

**Transcript:**

Fred Westfield

A51

45min14s

Interviewer: I'd like to talk to you a little bit about where you grew up. You were how old on the Kinder transport? 13?

Fred Westfield: Twelve.

Interviewer: Twelve? Okay, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about growing up, where you grew up, a little bit about your family, and then we'll talk about the actual transport and what brought you to Tennessee.

Fred Westfield: Okay.

Interviewer: So tell me a little bit about where you grew up.

Fred Westfield: Well, I was born in Essen, Germany. Essen is kind of the Pittsburgh of Germany: big ironworks and the famous craftworks, and it was a city maybe of 600...700,000 people. My father was a lawyer, my mother was a housewife, and I had an older brother who was born in 1921. I was born in 1926. I started school just when Hitler came into power 1933, and went to a public school, but it was a Jewish school. In Germany, the state supported religious affiliated schools and I don't think it had much to do with a Jewish religion, it was just a grade school. And then in— when I guess maybe in fourth grade, instead of continuing in the public school you could chose to go to the gymnasium. They had the high

school directed toward people who are going into the middle class, and that's where I went. But after I think even the first year in 1936, the so-called Nuremburg laws came in and the Jewish kids could no longer go to such a school.

Interviewer: Let me stop you right there. Tell me about that. You were old enough to understand what was happening...

Fred Westfield: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: What did you think was going on?

Fred Westfield: Well, I mean I remember being a first-grader or so when the Nazis, storm troopers, brown shirts, had their parades, it was fun to watch it. And when the—this is as a six year old—when the storm trooper came along and greeted you with “Heil Hitler” you thought it was fun to respond with the “Heil Hitler” salute. Now that was when I was very young. By the time I was in the gymnasium, the protocol was: when the teacher came in the morning, children would rise from their desks and give the Heil Hitler salute. But as a Jewish student I rose as students for generations had done in the German school, with all this discipline. We stood up without giving a Hitler salute. So it was, immediately you were segregated as it were, but this didn't go on for long because I was kicked out and went back to the Jewish school and continued there until...

Interviewer: You were how old at this time?

Fred Westfield: I'm sorry.

Interviewer: What grade were you in at this time?

Fred Westfield: This would be fourth, fifth grade.

Interviewer: And you didn't give the Heil Hitler salute.

Fred Westfield: No. No.

Interviewer: The other kids did?

Fred Westfield: Oh yes.

Interviewer: And you didn't...?

Fred Westfield: In the Jewish school of course there was no, no Hitler. I mean, the teachers were Jewish, and so this is what happened in the gymnasium.

Interviewer: Right. Okay, I got you. I understand now.

Fred Westfield: I guess gymnasium is like a private school. I think probably parents had to pay tuition, and that's where middle class kids ended up who weren't going to be plumbers and carpenters and the like. The German system, they had apprentice system for workmen for blue color workers who went to school until the eighth grade, then got out and went into apprenticeship.

Interviewer: Had your parents to talk to you about what was going on?

Fred Westfield: Oh, you couldn't escape it, right? There were some—I mean, everywhere the signs which said, "Jews not desired." You couldn't go to movies, public parks, swimming pools. The Jewish community was really ghettoized in some sense, although we didn't live in the ghetto. I mean we lived in a middle class neighborhood where we—but this is Germany in 1936, although my father was a successful attorney. We didn't have a car. We rode the streetcar wherever we went, or walked. It's hard to imagine today, but there were sidewalks and the like. I remember where I was part of the Macabi [unintelligible 0:06:44.7] which was the Jewish boys scouts, run through the Jewish center. But I have the memory, I remember some friends. My grandfather on my mother's side had a store in the suburb of Essen where we lived, and it was houseware store on the first floor and a toy store on the second floor. And so in addition to being able to play on Sundays on the second floor in the toy store, I also had nice toys at home, beautiful toys. Soldiers marching, clay soldiers, all that sort of stuff. No pistols as far as I know and no guns, but and I think I enjoyed the soldiers more parading than engaging in war. I had a bicycle and some friend with which—most Jewish friends, and we played. I still remember one of my friends who I even remember his birthday date, but when I was in Israel I looked up and discovered he too did not survive World War II. This friend had a father who still had his German military uniform from World War I and was very proud. The father was very proud of his German...how does one say it? German nationalist, and my father also had been drafted in World War I, but he was a Zionist from the turn of the century. He was born in 1880 so he was there when the Zionist movement came into being. And he was an enthusiastic follower which many German Jews of course were not, including this my friends father who thought his place was in Germany. And so that was as in this country, there were many Jews in the 1930s who had nothing to do with the Zionism.

Interviewer: Do you think your father's sense of dedication to the Zionist helped you with better understanding of what was happening a little bit more?

Fred Westfield: Well, we certainly were aware of Israel. In fact, my parents in 1935 took a trip to Palestine with a view toward seeing if that was a place they could immigrate to. It was an orientation trip so I was certainly aware of what was going on. Well, the kids of course stayed at home. They went, and my father, at the time in 1935 was 55 years old, discovered that there was nothing there for him to do. It was agriculture, my father was a lawyer, he was not physically strong. He was five foot two inches tall, and they came back and discovered that Palestine was not an alternative for them. And so in 1936 my older brother came to Nashville with my father. My father brought him to Nashville to live with his brother Robert who was married to a woman who was a native to Nashville. And they had no children of their own, so my brother as—in 1936—a 15 year old, was sent off, my father brought him to Nashville. My father was treated very well by the Jewish community. He was a distinguished German attorney, but at the same time the Germans, this is now no longer allowed lawyers to practice the profession, were not allowed to continue.

Interviewer: How did you make a living after that?

Fred Westfield: From savings.

Interviewer: Uh-hmm.

Fred Westfield: Savings. Yes. I don't think—I didn't recognized anywhere, in fact the idea was, my father came to America to bring my brother, stayed here for weeks, came back, although the immigration authorities had some doubts whether he really would go back so they had stopped him on Ellis Island. But he did go back, maybe foolishly. But then the plan was the following year my mother would come to America to visit my brother. They would alternate from year to year so that the separation would not be complete, but that part of the story never transpired. My mother did not come to America to visit and my brother went to school here.

Interviewer: So tell me about the events leading up to the transport?

Fred Westfield: My transport?

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Fred Westfield: Well, almost...and I'm trying to remember. This is November 2003, the Kristallnacht, Crystal Night, occurred on November the ninth 1938. And so it is now almost exactly 65 years as we speak here since the Kristallnacht. Many Jews work. Males were carted off to the concentration camps, and my father luckily escaped. On the morning following the Kristallnacht, he was at the railroad station on a journey, he was an executor of an estate in another town and was on the train. The smoke, everywhere, the synagogues were burning, including the Essen synagogue which was a beautiful structure. And he was on the train to Hanover, and when he got to Hanover, he called and wanted to come back and mother said, "No, stay away." But my father he said, "If they want to arrest me, I want to be there." This is the German legal training. But he did stay away and he escaped. However, in the morning while he was gone, the Gestapo came into our house, came to my bedroom, with my mother, looking for guns and weapons apparently. And I recall now as 12-year-old child my mother saying, "Look in there, in that closet, you might find some guns, my child's toys." And that took a lot of courage, but they left and did not...many people had , furniture was thrown out the windows in addition to being arrested. This is November 9 or 10, I forget, 1938. Now, I left on the Kindertran, that, I think, made it clear that things weren't going to get better. I mean this was the consequence of some German official having been shot in Paris.

Interviewer: Right. And they blamed it on the Jews.

Fred Westfield: Yeah. It may have been a Jew but anyway this was a terrible time. All the synagogues were burned. And so my father was able to arrange through a relative in London to find a family in London that was willing to take me in, a Jewish family. And by January 1939, two months later, I was on the train by myself meeting up with a group in Holland in VanHoek, where the ferry or the boat was to take us to Harridge, England. And the precise memories are not all that clear as to what happened, but I met up with the family Weis who had a son maybe a year older than me and a daughter several years older, and they lived in North London N16, where a quite sizeable Jewish community apparently lived. And what I do remember is, I had taken a few English lessons in anticipation of my immigration, and I recall greeting my foster mother by saying, "Goodbye," having confused what I'm...should have said hello. And I do remember also then, sitting, hearing conversation in the home of these people, who they kept talking in English because I caught almost nothing except maybe "because" and "of course" and I didn't know there was a distinction between the meaning of the word "because" and "of course." And so I tried to make sense, but I knew almost no English. But apparently one can learn it very easily just picking it up, I didn't take any lessons, and then went to school.

Interviewer: That will help.

Fred Westfield: Yes, and, well, this was a public, London county council school not a...their boy was going to what is known as a public school, what was really what we would call a private school. But I went to the school with the masses. It was sort of a pretty tough neighborhood.

Interviewer: Let me back you up just a little bit. Tell me about the transport. Tell me about...

Fred Westfield: Now that is really about what I can tell you. I do not...

Interviewer: No, I know. I'm going to ask you a little bit more.

Fred Westfield: Yeah, okay.

Interviewer: I hope I don't drive you crazy.

Fred Westfield: No. No, what?

Interviewer: Before you went on the train...

Fred Westfield: Yeah, by myself.

Interviewer: You went by yourself...

Fred Westfield: Yeah.

Interviewer: You were 12.

Fred Westfield: Twelve.

Interviewer: Where was your mother?

Fred Westfield: They were on...this is a train station, right? And track number four or whatever it was, and I look out the window of the train and there's a picture of that which we—



Interviewer: Okay, I saw that.

Fred Westfield: —can take a look at, and my parents, my brother was already gone. My parents are there. As the train moves out, they wave and I wave and...

Interviewer: Did you...

Fred Westfield: The choo-choo takes off and I don't recall seeing tears in their eyes. I don't recall crying but I think I was. I and they were aware that the chances that we might never see each other again was very good. And I know when I was in London in the beginning of 1939, living there amongst strangers who were, very different, they were Polish Jewish immigrants, merchants and they lived their life quite different from what I was used to. And I was trying to catch on, but I know I at night in bed often was sad and worried about my parents and the fact that they weren't there and I might never see them again. Fortunately I did, but that is just through more luck. You want me to go on? The lucky stroke, I told you that my father came to the States in 1936 to deliver my brother. When he came back he applied for an immigration quota and to come to immigrate to the United States with his family. And people were given a number, queue up, because there was quota, the German quota and only so many Germans were allowed each year. I think their number was something 20,000 which was years away, but in 19...I won't go into the details of what was happening to the German Jews in Germany at this time. We were being robbed and everything. Jewelry was taken away and every valuable possession, they made sure you couldn't spend too much of your money. Like we deal with white-colored criminals in this country, make sure they don't take away the money. Anyway, so here I am in England but the quota comes close. 20,000 hasn't come up yet. But the British at this point were willing to take immigrants headed for the United States temporarily, provided their livelihood would be provided from elsewhere or they could provide their livelihood and would not work, because it's still the depression, mass unemployment in

1939 in England and in the United States. So they were able, on the basis of their prospective immigration to the United State to travel to England. And they were also able to pack up some of their belongings, not anything valuable. My parents bought new furniture which aimed at a small apartment in the United States, and it was all put on a lift van. Of course, everything that they purchased, not only did they have to pay for it but a 100% tax was imposed by the Nazis, make sure they were getting all the money, and then when they left they were allowed to take 10 Marks, that's it. They went to England and had to live very frugally. I won't go into detail how they were able to survive in England without being able to work, I'll just give a brief sketch. Another brother of my father had been able to smuggle out money out of Germany which ended up in Nashville. He did not survive, by the way, but his money did, and he allowed this money to be used to help his brother's livelihood in England. So my parents survived in July of '39, came to England. I continued to live with my foster parents because they didn't want to spend their brother's money. And then they lived in a small furnished room with a kitchen and so on.

Interviewer: Do you still keep in touch or did you keep in touch with your foster parents?

Fred Westfield: Yes, some, but that dried up rather quickly, largely not from our side, but they did not respond. So we would send holiday greetings and they maybe with a note, and some years later that dried up.

Interviewer: Do you know why?

Fred Westfield: No, I think—well, first of all, it was a relatively short experience now. You see, January '39 the war breaks out, World War II breaks out September '39. The children, all the school children in London, are taken with their schools to various parts of small communities in the country side so that when Hitler started bombing London, the children would be saved. And

so I had a new set of foster parents, not Jewish, also childless...or childless, not the “also” part is wrong. Childless, living in a small cottage in a community of 150 people. No indoor plumbing, no bathroom and no hot water in the kitchen or anywhere, no central heating. But safe presumably from the bombs that were anticipated, but they never came. With this family I bonded more closely than my Jewish foster parents, and in fact when I happen to be in England in 1959—this is now 20 years later—I visited them. I had a Volkswagen and I drove up and visited, and the husband was dead but the woman was there, and I think delighted to see me.

Interviewer: What was it like to be reunited with your family?

Fred Westfield: Well how can one say, certainly my fears that I would never see them again had disappeared, and I must have visited them frequently and London has a good public transportation system. They lived in different part of town, but we were able to see each other, but we weren't living together.

Interviewer: What year did you come to the States?

Fred Westfield: 1940. Now...

Interviewer: You came here with your family?

Fred Westfield: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you go to New York first?

Fred Westfield: You see my...I'm sorry.

Interviewer: Did you go to New York first? Did you...

Fred Westfield: No. No, it's war, right? England is at war. My parents' number had come up to immigrate to the United States. My father had been interned by the British because the British thought he might be a spy, German spy. And all these German male immigrants also, many of them were hauled off into what were called internment camps, but nevertheless...and this is where my old friend Herman Lowenstein, his father and my father were interned together because his parents lived in the same house in London as my parents. So they were interned in the same place. And Herman's father was a strong man, my father was a weak man, and Herman's father would peel my father's potatoes for him. That was not KP, which my father, as I guess at the time, was not able or knew how to peel potatoes. You learn but anyway we...the time comes, it's October 1940. The Germans had begun to bomb London. The blitzkrieg had become the German, some terrible bombings we experienced in London, is set at night in the yet we return to London because nothing our parents wanted us home. My father had been hauled off, my mother and Herman's mother were alone, so they combined their households in this little apartment, and Herman and I lived together there and as 12-year-olds, but we are distant relatives. And so the war comes, the bombing comes, we get on the train and the shrapnel falls on the train as we move off to Liverpool to meet the boat, the ship, a [unintelligible 0:33:05.6] Liner, we were third class passengers in a convoy. With the first three or four days we wore life vest all the time, and at one point we heard depth charges go off in the distance. But as you know, the German U-boats did get some of these ships full of immigrants on their way to Australia. That's another sad story. But we arrived on New York, headed for Nashville of course. So we stayed a few days. My father had a cousin living in New York. We stayed with them a few days. This is—I forget exactly, it's around the high holidays, I don't think we actually went to...and meanwhile, of course I was going to be 13, but I never got to be bar mitzvah and I was robbed of that...

Interviewer: Did you ever do it?

Fred Westfield: No. No.

Interviewer: You never ultimately did it?

Fred Westfield: No. No. I know I'm not sure.

Interviewer: But we have somebody in here...

Fred Westfield: Yeah, right. Well, I haven't felt the need for one.

Interviewer: What brought you to Tennessee?

Fred Westfield: Well I explained to you my...

Interviewer: Brother.

Fred Westfield: ...brother was already here and my father's brother was here. And so in fact a little colony of Westfields and Lowensteins ended up in Nashville because of my father's brother having settled here because his wife was here. And I think quite a number of the immigrant community of that era came here like that. The other big collection of immigrants here was of course through Jack May, who brought here dozens of the remotest relatives and provided affidavits for them and it was a very generous act, and then other than that he was able to provide work for them. My

father by this time was 60 years old. I was started in the ninth grade, and graduated from what was then West High in Nashville. But meanwhile I did—there was a program there, you could work part-time while in high school, and so I got a job learning to be a watchmaker and I worked in a jewelry store and went to school an hour early every morning where I could study books, theoretical work relating to watch-making, and then in the afternoons I would go to work. I think initially I was earning something like six dollars a week. And when I graduated from high school I went to work full-time as a watchmaker and jewelry salesman, and in fact my employer at the time opened a second store on Church Street, which I then managed, and in fact were in part also hired my father to do the bookkeeping. My father had difficulty finding work at age 60 as a lawyer who, they made him an honorary member of the Tennessee bar, he gave some speeches. But things were different in those days for immigrants here, and so he couldn't find work and just menial jobs like bookkeeping.

Interviewer: When you look back and you recognized that had it not been for pure serendipitous luck—

Fred Westfield: Yeah.

Interviewer: —you could have been...

Fred Westfield: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: ...easily sent to a camp.

Fred Westfield: Yes, like so many of my relatives.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

Fred Westfield: Well very lucky.

Interviewer: A little guilty?

Fred Westfield: No, I don't think. Not guilty, no. I don't feel guilt, I was too young. My father, as I mentioned earlier, was an enthusiastic Zionist and was able to persuade parents who were reluctant to let their children go to an [unintelligible 0:38:39.2] to Israel was able to persuade some and...

Interviewer: And you say that he may have—

Fred Westfield: He may have helped...

Interviewer: —participated in the rescue of several people.

Fred Westfield: Yes. Including my mother's sisters children escaped that way to Kibbutz and then Palestine and now Israel. And I think I was too young, really, to take responsibility for anything I myself accomplished. I shouldn't say accomplished, but anything that happened to me. I mean I was on a leash. I was doing what I had to do. It wasn't given choices, and I guess I was obedient. I don't know how my parents were able to persuade me. I don't think they persuaded me to go to England by myself. They told me, "You go," and how difficult that must have been for them. I don't think I quite realized that at the time, but, I mean, to have sent off both of their children...

Interviewer: Are you a parent?

Fred Westfield: Yes. Well, stepparent.

Interviewer: Either way though, so you can understand—

Fred Westfield: Of course.

Interviewer: —letting the children go.

Fred Westfield: Well, I don't think one has to be a parent. I think one can imagine parenthood.

Interviewer: And how difficult that must have been for them.

Fred Westfield: Yeah. And of course we're able to correspond very regularly. But of course not through telephone, but mail went back and forth until of course—between us and my parents—when the war broke out, the opportunity of my parents or me to continue to communicate with our blood relatives who were left there became impossible.

Interviewer: Yeah. When you look back on this, what do you want people to know about what happened?

Fred Westfield: Well, I guess I am somewhat of a pacifist. Although I was drafted into the army, I served not just after the war so I was not in danger. My charities go to many of the organizations that try to support children around the world. I have great sympathy to what is happening to children in war in Africa and Latin America. I've seen some of this poverty myself, not in



war, but before war and after war. Tyranny is a terrible thing, and what people try to do to each other is terrible. I don't know what—am I—is this the sort of thing...

Interviewer: There's no right or wrong.

Fred Westfield: Yeah, right. To some extent I think what has happened to the Jews in Germany is just part of a much bigger story. This is one that has been publicized and I'm glad to participate in trying to publicize it, but I think we all need to realize that these sorts of things are continuing all over the world. And some are—they're still lucky children as I was, and I came to this country and was able to pursue a career largely because of my service in the army which allowed me to go to college and graduate school and become a professor. So that is...

Interviewer: And what do you teach?

Fred Westfield: I'm sorry.

Interviewer: What do you teach?

Fred Westfield: What did I teach?

Interviewer: What do you teach as a professor...?

Fred Westfield: No, I am now retired.

Interviewer: No...

Fred Westfield: And I was a professor of Economics at Vanderbilt and previously at North Western University. But all that would have not been possible had I not drawn some lucky cards.

Interviewer: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Fred Westfield: No, I don't think so. Can you think of anything?

Interviewer: I probably will.

Fred Westfield: I don't think I need to add anything.

Interviewer: If you have anything.

Fred Westfield: I think my story is...I think you can make some sense of it.

Interviewer: Absolutely.