Leo Bretholz (2007)
Interview 3

Interviewers: Tova Tennenbaum, Amber Kepple-Jones, Jennie Reich
Also present: Flo Bretholz

[Beginning of Interview 3]

Jennie Reich: May 8th?

Tova Tennenbaum: May 9th.

Leo Bretholz: May 8th, yes.

JR: And, uh, two weeks later.

LB: 1944.

JR: 1944. June 8th, uh, D-day.

LB: June the 6th.

JR: June 6th, D-day.

LB: And it was Tuesday.

JR: Tuesday, and just wondering what you were doing in that time span between when your surgery was over and the liberation.

LB: Well, I went back to my apartment and, and went back to the hospital several times to have the dressing changed, and kept being in touch with my friends from the movement, the underground movement. And by that time we already had, had an inkling that something will happen because the, the code, coded messages came to us that we had to translate into, into real, into real French, you know. They were, the messages were sentences that were non sequiturs. In fact, there was all this disjointed, but we had to-- For instance, there was one, there was one that we got during that period, and I describe that in the book, and it says, "Grandmother is riding on her bicycle three times around the barn." We didn't know what that meant, but that had to be, had to be translated, decoded into what it really meant or, "After the rain, the sun will shine," whatever that meant. Or, "The rabbit has laid three eggs."

JR: [laughs] Where were these messages coming?

LB: They came over, over the, the radio, over the communication system with the underground. And these messages were coded messages. Like I said, doesn't make sense. "The rabbit has just laid three eggs," or, "The grandmother is cycling," or whatever these things mean, but it had to be translated. So we were active and, of course, it was still war time, and as I said, I was 17 days
in the hospital and then between my release from the hospital on May 25th to June the 6th, I was just back in my apartment.

JR: So let's recap. How old were you at this point?

LB: At that point 23.

JR: Twenty-three years old. Okay. So, I'm going to skip to the good parts. D-day came and what did you do next? What happened? Anything different?

LB: Well, there was one scene that's still during the war, that's still not back in the present time or after the war. On Saturday, June the 10th I was assigned to take a pack of IDs, some documents, to a town near Limoges, a little town called Oradour. I don't know if you have heard the tragedy of Oradour, Oradour near Limoges. Oradour on the Glane River. I was getting these, this assignment to take these documents to Oradour where some people were hiding, Jewish people were hiding. A friend with whom I lodged in Limoges, Eugene, he also got a package to take into the same area, but he went a few stations further because his mother lived in that town, and at the same he wanted to visit his mother who was in hiding. He went there. I was supposed to go to Oradour. On the way to Oradour alongside the railroad track was a country road, and on that country road a detachment of German tanks and armored cars were advancing into the same direction stirring up all that dust on the country road. And a farmer was sitting next to me and he said, "You know what? When they're going into this direction, we shouldn't go into that same direction."

JR: Where did you go?

LB: And he said, added, "especially after what happened yesterday in Tulle," T-U-L-L-E. That was another town nearby where 91 men were being hanged by lampposts because they found out that there was resistance in the town. That German detachment did that. We didn't know at the time that that was the German detachment, but he says, "after what happened Tulle yesterday." The news had already reached us. "We don't want to go where they're going." The next stop--there was a stop before Oradour--he and I got off. Everybody that got off at that train station Oradour on the day became a victim because the whole, the whole town of Oradour was burnt down. It is six, seven, nine hundred people some--we don't know the exact amount, but the women taken into the church with the children, straw and dry things, branches around the church. They burned down the church. The children, women, could not escape. This was not Jewish people. This was the town people. They mayor was killed. The mayor said, "Don't," and the son said, "Don't do that to my father, do it to us." They killed him anyway. And everybody who got off that train, who would have gotten off at that train, maybe five or six or ten people--who know?--became victims as they arrived at that station. I was the luckiest man--

JR: Oh, this is some other.

LB: Got off, another sort of escape. My friend Eugene was shot by the German detachment in the railroad station of St. Julienne. When he got out of train, got into the train station, the
Germans got in there. They inspected his rucksack and found false ID cards, two shots in the head.

JR: Oh, my G-d.

LB: Eugene never came back that night to our apartment and the landlady and I were sitting there, sadly, learning what had happened in Oradour on that day. Oradour, May the, June the 10th, 1944, Saturday. Look that up and google, O-R-A-D-O-U-R, and then a slash, sur, S-U-R means on the, another slash, G-L-A-N-E, sur Glane, on the Glane River. And why do I say that? Because there was another Oradour nearby with another surname, Serac. That's another little river. The Germans made a mistake. They thought it was this Oradour that had the resistance fighters were or a cell of resistance. It was the other Oradour that had it and they made a mistake, and they did that in reprisals. They thought this was a town harboring resistance. So that was another one where I escaped pretty much, and Jeanne d'Arc later told me when I met her in '99, "You know, a couple of people from Oradour were brought to the Limoges Hospital. Some of them were not, couldn't save. Others we could." But the fact remains that that was another tenuous moment.

JR: So, another, wow. You're really good at premeditating things. So you found about--you're in your apartment. You found out about Eugene.

LB: Eugene is gone.

JR: Yeah.

LB: He was murdered.

JR: And then what? You had the IDs, right?

LB: Well, I had the IDs I had with me and I could just never deliver them, and not only that. It wouldn't have mattered anymore because the people that I was going to deliver them to, they were all dead.

JR: Right.

LB: And then if you go to Oradour today, in fact, where the church used to be, there is now a display like, almost like a holy place there, meditation. A table is there with all the, all the mementos--baby carriages, dolls, little shoes, dresses that the kids wore and clothing. That's there displayed, and the town of Oradour which was burned down has been built up like a quarter of a mile further down and has been erected again as another town. But that is remaining there now as a, as a place of, of memorialization.

JR: I didn't know that about the Germans.

LB: That is near Limoges, was.
JR: Um, so after that came--

LB: The landing.

JR: The landing. And what happened? What was that like?

LB: Well, it was euphoria, you know. When you hear the landing took place, that was the beginning of the end. The beasts will finally be taken care of.

JR: Right.

LB: But that was June 1944, but the deportations in France still continued 'til the fall in other areas. Limoges was liberated sometime in July or August just like Paris. Paris was liberated on August the 25th, 1944 and we just waited for Limoges to be liberated, and then when that happened the Germans who were captured, the day before they were the masters and the day after they were the captured. They walked around with their hands up, you know, like little frightened kids, you know. These Germans, some of them were, were not older than, than I. Some of them were 18, 19, 20, 21, whatever, but these were all young kids thrown into the battle and when they were captured, they were prisoners and had to submit to new rules. They were no longer the masters. But that's what happened. Limoges was later liberated and I was in Limoges when the war ended in 1945.

JR: Did you associate the war ending with the end of, like, the Holocaust?

LB: Actually not. First of all when the landing too place, there was euphoria. There was joy, excitement, but there was always the thought, what will happen next? How will it end finally because there was just a landing. They still had to go through France and into Germany. But when the war ended in 1945, it was good that we knew it was ended, but it was all tempered with, with the uncertainty of what had happened to my family.

JR: Right.

LB: I still wanted to know what had happened to my family, and being that I hadn't heard. The last time I had heard from them by letter was in the spring of 1942. That was already two years later. I could not take a guess. I couldn't venture a guess. I could just hope that what the rumors told us and what they already found out that there were death camps, that they may have survived, but until I would hear, there was still the question. There was still the doubts, still the, the emotions of, of not knowing what really happened, the truth.

JR: When did you begin inquiring about your family?

LB: Well, I have, right after the war ended I sent letters to the Red Cross and my Aunt Irna, who survived in Paris, did the same thing. We wanted to know where they may have been taken, but what really happened to my mother and sisters I didn't find out 'til 1962.

JR: Right.
LB: That was 15 years that I, after I had come to this country.

JR: So, let me just--when, what was the date of the actual, the last concentration camp being liberated?

LB: Well, they were--you mean in Germany?

JR: Yeah.

LB: That was in May of '45.

JR: That was also in May. Okay. So I know you moved to the United States, but what, what did you do before you moved to the United?

LB: I worked in a committee there, a Jewish aid committee. It was called Cojasor, C-O-J-A-S-O-R.

JR: And what--

LB: That was an acronym for Comité juif d'assistance sociale et de reconstruction.

JR: Jewish.

LB: The Jewish Committee of, of uh, Social Assistance and Reconstruction. That was for people who had come from camps or liberated from camps, and comité, and [indistinct] an aid, committee of aid. I worked for them.

JR: In France?

LB: In France, yes, in Limoges.

JR: And this was for how many years?

LB: That was from the end of the war 'til--almost two years. Yes, at least a year-and-a-half. I worked already, I worked already while, while the war was still going on, but Limoges had already been liberated, but it was still going on in the, in the east, you know. Then there was the Battle of the Bulge in '44, but there was a counter attack by the Germans again instilling a lot of fear that they might get back to Paris. But during that time I worked. I worked in the committee like from, from, oh, let me see, from August or September of '44 to the day when I left France in January of '47, about two-and-a-half years.

JR: So where did you go in '47? What happened?

LB: To America.
**JR:** America. And did anything significant happen while you were still in France, any memories or any--?

**LB:** Well, in France I was visiting my aunt in Paris a lot. She would have wanted me to stay in Paris, but I didn't. And I also went to Belgium to visit my, the family Framhau with whom I'd been living in hiding in France and Annie Framhau who was sort of my girlfriend, distant relative, but she was--

**JR:** [laughs]

**LB:** My girlfriend. And, and, you'll find out in the book that Annie and I had a, like a boyfriend-girlfriend relation.

**JR:** We don't want to find out in the book. We want to know now.

**LB:** What?

**JR:** I said we don't want to find out in the book. We want to know now.

**LB:** Well, nothing. Annie and I were just good friends and when, when we were, when he were writing the book when I was, Michael started editing it and adding his historic perspective into it. He said, "Tell me. What really went on between you and Annie? Tell it to me." He says, "We got to put a little something in there for excitement."

I said, "There's plenty of excitement, isn't it?"

He says, "You know what you mean." "You know what I mean."

But then Flo was sitting here and she says, "Michael, do you want me to get out of the room?"

**JR:** [laughs]

**LB:** "Then if Leo tells."

I said, "No, you don't have to get out of the room. Nothing happened because Annie and I were very good friends and we were boyfriends, girlfriends, but nothing would have happened. It was war time and I was a little bit afraid of her father, too, you know." That, he was, her father was a very domineering, strong-willed person, nice man, almost took me in like a son, so I wasn't going to disappoint him, but Annie and I had a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship and I went. I stayed in France. They returned to Belgium because they were, Annie and Nettie, her sister, were born in Belgium. They were my friends in Belgium when I got there from Austria and we got, we went-- We lived in France in hiding all together as a group and I went to Belgium for one reason, to say goodbye to Framhau family, and at that time I found out that, that Annie was going to get engaged to some other fellow who was a friend of hers and also of mine when I lived in Belgium, a group of youngsters. And then said goodbye to the Framhaus. In fact, on the 25th of October I'm going to call her for her 85th birthday, Annie. And I just spoke to her the
other day. She's going to Israel for a wedding of her granddaughter, and she had a sister, Nettie, whom I called in September. And she had a birthday, so I'm keeping in touch with these people.

**JR:** What was Annie's story during this time?

**LB:** Annie was hiding with her family and then she went to a convent to hide out in Nice on the, also assumed name. We all had false IDs to be able to circulate. I had three different IDs as you know. And then we were soul mates.

**JR:** You both had a very similar story.

**LB:** Yes, a mutual, common experience. You know, we were all, we were together when it was dangerous. We were together when we were hiding. We were together when we were scared and it all creates a bond.

**JR:** So when you went to America in '47, did you want to take her with you or what happened?

**LB:** No. I wanted to go to America and she, they wanted to, they wanted to stay in Belgium. So I went to America and that was it, and then Annie got married later, so when I went back to visit her, she was married, visited the family.

**JR:** Was that hard for you or?

**LB:** No, no. It wasn't hard for me. I don't think it was hard for her. In fact, she got married before I even got married so. But the mother, her mother wanted, would have liked me to go to Belgium and become in with the family. They were in the fur and diamond business. They had sort of put their minds to, to, to work. That would eventually happen, but it never did. You know, like to many other things that you plan, they just don't happen.

**JR:** So, um, when you worked for, what was the name of the, the Jewish group that you worked for? I can't say the name

**LB:** You mean the--?

**TT:** The agency.

**JR:** The agency, yes.


**JR:** Right. So when you worked for Cojasor, did you see some very, hear some traumatic stories?

**LB:** Well, I had an interesting story, when I told you that when I escaped from that one train I asked a man would he run with me, remember?
JR: Yes.

LB: Because he couldn't because he had family. Well, I met him at that committee. When he was liberated from the camp, he went to that, to that uh, to do that construction work, and he went to a camp near, near Bordeaux and I met him there. He came to that committee, in fact to find his, about his family again to be reunited, to Comité juif d'assistance sociale--social assistance and reconstruction. So I asked him, "What happened?"

He says, "We really went to the, we really went to a work detail," he says, "but you know what Kauffman said? That Leo Bretholz, he told me he would run away." He told me that.

JR: Kauffman the German guard?

LB: Yes, the French guard with the German accent.

JR: Oh, right.

LB: Yes, he was from Lorraine, Alsace-Lorraine, and, uh, being that he had asked me, he had told me, "You know, today I'm guarding you. You're not running away," and I factiously said, "Well, that has nothing to do with you. It has to do, it depends on me." And he said to them when he didn't find me, he says, "This fellow Bretholz told me he would run away." So if he accepted it as, as a mistake that he made, you know, because he didn't guard us well enough. That was one thing and the other thing was my friend Freddy, Freddy Noler, with whom I arrived in the United States. We got our, our visa at the same time. There's pictures in the book, Freddy and I. By the way, I'll meet him again. He is coming to New York in the end of October now and I'll go there for a couple of days. Freddy came to Limoges because he had relatives there. He was liberated from Auschwitz Buna. Buna was the Monowitz that was the forced labor camp in Auschwitz. They worked forced labor in a chemical factory and for I.G. Forban factory, the German chemical, uh, concern, slave labor. And he survived a slave labor camp in Germany. Freddy was deported just like I from Drancy and arrived in Auschwitz. He went to Buna Monowitz, survived, and then came to Limoges to rejoin some family, some cousins, and I met Freddy in, because he also came to the committee for aid. They gave him some funds, you know, the HIAS did that. No, American Joint Distribution Committee. No, HIAS was involved in immigration, but the American Joint helped with funds. And Freddy came there and finding out that he's also from Vienna, I said, "Where are you go, where are you going to be going from here?"

He says, "Well, I have my brother, two brothers live in America. I'm gonna join them there."

I said, "Well, I'm going to America, too," and from that moment on we just became friends in Limoges and we went to Bordeaux together to get our visas and we came over on the same boat.

JR: And?

LB: And that deals with now, and Freddy then came to New York and couldn't quite find a job quickly, so I asked him to come to Baltimore. And he came to Baltimore and he worked for the
same firm that I worked in the textile field. Then he met an English young woman that came here to visit an aunt, her mother's sister. They went on a blind date and he got married in '51 and she took him back to England.

**JR:** Oh.

**LB:** And lives in England. And I got married in '52.

**TT:** A quick question. Why America? What was your thought process? Was it--

**LB:** Because I had my relatives here, my aunt, my father's two sisters and a brother.

**TT:** So was it never--

**LB:** And she made my aunt, Sophie, living in Baltimore provided my affidavit of support. You needed an affidavit of support so that you can apply for the visa. You know, all these procedures. I also had a certificate to go to Palestine.

**TT:** Right.

**LB:** I told you that.

**TT:** Which was your original goal.

**LB:** The original goal, but then when I figured that that woman, distant relative with her two children whose husband, her husband was deported. She really had nowhere to go and she had a brother, somebody, some friend or something in Palestine. I transferred my certificate to her name. She went there and I decided to come to America.

**JR:** So you got to America in 1947.

**LB:** And here we are.

**JR:** Yes, here we are.

**TT:** What about the boat ride? I want to hear about that.

**JR:** Wait, what was the boat ride like? Was it--

**LB:** The what?

**JR:** The boat ride.

**LB:** Oh, the boat ride was in January. It was from, took ten days. We left France on the 19th of January, arrived on the 29th. It was a rough ride, a rough crossing, uh, stormy until we got into the Gulf Stream. Then it, then the sun started shining. It then became calm, but about 90 percent
of the people on that boat were seasick, I included. And to go to the, for the first time to the ocean when I was in Belgium. That's when I saw the ocean for the first time. Even stepping into the waves I got a little seasick.

JR: Really. [laughs]

LB: The motion, but that, that was a rough ride, 20 foot, 25 feet waves and it went right over the rail, and we slept, many of us, not everybody, but I did and many others slept actually on deck because in the cabins there was, the odor was-- They used chemicals to clean the toilets and everything. The odor plus the movement, it was a little bit overwhelming and a lot of people started also to throw up. Many of us did, but then they suggested why don't you go on deck, and I put on my coat, my beret, my gloves, and slept on deck on a deck chair until the uh, the rough sea settled down into the Gulf Stream, and overnight, over, within an hour or two, the rail, the railing on the boat on deck which was ice covered with icicles, within a couple of hours it all melted down and you had perfect sun. And then when we arrived towards, we got towards the American coast, well we had a reception committee I call it, the sea gulls.

JR: Oh. [laughs]

LB: They came meeting, they come to meet the boat. You know why?

JR: Why?

LB: Because they, they, they--

TT: Did you have food to throw up?

LB: They feed on the scraps, food that is being thrown overboard, so they come. They accompany the ship into the harbor.

JR: So you're in America, the land of the free. What did you, what were you associating America with? What did you think would happen in America? Why, why did you just want to get away from Europe afterwards?

LB: I wanted to get away from Europe because Europe to me was a place of bad memories, a place where I just didn't want to stay.

JR: Right.

LB: And I left Europe with a lot of trepidation, not still knowing what had happened to my mother and sisters. My aunt was in Paris. She says, "I will find out for you what happened to your mother." That was her sister.

JR: So you get to America, you don't know any English.
LB: I don't, I know very little. English, I know as much English as perhaps less than what Amber knows in German. She had five years of German. I had two years of English. So you know what high school English or any foreign language is.

JR: Right.

LB: That was my basic rudimentary knowledge. I could form a sentence. I had some vocabulary, a little bit of grammar, but to say that I knew English would be too much. But I had a basic knowledge, so much so that when I first looked for a job and a fellow--I was recommended somewhere, to go somewhere. "Look, they may need somebody to work there," and I went there and he needed somebody just for maintenance. Well, maintenance means what? Helping out, fixing this, doing this, doing that. So I wanted to say, "You probably need somebody who is handy," like with tools or whatever. Instead of "handy" I said "handsome."

JR: [laughs]

LB: You see, that's the English language. I said, "You need somebody who's handsome."

Interviewers: [laughs]

LB: He said, "No, handy."

I said, "Oh, I'm sorry."

He said, "But you know, handsome doesn't hurt."

Interviewers: [laughs]

LB: He says, "It's no drawback, but it would be better if you know how to handle tools, you know."

JR: Were you in New York at this point?

LB: No, in Baltimore. I arrived in New York and my uncle and aunt picked me up and took me, whisked me to Baltimore and that's where I am since January of 1960, 1947, 60 years.

JR: Okay. So you get to America. You're living with your aunt and uncle in Baltimore, and what, what happens?

LB: Culture shock.

JR: Culture shock.

LB: Definitely culture shock.

JR: And, what, explain that.
LB: Well, culture shock, you come, you come from one society to another. Number one, that same year I was—that was already then in the fall of '47, not in the spring—but an awful thing happened after, a month after my arrival. My Uncle Jack, my Uncle Sam—we called him Jack in Vienna—my Uncle Sam Gross died who picked me up at the boat at the 29th of January died in February. He was 43. He did in my arms.

JR: Oh my goodness.

LB: Uncle Sam came home from work, sat down to listen to the radio. It was snowing. He went outside and swept the sidewalk, keep the walk to the house ice free. He sat down and took deep breath, like this. Then he went over to his desk drawer. He took out a folder with some papers. I said, "Uncle Sam, what are you looking at?"

He says, "Well, I just went to my insurance man a couple of weeks ago and he increased my premium and I took a medical examination that everyone has to do to increase premium, and everything was fine, but I just don't feel good." Can you imagine that? Because that, he got the insurance company, the insurance premium increased. To him was proof that he was, proof enough that he was in good health. So he took, sort of put two, he questioned it, looked at the papers. And then he said, "Well, it's time to go down." He took his shower in the basement. "It's time to go down and take shower," said Uncle Sam. "Let me take a shower."

"Do you really have to take a shower? You don't feel too good."

"Yes," he says. "The day's over."

I said, "If you take a shower, make sure it's lukewarm, not too cold, not too hot," because I figured anything too much would shock him. Uncle Sam collapsed in the shower and died. My other uncle and I—they lived together, one upstairs, the other—we took Uncle Sam up the stairs to his bedroom. He lay down. He had to go to the john. We put him on the john. We called the doctor. Uncle Sam slumped and he was gone. He was 43 and that was a shock for me.

JR: That's traumatizing.

LB: That was a great, great shock for me to see, and the interesting things is I had seen so many miserable things during the war, but here this one incident right in front of me. I should have been maybe inured to it, immune to it, you know. Well, one tragedy, another tragedy, but it was my uncle.

JR: Right.

LB: And it was in my arms and it was sudden.

JR: And it was right after this--
LB: It was right after all this. That was a little, that was, not on the culture shock is naturally with all the things that, that you experience in a new surrounding. For example, I didn't have a car in France. In America everybody, almost everybody had a car, so the first date that I had, the girl that I called. She says, she gave me the address and says, "What car are you riding?" so she should know when I come to pick her up.

I said, "I haven't got a car. I'll be there by bus."

"Oh, you don't have a car!"

So jokingly, I said, "If you can't walk, I'll call an ambulance." Jokingly. But that was alright with her.

JR: So.

LB: So this is a little bit of a culture shock, but three, four months later I had a car because I went, traveled for a firm. I worked for a firm and they sent me on the road to work for them, you know, a textile firm.

JR: So you get to America.

LB: Yeah.

JR: You're in culture shock. Your uncle dies. You were just in the Holocaust. You must have been pretty depressed.

LB: Yes, it was emotionally very burdensome to me. I remember going to the Hippodrome movie theater on Eutaw Street, a film, to see a film.

JR: Yeah.

LB: In the afternoon. Before the end of the film I started hyperventilating like [panting sound], couldn't catch my breath. These were emotions. When the next day I went to Dr. Mazer who is--that's the one who treated my uncle and he became my physician, family doctor. I went to Dr. Mazer and explained what happened. Took my blood pressure, examined me, he says, "Leo, you're fine."

"So what was that?"

He says, "Leo, this was a shock. This was an aftershock from what you experienced with your uncle." That was definitely an emotional reaction.

JR: Do you think, there's a term for people that have been in war experience, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Do you feel like you had that?

LB: It's a term and people have that war and, and that's a camp situation. Soldiers have that same
thing. People have that. You see, but the only thing is that we, when we came here, there was no psychologist.

JR: Right.

LB: Or psychiatrist. There was no social worker.

JR: Right.

LB: Today when you have a stress syndrome after an event, a plane crash, a big fire somewhere, floods, immediately you have the--in a school, the shooting in the schools, immediately a psychologist or the psychiatrist, the counselors, they're immediately there to tell you what to do to keep you, to keep you formed and to make it easier for you to cope. Well, we didn't have that. We were, the first thing that I had to worry about coming to America, get a job and make a living. I could not be a burden to my family or to the state. That was part of the affidavit, but I wouldn't want to, either.

JR: Right.

LB: So I had to look for a job. I arrived on the 29th of January. Well, by the 15th of February, by the 20th, 15th of February I was working.

JR: So, I'm sorry. When did your uncle pass away?

LB: In February.

JR: February. So immediately after you continued to work.

LB: A month after I arrived he died. But, and I continued to work, yes.

JR: Was your, were you in a sense a provider for your aunt and your other family?

LB: No. I lived with my aunt. They sheltered me, but there was long before. When Freddy came, we joined--I told you before--came from New York to join me. Freddy and I took an apartment. We lived, we rented an apartment for ourselves. I didn't want to live with my family.

JR: What year was this?

LB: That was 1947, '48, yeah.

TT: Where did you live? In Baltimore?

LB: In, on Cold Spring Lane first.

JR: So you're a Pikesville native.
LB: Yeah, well Cold Spring Lane was more like upper Park Heights.

JR: Oh ok. So you move in with Freddy and then what happens to your life?

LB: Then Freddy got married in December of '51 and I got married in July of '52.

JR: And who did you marry?

LB: Flo.

JR: And so did you move in with her or did she move in with you, or?

LB: Before we were married?

JR: Yeah, before you were married. [laughs]

LB: No. Flo lived on Liberty Heights Avenue with her parents and a sister, and I met Flo in November of '51. Another friend of Freddy and me, Herbie Freedman, he lives now in [indistinct]. Another friend of mine got married in November of '51. I was his best man and Flo was the bridesmaid.

TT: Is that how you met her?

LB: We met at the, at the wedding rehearsal.

Interviewers: Aww.

LB: That was in November of '51 and we got engaged in March and then in June, in July we got married, 6th of July.

JR: She always lived in America and she--

LB: She was born in America.

JR: Right.

LB: And her parents were born in America.

JR: So did she know your story?

LB: Oh, not immediately. I talked very little about it. I really did not speak too much about it because I had unfinished business with my mother and sisters.

JR: Right, right.
LB: It was too hard to dwell on it, to speculate, but when I finally found out in 1962 that, I was notified. I'll show you the papers that gave me the notification. I have them right here, from the Jewish Community in Vienna. I was notified what happened to my mother and sisters. I started opening up all, to tell everything to Flo and the family. And I said, "You know why I'm doing it? Because their voices are gone. I have to speak up. I cannot let it be unsaid."

JR: Right.

LB: And it had to be told because for nothing else but to honor their memory.

JR: So 1962, you're living with Flo.

LB: Yes, that was only five years after we got married.

JR: Right, in Pikesville, and--

LB: No, we didn't live in Pikesville.

JR: Oh.

LB: We lived on Liberty Road in Woodmont. We bought a home. We moved in right after we got married.

JR: And where are you working at this point?

LB: At this point I was working for Standard Textile.

JR: Okay.

LB: The Standard Textile Company, a textile firm on Hopkins Place.

JR: And what is Flo, is she working?

LB: She worked as, that's all she ever did since she left high school, medical secretary. She worked for--

JR: Oh, she still does.

LB: She still does.

JR: Oh, wow.

LB: For the this person, she's now over 20 years, but she only works one day a week and that's Tuesday. In fact, she works in Cockeysville and met our son on York Road for dinner. He lives in the general area.
JR: So, so you life is going along smoothly. Everything--

LB: Is what?

JR: Your life is going along smoothly pretty much. Of course, you're--

LB: Well, sometimes smoothly, sometimes not so smoothly.

JR: Right.

LB: Like life is in the ups and downs, but it was, usually it was normal. I would say a normal daily routine--working resting. Later on I went into the retail book business.

JR: Oh, right. That's what you said. You were in the book--

LB: Yes.

JR: Did you have children at this point?

LB: We had our--we were married in '52. Our first child, our son, was born in '55. He's now, he's now 52 years old.

JR: Wow.

TT: What's his name?

LB: Myron.

JR: Is he the one that likes the Irish--

LB: Yeah.

JR: [laughs]

LB: Yes, yes. He is--if you go, if you go on, if you go on Google and you get Myron Bretholz you see all these [pause from 39:48 to 39:56] and there he was. You know, when Clinton was president on St. Patrick's Day, he and his group are always invited to the White House.

JR: Myron and his dance group?

LB: Yes, and even before the other--there he is with the, Clinton. I'll show you that, too.

TT: Is it a dance group or a singing group?

LB: No, singing--no, no. They play instruments.
TT: Oh, okay.

LB: Here's my son.

TT: Which one is he? The one right next--

LB: Next to the President.

TT: With the glasses?

LB: Yes. This is Myron.

TT: Right next to Bill. [pause from 40:25 to 40:29] Oh, there's Hilary. Were you standing in between Hilary in back?

LB: Let me show you something else. See these green papers? That's all I have left. I have no resting place for my mother and sisters. I have no tombstones. This, these are the three pieces of paper that I received from Vienna, telling me what has happened to my mother and sisters. Now I am going to read it to you in German. Then I will translate it to you. Now each, each document says the same thing except where the name is. It's a different name, my mother and my sisters. [German reading] Meaning in patience, information. We testify, we certify that Mrs. [Speaks German from 41:33 to 41:59] that she was deported on the 9th [Speaks German from 42:03 to 42:18] Can you translate that? Not exactly.

This is to certify that according to our information, Mrs. Dora Bretholz, born on the 23rd of April '95 and where she lived was deported to Isbicha--that's near Belzec, a death camp, on the 9th of April '42 and her name does not appear on the list of those who have returned. Is that a long sentence to tell you what happened? And the same thing for both of my sisters. I showed you the picture of the plaques last time, didn't I? Did I?

TT: Not yet. You said, you said you would save it until tonight.

LB: I'll show you that. So this, this, this is the information that I got and then I finally did get this. I decided it's time to talk.

JR: So let me just--before this happened--

LB: [Speaks German from 43:13 to 43:20]

Amber Kepple-Jones: That's the [German]

AKJ: [Speaks German]

JR: So Flo didn't know about your--did she know you were making an effort to find them?

LB: Yes. Flo knew bits, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. I didn't want to burden her with that
and I didn't want to burden the kids with that because it's what, what's the use. It affects people, but there's also, my son for instance, my son for instance doesn't want to talk about it ever, but my daughters relate to it.

**JR:** So was this like a great effort or was it harder than you thought it would be to find out this information or--

**LB:** Well, I did not. I had over the years tried Red Cross and other agencies, but this was from the Jewish Community Council in Vienna and then my cousin who lived in Vienna then and is still there now. We're going to visit her. She's ill now, very ill. My cousin got me these papers. She got, she got it from them, had them, had them, you know, give me a copy and she mailed it to me.

**JR:** What did you think when you got this? Were you--

**LB:** Well, it was, it was, well, hoping against hope.

**JR:** Right.

**LB:** That I will have some positive news someday. Who knows? It confirmed what I had thought happened to them as it happened to many thousands others. There were a million and a half children were murdered.

**JR:** Right.

**LB:** A million and a half!

**JR:** Wow. Do you feel any like, not guilt, but do you feel any maybe you could have told them something or--

**LB:** Whom?

**JR:** Told you mom and your sisters.

**LB:** I wasn't there to tell her anything.

**JR:** Right.

**LB:** She sent me away to be in safety. That was achieved. I always had hope that I would meet her and tell her, to thank her for it.

**JR:** Right.

**LB:** I could not, what could I have-- I know one thing. Had my father been alive, we could have been arrested because he was a socialist. But had he lived, maybe he would have made efforts to hide with them or take them out. Of course, to Switzerland, the mountains somewhere, but that is
all speculation and hindsight. What, the only thing that is always with us, most survivors, and we hear that in the interview. You, did you ever--I asked you already. You never saw that episode. You would see the same thing that others say. Why me? That question always comes to mind, you know. They, why, why me? But there's no explanation. It's metaphysical.

JR: Right. So you must have--I would have felt sort of it was my duty to, to deliver the message. You felt that way, too.

LB: Well, once I found out I said to myself, I have no right to keep quiet now.

JR: Yeah.

LB: Because if we, if we do not remember them, then we kill them a second time. If you lose memory and if you have no memories or remembrance, that means you kill the memory and you kill everything, and this is what Hitler wanted, for us to be forgotten, to be annihilated, and if we do not remember and connect with that past, then we give Hitler a victory posthumously. We cannot let this--it's burdensome. It's never easy as I'm talking to you. It's emotional, but I have, as I said before, I have a choice. I can say yes. I can say no, but my mother and sisters had no choice.

JR: Right.

LB: They were taken against their will to be murdered.

JR: So it's 1962 when you find this, find out about this. So what's the first thing you do when you find out about it or doing?

LB: I know now that I can say kaddish after my mother, the memorial prayer.

JR: Right.

LB: Before I couldn't, didn't know that I can, and my sisters I say this, you know, the papers comes and all this yitzkah, but I couldn't change the, what had happened, live with it. It's a tragedy. You see, there's several--tragedies come in, in, in various--what do you call it?

JR: Degrees?

LB: Different, different, ways. If you have floods, New Orleans, or a volcano eruption or an earthquake, that's a tragedy, right? But it's a statistic. It's statistics. When it happens next door to you in a home, a home next to you is burned down in a fire and you knew all these people personally, that's a different kind of tragedy. So this is--when you hear about a million and a half children were murdered, that's a tragedy and a statistical tragedy, unfortunate as it is in the land of poets and thinkers, but when you know that two of your sisters were also murdered, then it's personal.

JR: So your--how old is your child at this point? How old is your child at this point, your son?
LB: My son now?

JR: Yeah.

LB: He's 52.

JR: No, I mean how old was he when you found out that--

LB: Oh, in '62. He was born in '55, seven years old.

JR: And did you have any other kids after?

LB: Yes, we had two children, two. One was four and the other one was, that was '62. That's when Edie. Edie was born in, that was the year she was born. She was born in '62 and she's now 45. Born in '62 in February and I found out in October, so she was eight months old when I found out. I always relate to it and my granddaughter, in fact, was one of the--my granddaughters, one of my grandchildren interviewed in the DVD Survivors Among Us. Right where you're sitting there was Deborah sitting here taking the, doing the interview. She was sitting in the leather chair here. They wanted to know from her what does she think and how was she go on with this. She says, "I will, eventually I will talk for my grandfather." And she reads like a paragraph from the book referring to the story when I met Jeanne d'Arc. They asked her to read something out of the book and she picked that.

JR: Wow.

LB: That's Andrea, my granddaughter, Andrea. I have a granddaughter Andrea, a granddaughter Samantha, a grandson Michael, and a grandson David.

JR: So it seems in the face of all this tragedy and this news, you had the things in life that people crave and want. You had love and children.

LB: I have a family.

JR: Yeah.

LB: A new family. They are the new branches on the old tree, the twigs, and c'est la vie. [Speaks German from 50:39 to 50:46]

AKJ: Life is like this.

LB: She agrees with me in German, very good. I'm impressed. You pronounce it very well and everything.

JR: So I'm going to go to a happier memory. I was going to go back to how you met Flo.
LB: I met Flo.

JR: Or I mean, how you began your relationship with her.

LB: Well, we, we, at the wedding, at the wedding rehearsal.

JR: Yeah.

LB: We kissed. [laughs]

TT: The first day you met her?

LB: What else can I tell you? Yes, at the wedding rehearsal.

Interviewers: [laugh]

LB: No, that wasn't. No, the wedding rehearsal was a week before the wedding.

JR: Oh, the rehearsal.

LB: The rehearsal. You know, the man who handled it all has to do that, you know. I don't know whether we did there or the next day or the wedding, but whatever it was, we met, we met at that wedding and we got engaged, as I said, in March of '52 and then married in July.

TT: What about in between the kiss and the engagement? [laughs]

JR: She's dying to know.

TT: The courtship and the dating.

LB: Well, it was, the engagement, we took a trip with her parents to New York. We went to theater, to movie together. You want something spicier? You won't get it.

JR: She wants some spice.

TT: Well, did you have a car by this time?

LB: Oh yeah, sure. I traveled since 19--

TT: So you could go pick her up--

LB: Oh, yes. I traveled since--

JR: For dates.

LB: I traveled since, since, later on in, since '48.
TT: What was your first car?

LB: A Plymouth, Plymouth '47. A gray Plymouth '47 that my boss had that car and he sold it to me and he got a new one, and I traveled. I traveled for 13 years for the textile firm. I had a big territory. I traveled from Delaware into western Maryland, into West Virginia, into the south, into Virginia and North Carolina. I had a big territory. I traveled. I traded a car every 18 months.

TT: You got to drive a different car every 18 months.

LB: Well, because I put on so much mileage.

TT: Nice!

JR: So you're going pretty well.

LB: Yeah. I made a good living. We bought a home. In fact, after we got married we lived one month with my in-laws and then we moved into our own home, on, on Fairview off Liberty Road near Woodmore. And we left that home in 1940, '75 when Flo and I went over to Amsterdam in Holland. We lived there for two years.

TT: Oh.

JR: Well, I'm just gonna go--so it's 1962. You're still working for the textile--

LB: Textile firm.

JR: And did you like that line of work?

LB: Well, it was good.

JR: Yeah, you said you did. So what happened after 1962?

LB: This is Flo. It must be Flo. Who else has a key?

TT: [laughs] So far she just opened the screen door.

LB: Let me go open the door for her.

JR: I can open it. You don't have to. [Pause from 53:48 to 53:56] Hello.

Flo Bretholz: Let me put my keys.

TT: Hi Flo.

AKJ: Hi.
Flo: Hello everyone.

TT: How was dinner with your son?

Flo: It was fine. Thank you.

LB: Look what the ladies bought you.

Flo: Oh, how sweet.

TT: Well, and for you also. [laughs]

LB: That's alright.

Flo: Very nice. How did it go today? Are you still going strong?

LB: Yeah. You and I are just kissing.

Flo: Oh really, okay.

LB: At the wedding.

Interviewers: [laugh]

Flo: Yeah, I thought you were supposed to only go--

LB: I'm sorry about that.

Flo: Stop when you enter America.

TT: No.

Flo: That's what I asked.

TT: No, it's up 'til right now, to this very moment.

JR: We're at 1962 right now.

LB: Still 1962?

JR: Yeah, okay, what happened?

Flo: 1962, Edie was born then.

LB: I just told them that.
JR: Alright, what happened, what was your first effort to get the word out about your parents, your mothers and your sisters.

LB: I started talking. I just started telling them what happened, where I was in the camps and, you know, before all I had done was said I escaped from a train without details. This time I started telling the whole story and, and my kids listened to it. They were too young at the time to understand it, but of course I told Flo and she kept, she coaxed it out of me more and more. And then what happened, like what you just asked what happened, so I started telling the whole, the whole thing.

JR: So you started with your family.

LB: Yeah.

JR: And then you went to, who else? Who was the next person you told?

TT: Who was your first public, public talk? What was it?

LB: [pause] I formed a group in the '60s. That's when I started, the first public talk. The group was called Prejudice Anonymous. A group of us--Jews, Christians, Catholic, Protestant, black, white--we went out. We called it Prejudice Anonymous, taken after the title of Alcoholics Anonymous.

JR: [laughs] Right.

LB: Like alcoholism is a sickness, so is prejudice. An alcoholic will not do anything about his sickness until he admits that he is an alcoholic, that he has a problem. If he says, "Oh, I'm just drinking for fun," and this and that, but then he comes home and abuses his wife and children, that's no longer fun. Then he's an alcoholic and he's sick. And when you do that, you have to look for help and then you go into Alcoholics Anonymous, group, a group of therapy. So we named this group--Reverend Luther Stanz, a Methodist minister and I, we were the originators and we had a group of over 20, and he called it Alco--

JR: Prejudice.

LB: Prejudice Anonymous because prejudice is an illness that has to be dealt with. If you say, "I'm not prejudiced," but then you don't want to associate with blacks or with Christians or with Jews, whatever, then you have a problem so you have to do something about it. We went out as a panel to speak to such diverse groups as the Black Panthers.

JR: Wow.

LB: In west Baltimore, and we went to Joppa Town, to redneck country, and we went to schools. We went to, to Arlington, Virginia where the, where Rockwell's Nazi party was. We talked at a high school a few blocks away from the American Nazi Party and we went out and told people--
when we start to talk, we introduced ourselves. My name is-- and I'm prejudiced, but here's what I'm trying to tell you, what I want to do about it. And this is, this is, there were the first. Flo.

Flo: Yes.

LB: Wasn't that Prejudice Anonymous that first involved me in talking?

Flo: Uh, huh.

[Phone rings]

TT: That's okay. That's a perfect break because gotta change tapes right now.

JR: Okay.

LB: Miriam. And you know what else? Flo, take it, it's Miriam.

Flo: I'll take it here.

LB: Take it there. And you know what? Today I was thinking of calling her because I want to tell her we are leaving. It's my cousin. In fact, that's her mom. That's her mother who brought he over here, Aunt Sophie. She's my first cousin.

TT: Let me just change tapes, it’s a perfect breaking point. So what do I do, I press the red button?

(Getting drinks and joking until 3:44)

Jennie Reich: Actually, I'll keep it on the topic of the Holocaust. I find it somewhat inspirat-- I do find it inspirational that someone--

Leo Breholz: You find it what?

JR: Inspirational.

LB: Inspirational.

JR: That someone can go through such tragedy and live in such happiness. Like I don't know, that just, that just inspires me. I don't know.

LB: Well, you have to--

JR: Yeah.

LB: You have to make a life. You see, when you have the children. For instance, when my son is present, I can never mention the term “Holocaust.”
JR: Yeah.

LB: If that ever comes up in a conversation, if it happens to be in [indistinct words] dinner and that comes up, he would get up and walk out. He's speechless and would walk out.

Flo Bretholz: He has a hard time handling it.

LB: That's it. So. But the daughters are different and the granddaughters are different, and they read. They read my book and they get the teachers involved and they ask the teachers to get the book, and then the teachers ask me sometimes to come and do some talks, which happened in several instances. But you have to--you know, you can't give up. If you give up again, Hitler has a victory, posthumously. But inspirational, I appreciate the fact that you see something positive in that. But… and hatred, I can't, I can't hate those who killed my mother. I don't know who they are, number one. But hatred is a very destructive emotion.

JR: Yes.

LB: Hatred destroys the person, that hater, too, so you can't think straight anymore. If you hate, you're--that's all you do. You lose all rationale, all reason. And a lot of people say that to me. You mean you don't hate the Germans? No. Why would I hate the Germans?

JR: Do you really?

LB: I hate what they did.

JR: Right. You hate what they did.

LB: What they did.

JR: But you don't hate them, yeah.

LB: And then we meet in Austria. We meet non-Jewish people, young men who worked for Jewish causes, and then you meet them. It's called a gedenkgottesdienst, remembrance service. And these people work for Jewish causes. They come to the Holocaust Museum and every 18 months another one takes over because instead of doing the military service in Austria, they go for 18 months to do these civic duties. And you see, they are getting paid back in a way, not that you want revenge. Revenge has never solved anything.

JR: Right.

LB: Simon Wiesenthal, the Nazi hunter, in his book *The Murderers Among Us*, in his book he says, "My goal is not revenge. Justice. We want to find them and bring them to justice, but revenge doesn't cure anything."

But these young men, and they speak to me, and then one of them said to me, "I hate my grandmother," and that's punishment enough. When a grandson says, "I hate my grandmother,"
you know why? Why is that a sin? "Over her bed in her bedroom, she still has a picture of Hitler hanging. I hate my grandmother." That's enough punishment for that grandmother that her grandson hates her, and this is what Wiesenthal said. "We want justice, not revenge." When we found out that one of the Nazi officers who was a camp guard, murdered people, was hiding out in Asia, somewhere in Nepal, and he became a shepherd living as a hermit in the mountains away from the rest of the world, when our agents found him, instead of bringing him in, arresting him, they let him be there. Just to have found in that state of condition, we knew he's being punished enough. That's punishment for him. Its justice has been done. He lives in a world away from the rest of the world as a hermit. We know that he's there. Self-inflicted, self-imposed, but he has been punished enough that he has to do that, and that is, that is basically what we're doing. If I would say I hate this against myself over and over, I wouldn't be able to talk and sometimes in the talks I get very emotional. I wipe a tear here or there too, and I see people join me. People get the story and understand it, and young people write me wonderful letters from schools. That's the reward.

JR: And also the many groups that you--well, the group that you started, Prejudice Anonymous.

LB: Yes, that is one group. Later on it dissolved because some of the people moved out of town. That was always the same people doing the talking and the others just came as a support group, so after a while, two-and-a-half, three years, they dissolved somewhat, moved out of town. A couple of them died and Luther Stanz--Flo, Luther is still alive, isn't he, Luther Stanz? Oh, she's downstairs. Luther Stanz, a Methodist minister, he and his wife Joyce, we became good friends, and then the book was done and the book was translated into Dutch and German. It was also published in England. The German title of my book is *Leap into Darkness*. The German title is [says it in German].

Amber Kepple-Jones: Fly.

LB: Flight.

AKJ: Flight.

LB: Flight into the dark or darkness.

JR: What happened in between the book and the Prejudice Anonymous? Any other--

LB: Well, the Prejudice Anonymous was in the '60s.

JR: Yeah, so, and when the book was published in--

LB: In '98.

JR: So there must have been other things.
LB: Nine years ago. Well, you know, then a lot of schools took it in and I got, I got-- Yesterday I was at a, on Sunday I was at a church in Churchville right near the [indistinct words] These are my talks this year already, here and here, 40 of them and it's only October. These are all the talks. I write them down because I have to write down my mileage for my income tax. You know, he wants to know what mileage when I do this so that I can, I'm allowed to take off mileage as a deduction. So here it is. St. Mark, [can't understand], Bryn Mawr, Hadassah.

Tova Tennenbaum: Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania?

LB: No, Bryn Mawr School.

TT: Oh, okay.

LB: Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania is right near where the artist, East Philadelphia, West Philadelphia. John Carroll High School, Yeshiva Dramborg, Catonsville Community College, Loyola, Chantilly High School, Virginia, Department of Health and Human Services, St. Mary's Seminary. I mean, I get, synagogues, Roland Park Middle School, Count Maple School, St. Francis of Assisi School, Washington, Jewish Museum of Maryland. This was the last one. Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Church, 80 miles. But that's what, you ask, yes, I have to do it, and if I get calls and I can't, we do it some other day. I refuse some of them, too, because it's just not possible to do them all. So I give the name of other survivors and they get somebody else to do the talk. That works, too.

JR: So, you really, from 1962 on you've been fighting for--

LB: To spread the word, to connect with young people. I like the idea of speaking to young people because I can without qualms say, as I said before already, take it with you into the future. I can tell you that. I cannot tell that to an old age home. That would be--

JR: Right.

LB: That would be sassy.

JR: Right, like here you told us the story.

LB: Yeah, I couldn't do that.

JR: So what else happened in your life? Any big events here in America? You have three kids, a wife, good job.

LB: Family.

JR: Family.

JR: When did you switch into the book business?
LB: Well, I traveled and I carried a lot of suitcases. I carried 14 suitcases in my car, samples for the--

JR: The textile.

LB: Textile.

JR: Yeah.

LB: And I developed a back ailment. I had, I have two deteriorated discs. They're actually gone. They slipped. They're out, but the vertebrae are supported by calcium deposits [indistinct words] so that nerve is not being pinched constantly. If it were constant, I'd need an operation, but fortunately I can deal with it this way and with sometimes a pain pill. But, I went to the doctor in the '60s, Dr. Rubin on York Road, and Dr. Rubin said to me, "Leo, I don't want you to come here and pay me five dollars each time for junk. They have family treatment, heat treatment or stretch treatment. It won't get better as long, as long as you travel because sitting in that car, it's occupational stress, disease. You have to get out of that car and do something else because it will never get better as long--" I traveled. As I told you, I traveled 50, 60,000 miles a year. He says, "As long as you do that, it will not get better. No use coming here. You're spending that money without getting any results."

So I have a friend who was in the variety store business, like a five and dime store, Ben Cohen. And I spoke to him. He says, "Leo, I want to get out of this, too." So I went out with him and we went into the liquor business for a few years, and in 1968 we closed that after the riots here. And after '68, I went into a retail book business.

TT: What riots? Can you talk about those?

LB: Yeah, sure.

TT: We don't know 'em.

LB: Baltimore riots in '68. What year were you born?

JR: [laughs] '85.

LB: '85. In '68 right, you know, the riots are in Watts, in Watts, Los Angeles, in Detroit.

TT: Against the war?

LB: In Newark. Not against the war. That was the, after Martin Luther King.

TT: The civil rights movement.

JR: Was that the--
LB: K Street here was, they burned downed places. A lot of places were burned down there. So I went out of that and then in 19--., uh, '68 I went into the retail book business in partnership, and for 20 years I was in that business and so I developed. And then I said to myself, I see so many, so many titles here. It's about time, billions of words, maybe I should put my own words there. Then I co-writed my book. So I came to the store almost every day. Says, "Leo, when are you going to sit down and write that book?"

I said, "Well, I'm in the store seven days a week. I have no time." Then when I retired I said, "You no longer any excuses." I retired in '95. So I have no longer any excuses and I started doing it and I wrote 660 pages, legal lined yellow paper.

JR: Oh, yoy.

LB: In black lettering, and he edited it and he put it on computer and edit his own words into the events and everything. They're very satisfied because the schools have taken it and using it as a, as a tool for education, and that's why that some of them-- I told you also that that teacher in California has now established a study group on that book.

JR: Oh, right.

TT: And it was Constant, it was Constant Teacher who wrote a symphony about your book.

LB: That's the other one.

TT: Right.

LB: For a band and we just, we just got a letter from them.

TT: And you're gonna go. Did you get the grant?

LB: Yes, she got the grant.

TT: Oh, great.

LB: Flo, I got. Flo, I got an answer from Nancy Fairchild today.

FB: Yeah, I read it.

LB: Did you read it already?

FB: I just read it.

LB: So you think that's alright?

FB: Yes.

TT: You're going to go to southwestern Wisconsin.
LB: Southwest Wisconsin. She said she will pick us--

FB: Rockville.

LB: And she will pick us up. She wrote today. She'll pick us up in Madison.

TT: What a blast.

FB: What about that boy that wrote you that he has a friend who's related to, to--what's his name? The Nazi. What's his name? The one that did all--Mengele.

LB: Mengele. Dr. Joseph Mengele. Did you see that letter?

FB: Mmm hmm.

LB: That's from Glen Elk School. I have to answer. I'll have to call him later.

FB: No, this is from Brian in Michigan.

LB: Oh, oh. You mean the one that you read downstairs? There's another letter from a student for an interview in Glen Elk.

FB: Okay.

LB: That's right off route 99 in Howard County.

JR: So, obviously you're a reader. You like reading.

LB: I read less now, but I, I still read.

JR: You liked your job, the book business?

LB: Yes, yes. It was very interesting and meet all kinds of very interesting people. And it was good. We sold it later and then we lived for two weeks, years in Amsterdam, in Holland.

JR: How was that?

LB: That was alright, too. My partner with whom I was partnered here opened that store in Holland and then his partner there wanted back to America, so he asked me if I would go over there. I said yeah because I speak Dutch and I was there for over two years. Flo, I got there in March of 1975. Flo joined me in June after school was ended here. At that time Edie was bat mitzvahed and Flo came with the girls. My son was in Georgetown and he didn't join us, but he came there to visit us once. And we took the girls with us. First they didn't like it and then they didn't want to leave when we came back. They learned the language. They still speak Dutch.

TT: How old were the two of them?
LB: Flo, how old was Edie when we went? Edie was born in--

FB: She had just finished and had her bat mitzvah.

LB: That's right.

FB: So she was 13.

LB: Thirteen.

TT: Who is your other daughter?

LB: The other one, Denise. She, she--

FB: Seventeen.

LB: She was 17 then. She went to an extension school from Syracuse University in Amsterdam.

JR: Oh, wow.

LB: And she was proctored by a fellow who worked in the store where I worked, and he was a Penn State graduate so he proctored her. And when we came back in '76--we were there from '75.

FB: He proctored her so she could graduate high school, and the following year--

LB: That's it, graduate high.

FB: --she went to college.

LB: I'm just in the midst of telling that, Flo.

JR: So.

LB: Yeah, but that's right. We came back here in '76 just for vacation, a month to visit, six weeks, and then we went back and Harry Joe proctored her and she graduated. She, he proctored her there because she went to an extension from Syracuse University in Amsterdam and came here to graduate in '76.

JR: Oh, cool.

LB: She graduated at Milford Mill. Then we went back to Amsterdam. We finished staying there. Flo and I-- No, I came back myself and Flo and the girls stayed there until they finished school. They went to school there. And so that was an experience, too, a different experience.

JR: Did you do any work there with the Holocaust and--?

LB: No, we did not do anything of that nature although I was invited a couple of times to talk, but we took, we got visitors regularly from here. They came there and they visited. Some of them
stayed overnight in our apartment, but everyone that came there wanted to see the Anne Frank House, so we went. Flo, how many times did we go to the Anne Frank House?

FB: I don't know, like three or four.

LB: A little more than.

FB: Three or four times.

LB: Well.

FB: Everybody wants to go there.

LB: Everybody wants to go there. So the Anne Frank house is a, is a memento of those years, you know. So it was another experience.

JR: Right. So you get back to America. What year is it that you get back to America?

LB: Where? From Amsterdam?

JR: Yeah.

LB: We were just there two years in '77.

JR: I have a question about Amsterdam again. When you first left Europe it was because you had these, you know, bad feelings about Europe and just wanted to get out. Did you have any of those same feelings, like trepidation or hesitance about returning, or like memories floating back?

LB: Back to Europe?

JR: Hmm, mmm.

LB: No, not really. I, actually--

JR: Because you hadn't been in Holland before you, had you?

LB: No, I was in Belgium.

JR: Right. You'd never been to Holland.

LB: In Belgium I learned Flemish, which is Dutch, the same thing, but Flo and I went back to Europe in '54 already.

JR: Oh. How was that?

LB: We were married in '52 and we went back for a whole month to Europe to visit. I wanted to introduce Flo to my Aunt Erna who has survived in Paris and then I have an uncle in Belgium,
and my cousin Sonia, and then my cousin Helen who lived in England, still lives in England. She's now 92. And I'm not going to tell you that relationship there because that's the soap opera in the book at the end and that is a sur--, will surprise you. But anyway, when we went back in '54 I wanted to introduce Flo to my family. We were there for a whole month. Then in 1970 we took all three kids on a two-month trip.

JR: Wow.

LB: To Israel and Europe. One month in Israel and one month in Europe and I showed them. I went to that river where I crossed into Luxembourg and showed it to the kids.

JR: Oh, wow.

LB: They, they didn't realize it. They said, "No, that couldn't have happened."

JR: Ah!

LB: That couldn't happen because that river was a placid river, a placid stream, but after five days of rain this was, this was a torrent, and I explained the things to them, went back, went back and we saw my Aunt Erna, introduced the kids to the family. And it was 1970. We went back to Vienna. That was the first time I went back to Vienna. Isn't that right, Flo?

FB: Mmm hmm.

LB: Babe, when we went back to Vienna that was the first time in 30, in 32 years.

JR: Oh.

LB: Because I had left Vienna in '38. That was 1970.

FB: He was depressed, he wasn’t happy there.

LB: I wasn't too happy.

TT: You didn't have a good time in Vienna?

JR: Why not?

FB: He was not a happy camper there, not the first time he went back.

LB: Now it's different.

JR: Why, was…?

FB: It was too fresh. It was still, you know, couldn't wait to get out of there.

LB: Found feelings. Yeah, isn't that true?
FB: He couldn't wait to leave.

TT: What's the first time that you went to Israel?

LB: 1970. That was the year we had, we were gone two full months with the three kids. We went to Israel for a full month and then Europe for a whole month. We rented a car in Rome and we had something like seven suit--

FB: You're talking about our trip to Israel, right?

LB: What?

TT: The first time that you were in Israel was 1970.


LB: 1970. I just--

JR: What did you think of Israel?

LB: With the, with the, with the-- I like a place better that a phone booth has mezzuzahs.

JR: [laughs]

LB: Yeah, I had relatives there. My Uncle Jacob who went to Palestine in 1930 as a 21-year-old. That's also in the book by the way. He went to Palestine in 1930 as a 21-year-old. He died at about 9 some years ago, but Uncle Jacob was on a kibbutz and we went to visit him. And right now on that kibbutz are between 30 and 40 members of the family all from that one uncle who came there.

JR: Wow.

LB: Can you imagine? If only more people could have escaped how many people would be here now. He was just one, and Uncle Jacob died and his wife died.

FB: Is that a drum?

LB: Hmm?

FB: Do I hear drumming?

TT: Yeah, there's been a band playing for a while.

LB: I think they're practicing for Simchas Torah.

FB: Oh, okay.
LB: They're doing a, at the synagogue. They're making, made a noise all afternoon. I couldn't take my nap.

FB: [laughs] Poor thing.

JR: So Europe, the second time was a lot better.

LB: Yeah, the second time is better. Every time it gets a little better. But I'm going again with misgivings. In fact, I told Flo--we are leaving next week, you know--I can't wait 'til I get back. I'm reading this book about Vienna and it brings back all kinds of things that how dastardly a group of people they were, just hateful. I don't know.

FB: Now we have wonderful friends there.

LB: Wonderful friends.

FB: Most of them are not Jewish and they're wonderful. They just--they're so angry about what happened with their relatives, ancestors and what they did.

LB: Right.

FB: Very good people.

LB: The fellow who published my book, Erich, he wanted to take us out to dinner last time in Italy when we visited there and his daughter made reservations in the place, and he found out that that was a place that during the Nazi period the Nazis held their main meetings. It was a gathering place for Nazis. He says, "Call them up and cancel. I don't want to go into that place." That's today, 60 years later. He don't want to go in there.

JR: What do you think of all the support that--

LB: It's good. It's good to see that people have come to realize that something bad was done and they, he does something to change it.

FB: We have to keep reminding them that it wasn't their fault. They weren't even here or anything. You know, they feel so horrible about it, but they're not responsible for what their relatives did. These are really good people and they can't imagine anything like that happened. Just can't imagine people being that cruel.

LB: There's some good people there now. Of course when I speak about this woman who still has Hitler's pictures, that's the exception. But she gets her due by her son, her grandson hating her. That is an awful thing. I can still not get over that a grandson can say, "I hate my grandmother," and her son can say, "I hate my mother."

FB: She won't change her ways.
LB: Her son can say, "I hate my father. I hate my mother." But a grandson hating a grandmother.

JR: That never happens.

TT: Why do you think that's a great distinction?

LB: Well, because, because grandmothers are doting. Grandmothers are a picture of gentleness, you know, like grandma, my grandpa. My kids call me old jokes grandpa. My granddaughters call me old jokes grandpa. That's, that's, I like that.

FB: Even they're getting tired of his old jokes.

LB: I fail to see the humor.

FB: [laughs]

TT: I didn't have grandparents like that so. I know that's what grandparents are supposed to be like, but…

LB: Yeah, but that's just--

TT: Supposed to be--

LB: There's a different relationship.

TT: They're supposed to spoil you, right?

LB: It is a different relationship from son to father than from son to grandmother or grandson, grandmother, grandson, grandmother, grandson, grandson. So--

JR: In the 90's is when your book came out, this is when--

LB: End of the '90s.

JR: And then you're reunited with--

AKJ: Jeanne d'Arc.

LB: Sister Jeanne d'Arc.

JR: You talked about that.

LB: That was in '99. We met her and it was a great reunion and a wonderful lady and she told us just amazing things, that the correspondence that went on between her and me. She wrote like a poetess, and kind and gentle and caring and considerate, everything you can find, all the attributes. Then she passed away in '06. That was a wonderful get-together, emotional and yet very rewarding.
JR: Where did you meet with her?

LB: At her retreat. Yeah, we visited her retreat in the town of Castres in south of France, southern part of France, near Toulouse. And it's a nice town, Roman vestiges. The Goya Museum is in Castres, and we met her there at her retreat for aging nuns. She is, she was, of the order of the Immaculate Conception and they call them the blue nuns because they wore blue habits. As nurses, of course, in hospitals trained and practical nurses, they wear white, but as nuns they wear blue. They're called the blue nuns, and that's where she was in her retreat, the House of St. Joseph in Castres. She made sure that I become acquainted with her nephews and nieces, and a couple of months ago her grandniece was married and I was invited to the wedding, couldn't make it, just sent her something. So been in touch and to me it's a, the loss of a very good friend. And she knows Jewish so, and she always liked what she knew about Jews, she said, and she knew at the moment when she saw me, she knew she had to help me, not so much physically as she was a nurse.

JR: Right.

LB: She did help me with the dressings and everything, but emotionally, tell me I have nothing to fear. When I heard I have nothing to fear, I was in seventh heaven.

JR: And it's amazing how she remembered you so vividly also.

LB: Well, not actually--

JR: Oh.

LB: --because she remembered what she asked me when, because when I told her what she asked me to do to help out with somebody else, she says, "Yes, I remember that and now I know just the time you were there. But don't just think it was just I." She never wanted to take credit. “There were many of us who did that. We had male and female nurses there and they all helped out. They all were, we were all connected in that. We all did the job together.” She never wanted to get one iota of praise for herself or recognition. That is, that is another wonderful trait.

JR: Right. So you met up with her and then your friend, wasn't that also in the movie?

LB: My friend Robert.

JR: Yeah.

LB: Well, my friend Robert, that was a story that is unbelievable.

TT: Robert Hoffman?

JR: Yeah, Hoffman.
LB: Robert Hoffman of whom I mention him in the introduction to my book, and Robert and I left each other in 1938 when I was 17. I went first. He was 16. He went to Palestine because the youth *aliyah*--

JR: Right.

LB: --cut off age was 16, but over 16 I no longer qualified, but after my book came out I found out through someone who had read his name that he was with Robert and he suggested that I write to Vienna to find out from one of the agencies if they might have him on one of the lists, and through that list I found out about Robert. They called Robert and let him know that I'm looking for him because they couldn't give me his address and phone because that wasn't proper, and I got a call two days later from Robert from Virginia Beach.

JR: Yikes.

LB: And I tell you something, this was of the moments of absolute, absolute--

JR: Emotion, yes.

LB: Another thing happened today that is absolutely, Flo.

FB: Yeah.

LB: Did you see the book that, the two books that you ordered?

FB: Yes, I did.

LB: Did you see the writing in there?

FB: Uh, huh.

LB: Flo ordered two of my hard backs. They're no longer available in the stores.

JR: Right, in soft cover.

LB: But she ordered them off Amazon. She found two hard backs available at Amazon and they came today. You wouldn't believe it.

JR: What?

LB: I open up one of the books. My signature in there and Michael's, Michael Lester's, with a dedication from me to a good friend. She passed away six months ago. She lived six blocks from here and that book was dedicated to her and that's the book I got into my hands today. Of all the thousands of books--

AKJ: You didn't even know.
LB: --out there. I signed it to her, "To Lucille, with my best wishes. Lucille, a friend of long standing with my best wishes." I got this today. I mean, it came, it came back to me from six blocks away to, I don't know where it was sent from, Washington or from somewhere. People sell it to Ebay and Ebay sells it or they get somebody who has, whatever it is. She sold it. These unusual things, but listen, that's it.

AKJ: What do you think? Do you believe in faith or do you think that it's just luck?

LB: A little bit of faith, luck. We have a saying in Yiddish, *bershert*.

AKJ: Right.

LB: *Bershert* means it's fated. It's meant to be.

TT: Also between people, right?

LB: Yes.

TT: She's my *bershert* means that she's my soul mate.

LB: Yes, yes, it's *bershert* meaning, *bershert* means this is *bershert*. Or in German it's the same thing. It means it's meant to be. You see fate, some woman once told me, my travel agent. She said, Flo with flying was always unhappy. I don't mind flying, but Frieda doesn't. Frieda believes in fate. She says, "Listen, when your time is up, when your time's up, it's up."

I said, "Yeah, but I don't want to, I don't want to be on the plane when the pilot's time is up, you know." Listen, I make that remark.

She said, "Well, you got some there," you know. Fate, fate is, yes, a little bit of luck, a little bit of-- It's weird sometimes.

TT: Yeah, you have to admit you have your fair share of coincidences or whatever you want to call them.

LB: I have my fair share. That is for sure. In fact, when I was supposed to go to Vienna in June, remember I told you?

TT: Mmm, mmm. You were sick.

JR: You got sick.

LB: And I couldn't make it. I got sick and I said to the doctor, "Get me out of here tomorrow because I'm flying to Vienna."

He said, "Leo, you ain't going nowhere." And then he told me, "Leo, I know all about your book. You again escaped."
"What do you mean?"

He says, did I tell you that? "If you had not developed this fever the night before but the next night when, or the next day when you are on the plane and you didn't have intravenous antibiotics immediately, you would have developed sepsis." Sepsis is poison. This is fatal. "Leo, you escaped again." Really. And I mean that. He was very serious.

So you're right. Yeah, I had my shares of, my share of strange coincidences and happenings, and also some of it was by my own initiative because I was always scared to go there where they tell people are being killed and took medicine to my own hands. People said, "You're escaping from the train. G-d had his hands on your shoulders." Fine. Do you want to believe that? Fine. But there were also infants and children and elderly and other people. Why me? Again the question comes up, why me? But you also, there's a saying. You heard that saying often.

TT: Probably. What saying?

LB: Help yourself and G-d will help you.

TT: I thought you were going to say im, aim.

LB: [Hebrew saying]

TT: If I'm not for myself, who will--

LB: If I'm not for myself--

TT: Who will be for me?

LB: Who will be for me?

TT: And if I'm only for myself--

LB: If I'm only for myself, who am I? [Hebrew saying] If not now, when?

TT: When.

JR: Do you believe in G-d?

LB: I am quoting Elie Wiesel, my good friend.

JR: Right, yeah. My dad--

LB: I have faith but it is wounded. I showed you Wiesel's picture.

JR: No.

LB: What?
JR: I don't think so.

TT: Did you show us what?

JR: Elie Wiesel's picture.

TT: Oh, no… When did you meet Elie?

LB: Oh, I met him several times. This was two years ago at, at McDaniel College.

TT: Really?

LB: This is my granddaughter, Andrea. She's the one that was also in the interview.

TT: How old is she?

LB: She will be 19 in January. There's Andrea.

TT: With Elie. [pause for several seconds] So when did you meet him?

LB: This was in McDaniel's two years ago.

TT: That's the very first time you met him?

LB: No, I met him previously several times. I also met him last, this past July. No, not this, last year in July in Washington. I participate every year in a Holocaust essay writing contest sponsored by the Holland and Night Firm.

JR: Is that, was that on "Oprah?" I think it was.

LB: Maybe she did mention it, but last year the winner was Saranka Smith, a 15-year-old from Baltimore. They have some 10,000 students, 10 to 11, no some, yeah, about 4,000 students participating in essay, Holocaust remembrance essay writing contest and the ten winners are being taken to Washington every year to be given the awards.

TT: Do you get to judge that contest?

LB: I get to judge that.

TT: Oh, wow!

LB: So they, they, last year it was Elie Wiesel the keynote speaker. This year was Stuart Eisenstadt. Two years ago it was Wesley Clark, the former presidential candidate, General Wesley Clark, and they always have interesting keynote speakers. So uh, that's where I met him again and I wrote to him also. I write to him from time to time. I need some advice here or there. In fact, I wrote to Elie, "If I use your quote, is there anything you want me to add to?"
He says, "No. Just leave it the way it is. There's nothing. That speaks for itself." I have faith but it is wounded. That explains it, I have, meaning there are some doubts. And the rabbi in the camp said it in Auschwitz, Rabbi Zalman Schachter. They asked him, "Rabbi, where's our G-d? We have a G-d. Where is He?" And his answer was--listen to this, a rabbi--"Yes, we have a G-d, but He's not with us today." G-d is every time, everywhere, any place, omnipresent. When he said He's not with us that means he took a leave of absence or went somewhere else, had something better to do than to save souls? I mean, that's what he brings up and Wiesel is an Orthodox man.

JR: Oh, really.

LB: He's Orthodox, yes, and the book Night is an excerpt from a bigger book that he wrote in Yiddish. That is just one chapter of that book. The bigger book in Yiddish was called [Yiddish title] And the World was Quiet, kept quiet. That was the book in Yiddish and one of the chapters was the one that is called Night. It was called Night after he extrapolated it from that book which deals strictly with his father's death in the camp, where he doubts, where he questions, where he's very upset and he was a 14-year-old so naturally. He's not too well now really.

JR: So just one other question. Do you believe in karma?

LB: Well.

JR: Sorry.

LB: I guess, uh, a little bit of-- Look, when Jeanne d'Arc died, she was buried on the 9th of May. She spoke those words to me on the 9th of May, and do you think they remembered that? That's why they did the funeral? No. When they told me she was buried on the 9th of May, I know that I was operated on the 8th in the evening and the next morning on the 9th she spoke to me these words? Is that karma? My, I can't quite, but my granddaughter and my daughter especially, Denise. Denise says, "Yes, Dad. There's something to that." In fact, at her eulogy, during her eulogy it was brought out that her later years, since 1998, were enriched and gave her something to look forward to every day while she was ill, had a heart attack and other things, gave her something to look forward to, to the next letter that would come from America. And she wrote to me, "When they bring me a letter and I see a smile on her face, the person that brings me my letter, I know that letter has a stamp from America on it." And she's listed, not listed, she was, her name was entered in the record at Yad Vashem.

TT: Mmm hmm, because they register gentile?

LB: Yes. There it is. [paused for several seconds--leafing through book] in French [pause] She said when she saw a letter from Jerusalem coming to her, she knew exactly who was responsible for that. Yad Vashem. "The information that has been communicated to us have told us that in the course of the year 1944 you have given your aid and comfort to Leo Bretholz during his 17 days, for the 17 days during which he was hospitalized in the hospital in Limoges where you
worked as a nun. Yad Vashem wishes to explain, to express, its grateful, it gratitude and profound appreciation for your humane, humanitarian conduct at a time where, in a time of persecutions and dangers for all those who were Jewish and for those who helped them. The brotherly hand that persons like you have extended to the Jews were rare and precious. Be assured that your action has found its place in the documents of witnessing, witnesses at Yad Vashem for the better benefits of generations to come. Received, dear madam--they called them madam--sister our best wishes of good health as well as the expression of our distinguished consideration. Dr. Mordechai Bayael, Vad Vashem."

**TT:** Did you nominate her for that?

**LB:** Yes.

**JR:** Oh.

**LB:** I spoke to Bayael and I said, "I have a story to tell you."

He says, "Leo."

"It's a worthwhile story." Now when she got, when she died, I planted two trees in Israel. Did I tell you that?

**TT:** No, not yet.

**LB:** I planted two trees in Israel and they sent the French certificate for those trees to her nephew in Paris.

**TT:** Oh, right.

**LB:** Yes, and he produced copies to send it to the other many nieces and nephews that he has, that she had, his cousins I mean. And he wrote to me that my Aunt Jeanne d'Arc would have appreciated the idea of reclaiming the desert by planting trees there. So this was a nice thing to hear.

**TT:** Was there a reason you planted two trees instead of one?

**LB:** I just wanted to have it a little stronger this way because she helped me and she was also a good friend. One thing is for help and the other one because a good friend died, you know. She became--in fact, there's a letter I have. Probably this is the first letter that she wrote to me in French, which I may translate. [pause] This was her handwriting at age 90.

**TT:** Oh, that's beautiful.

**LB:** Without lines.

**TT:** It's perfectly straight.
JR: You have good handwriting, too.

LB: Yeah, I do.

Interviewers: [laugh]

LB: Well, I was good at calligraphy all the time anyway. We had calligraphy at school.

JR: Yeah, you showed us the--

LB: What did I show you?

TT: The writings you did in jail.

LB: Oh, yes.

JR: In public school, yeah.

LB: [pause] My dear Leo, my dear friend [pause from 47:34 to 47:50] I wanted to fill my page only with thanks to express my appreciation for the good moments, short but [pause] short but so good that we spent together here." This was in '99 when we first visited her after we came back. "I cannot forget them. I am so profoundly touched by your, uh, closeness, fidelity [pause] loyalty. The photo, I look at it without stopping because it was, because the photo is full of emotions caused by that encounter [pause] those 54 years that have separated us after our first encounter in Limoges and it is especially good that you have, to have seen you again. I thank G-d for these instances of joy. It seems to me that I can now follow you easier into your faraway America with her thoughts. I'm happy that you had satisfaction returning to France where you have, where you have so much suffered dearly [pause from 49:53 to 50:03] and especially that you're now finding out the possibility to relive it all being free [pause from 50:10 to 50:15] This also I cannot forget. Thank you also for this. [pause from 50:19 to 50:32] Yeah, the period was a very stark and dangerous period and has caused fear in your life in the middle of people whom you never knew whether you should trust them or not, the fear of the alerts. You know, the alarms that were blowing with the bombardment.

JR: Right.

LB: With, with sick people suffering--where she worked, you know--and the sirens [pause] I don't want to bring back all these moments to you at this, these painful moments to you at this moment. These days, these months, these years in the darkness.

JR: That's touching.

LB: Believe that, believe me that my prayers will reach you as well your family, the big ones and the little ones are always present in my heart and I would be so happy if you would give me
the name and the date of your religious holidays so that I can celebrate them with you living so far away from you because it will be G-d on those holidays that will reunite us.

**TT:** Wow.

**LB:** I embrace you both in, again giving you all my, my best words of appreciation. Sister Jeanne d'Arc.

**TT:** She writes really beautifully.

**LB:** And I gave her. I told you I gave her the religious holidays.

**TT:** Mmm hmm.

**LB:** Then she lit the menorah there.

**LB:** And I always say that those nuns standing around and seeing what she does on her night table, they must have said--

**Interviewers:** [laughs]

**LB:** But she explained it. I didn't have to explain the Maccabees to her. That's biblical. That's the--in fact, she even said to me, "You know, if not for the Maccabees, the victory of the Maccabees over the heathens, the Greeks and the Assyrians, the Jewish people would have been destroyed," she says. "If there had not been a Hannukah," she says, "you know, chances are there would have never been a Christmas." That's Jeanne d'Arc. You can't say that--

**JR:** She has a good heart.

**LB:** She was good, yes, a great person, great human being, gentle. One thing that she said to me when I wrote to her, "I remember your dark eyes looking at me and saying, 'I have nothing to fear.' Those gentle dark eyes." She says, "Please don't romanticize it. I'm an old nun now."

**Interviewers:** [laughs]

**LB:** She wrote to me. I have other letters. I have some 50 letters.

**JR:** Oh, wow!

**LB:** Eventually I will probably put them into a, maybe publish, maybe just translate them and have them in a little folder for my kids or whatever.

**JR:** Right.

**LB:** The grandchildren especially.

**JR:** That would be a great book, though. That would be a great thing to do for your kids.
LB: Are we done actually or what now?

JR: You have anything else you want to say?

LB: No.

TT: What else should you tell us, Leo?

Interviewers: [laughs]

LB: What else? Well, I can tell you.

TT: Your blood pressure, your height.

LB: No, she asked me is there anything else you want me to ask you.

TT: [laughs]

LB: That was her phrasing. She didn't perhaps mean it that way.

JR: Yeah.

LB: But when I heard that, I couldn't help but throwing in a little flip, flip there, but that's when I called and apologized.

TT: I've got a few questions that I thought of, but I wrote on my arm so I wouldn't forget by the end.

LB: What are they?

TT: If that's okay.

LB: You mean you want to ask now?

TT: Yeah, just like things that popped into my head. Um, I know that the idea of like the Holocaust and the term “Holocaust” are fairly new sort of concepts. It wasn't immediately in '45 that everyone started talking, oh, the Holocaust. It took a very long time for everything to sort of, you know, become revealed. What, do you remember the first time that you heard that term Holocaust and started thinking of it in those terms as a Holocaust?

LB: Well, I'm glad you asked that because often when I start a, when I start a talk and have enough time. Sometimes I get an hour, an hour-and-a-half, I can do it, but when they tell me you have 30 minutes, then I have to, can't go into history. But when the camps were liberated in 1945, when Auschwitz was liberated, there was one British journalist calling his office in London--I think it was the *London Times*--with a report and he told this, this editor, to his editor. He says, "I'm here with the troops liberating a death camp and I'm supposed to write about it, and I can't find the words to write it, and I don't even know what word to apply." They went into
dictionaries and they went into encyclopedia. They looked for the proper word that could be applied to that which the eyes of the world never beheld before, and they found a Greek dictionary the term "holocaustum." Holocaustum translates as total destruction by flames, by fire, by burning. The word caustic comes from it in English. Caustic, a caustic matter burns. Lye is caustic. It burns. Holocaustum, and they decided to use the word Holocaust as the most appropriate for this occasion because it was a total destruction by burning. That was, but it became known already in '45, '46. Later it was applied, but later it became more popularized because there were events taking place and commemorations and Holocaust, and then they call it Shoa.

**TT:** Right.

**LB:** That's now--

**TT:** Which is the Hebrew term.

**LB:** The Hebrew term, but in Vienna, in Austria and in Germany, it is no longer called the Kristallnacht, is no longer called Kristallnacht. What they called it now, the night of, the night of the November pogrom. But this was one of your questions. I think you have an armful.

**TT:** Oh, well, and between those two terms, Holocaust and Shoa, which do you prefer?

**LB:** It doesn't matter to me.

**TT:** They're both equally accurate.

**LB:** Equally accurate, but when you say Shoa to a non-Jewish person, it may not, although I have many friends who are teachers and they're not Jews and they call it Shoa because they want to be, they want to be conducting it with the Jewish term, you know, the Hebrew term, but I'm equally at ease with both of them.

**TT:** Okay, and my other question which I might have to cut off because we're nearing the end of this tape, but we were talking in class about sort of the, how people push on and embrace life, and the way we talked about it was sort of a transformation from victimhood to personhood. Did you ever feel like a victim? Did you ever feel like, like that's all I am was there a time like that you could only say "I'm a victim" before you could move into saying "No, I'm a person. I'm a Jew."

**LB:** I never considered myself victimized.

**TT:** Never?

**LB:** I'm lucky to be alive, to be talking. The victims are those, they're the martyrs. They are the victims. The voices that are now still are victims. We are survived. We are, we can remember. We are--I don't even like the term survivor because survivor means, you know, these shows that
you have survival and all that. It's adventurous and you do an extraordinary things now. I was lucky. I was fearful. I was hopeful, but I've never had the term— I never had the attitude where I've been victimized because that would, no. I survived this thing. I'm a winner. I'm a winner. I lost 20, over 20 members of my family. My mother and sisters were murdered. What do I have to complain about? I eat a breakfast every day regularly. I sleep in a bed. What else, what else do you want after all these years.

**Tova Tennenbaum:** You said you don't like the term survivor and victim is even worse. If you had to come up with a term for it, what would you call yourself?

**Leo Bretholz:** A witness.

**TT:**--besides an old grandpa jokester?

**LB:** A witness, a witness.

**Amber Kepple-Jones:** A witness.

**Jennie Reich:** A witness.

**LB:** And you become a witness to a witness. That was, that's what Wiesel says. When you tell students, they carry on the message. They become the witnesses to the witness.

**TT:** But when you think, or at least, I mean, when I think witness, I think of a passerby. I think of someone who was not personally involved.

**LB:** A witness of the events, a, a, a eye witness, an eye witness of the events.

**JR:** This is a, this is first hand, isn't it?

**LB:** Yes.

**JR:** This is coming directly.

**LB:** Coming directly. This is not reported. This is not second-hand story. This is the witness events as Leo lived through them and that's what is, whatever you want to call yourself. Survivor, yeah, fine. I'm here to tell the story so I survived. But that means, it's almost like look, here I am but you're gone. It's almost like, like you're bragging, that you're giving yourself a stamp of something bigger than it is instead of--

**JR:** That's how you started your interview that you had a normal childhood. You are a normal person.

**LB:** Normal person, and that's what. I want to be a person. I don't want to be singled out. You know, often when I am these classes and they ask me, "Mr. Bretholz, did you have a number?" No. They look disappointed. You know what that is?
JR: Yeah.

LB: That's voyeurism.

JR: What do you mean?

LB: Unless you have a number, you're not, you don't even--

TT: Oh, a tattoo number.

LB: A tattoo.

TT: Because you were never in a death camp.

LB: Death camp in the east. And some of them were disappointed, to watch, to want to look at a number rather than to hear a story, that's voyeurism. That's curiosity.

JR: That's what voyeurism means?

LB: Voyeurism means—

TT: Voyeurism is like wanting to watch other people's lives sort of.

LB: Voyeurism, you know the comedian, the one that says gets no respect, Dangerfield.

TT: [laughs] Rodney Dangerfield.

LB: Rodney Dangerfield. He said something about a voyeurism, a peeping Tom is a voyeur.

JR: Okay.

LB: He says a peeping Tom once watched me and he booed me.

TT: [laughs]

LB: He wasn't happy with what he saw. [laughs] But anyway, voyeurism is like peeping, looking through a peep hole. Voyeurism is you want to see something that you shouldn't be seeing, that's none of your business.

TT: So people think, people think it's almost like scandalous like--

LB: Yes.

TT: Like, let me see your tattoo.

LB: Let me see your tattoo.

TT: That proves you were really--
LB: It proves what you tell is true. You don't have a tattoo, you have nothing to tell, but I was never in a, and I preface all my talks that way. I was never in a death camp. My efforts were directed at not getting to the camps, and that took some doing with all the escapes and the arrests and prison and camps, and often, more often being hungry when I went to bed at night. When I went to sometimes that wasn't even a bed. I went to sleep at night. In most cases I was hungry when I went to sleep. Maybe it was good because I didn't overeat in butter and fat and meat and eggs. Who knows? Maybe that was good.

TT: Because then you were skinny enough to fit through that hole.

LB: At that time I was.

TT: That window.

LB: Now I wouldn't.

TT: You said you weighed what, 119 pounds?

LB: At that time I was 119, 120 pounds. I'm now 160. What are you going to do?

JR: I have actually two questions. They're very quick.

LB: Go head. All with the present time?

JR: Yeah. What do you think of pop culture's adaptation of the Holocaust, movies and some? I don't know. You probably have "Schindler's List."

LB: I saw "Schindler's List." "Schindler's List" was very true to life, but it was just the tip of the iceberg.

JR: I haven't seen it, but--

TT: I've seen it.

LB: "Schindler's List" was the tip of the iceberg. You have to, in your imagination you have to add more and more and more and more, but he did a good job.

JR: "The Pianist," all those.

LB: "Pianist" I didn't see. Flo went to see it. I didn't see it. I didn't need to see "The Pianist," that personal story, but "Schindler's List" was something because I also was then still in the book business. That was a bestseller and I met Keneally who wrote it. Keneally wrote a fictional book. He wrote a lot, but that was a novel based on the story.

JR: Oh, really.
**LB:** Just like Leon Uris wrote "Exodus." He wrote a novel based on an event, and when I spoke to Keneally, he told me. I said, "Why did you do it in novel form?"

He says, "I have to add my own interpretation, my own thoughts and my own fine points into it. I cannot write nonfiction. I have to have a fictional, an event that I can turn into fiction."

**TT:** Right, which is almost what we're trying to do.

**LB:** Yes.

**TT:** To turn, to turn your life into a story sort of.

**JR:** And finally, how, you know, decades from now when people look back on your life, what do you want them to see?

**LB:** Decades from now.

**JR:** Or whatever.

**LB:** That means when I'm no longer here.

**JR:** Yes, or just whatever.

**LB:** You have no questions about, eventually in time. You asked me questions the other day.

**TT:** She's thinking.

**LB:** But what decades from now, I want this to be a teaching tool. I want young people to learn one main thing--persevere. Persevere. Do not give up because giving up is the easy way out. Persevere. If it doesn't come to you now, it may come to you tomorrow. If it doesn't happen tomorrow, it may happen the next day. At least persevere. And if it doesn't happen, you cannot fault yourself for not having done your best to try. Of course, I cannot compare a composition that you have to do or a math problem with the dangerous situations that I was in, but that still means persevere and stick to it. I made up my mind I want to escape with my friend Manfred, and we did it. We didn't let anybody talk us out of it, and the woman on crutches was the one who, who emboldened us. She said, "You must do it." This old woman said and the young people wanted to talk us out of it. You know why?

**TT:** They were--

**LB:** They probably would have wanted to do it, too and didn't feel like it enough, the guys who didn't have the impetus or didn't, weren't scared enough. Maybe it was jealousy. Why do you do that?

**JR:** Yeah.
LB: You people should have said, "Let me go with you." No, but the elderly woman, I say old woman gave me peace. I don't know her name, but let her forgive me wherever she is now. I call her old woman. I was 21. If she was 60, to me she was an old woman. Her eyes were deep set. She had grey hair, but, but she emboldened us and others tried to talk us out of it. I listened to her, didn't listen to those who tried to talk us out of it. Scared the wits out of us. If it succeeds, it will, and if it doesn't, I'm a loser.

JR: I think you must have had a very strong inner voice that directed you because I don't think most people would be capable of pulling off the things that--

LB: That's true and that's what Martin Gilbert, Professor Gilbert told me. "Leo, there are only 12 reports of attempted escapes in all the deportations in France." He got, he got it because he wrote "The Atlas of the Holocaust." He's an historian. He wrote over 90 books translated into I don't know how many languages. Martin Gilbert and I've been in touch too periodically, but he told me that. Remember I told you when I said I was in transport number 42? "If you were in that transport the 6th of November, how come you're standing here talking to me?"

JR: Right, yes.

LB: Because he knew that there was only four survivors, five. Actually four are listed in the book. I was the fifth one. So he knew what I was talking about. I said, "I escaped, Professor Gilbert."

"I must hear about that." And then he wrote it in his book, "The Holocaust." He put a whole chapter in there like--

JR: Is a--

LB: Chapter 26.

JR: "Leap from Darkness."

LB: "Leap into Darkness."

JR: "Leap into Darkness." Was the co-author or the publisher was, the co-author was?

LB: Michael Olesker.

JR: He wasn't Jewish.

LB: Yes, he's Jewish.

JR: Oh, he's Jewish.

LB: In fact, I just saw Michael yesterday.
JR: Really.

LB: Yeah. Michael is Jewish. He was born in the Bronx, but he is more of a cultural Jewish.

JR: Right.

LB: He is not a, not Orthodox because--

JR: I like the--

LB: He goes to a seder. What?

JR: I like the cultural Jewish.

LB: Jewish. He writes for the *Examiner*.

JR: Oh, really.

LB: The newspaper every day Monday through Thursday, four days. He wrote a good piece yesterday. He wrote a good piece today again.

JR: Do you consider yourself a cultural Jew?

LB: Well, I go to synagogue. I'm a member of a synagogue by tradition. I want to live up to what my mother said the last words. "Never forget who you are." For better or worse, I do it to honor her, honor her memory. I like to maintain the holidays out of principle. I fast on Yom Kippur because I want to show something that connects me to my, to my tradition to Jewish people.

TT: Would you say you are as about observant now as you were as a child, the holidays and--

LB: Who, I? Well, as a child my mother was the driving force in that. She was very traditional.

TT: Well, and she still is the driving force.

LB: She is still the driving force. And my mother kept kosher and my father was a cultural Jew, never went to a synagogue. He was a Socialist and don't forget, if he had been alive when the Nazis took over, he would probably have been arrested because they knew he was a-- Everybody knew the list of the Socialists. He could have been because he died when he was 39 so he never had a chance. I was nine years old when my father died. [pause] So when do you think Uta will let you read the book? Does it depend on her when you're reading it?

TT: No, no. We could have read it any point.

LB: Oh, you can.

TT: We just didn't want to because--.
LB: You don't want to be influenced.

TT: Right. Actually, I think I'd still like to put together the presentation without having read the book.

LB: Really. Well, you have time, only another month or so, another month and a half. It will be towards the end of November?

TT: Yeah. We think right before Thanksgiving break.

LB: A Friday, oneg shabbat.

TT: Yes, it's oneg shabbat.

LB: I told you that I would like to bring my daughter and my two granddaughters there. Would that be alright?

TT: Of course.

JR: Of course.

LB: Denise and the girls. I don't think Barry will come because he sometimes works late, but whatever he does, he does.

JR: Just to conclude, I really appreciate how very real you were about your Holocaust telling. I think--I forgot what I was going to say.

LB: You mean I didn't hold back.

JR: Yes, you didn't hold back and you were honest when you said sometimes it is too much. People, that's a very unique perspective and I think that's really great that you pointed that out because it's really--it's such an experience that it's so hard to imagine. You bring it down to a level of a normal human being telling a story, and I think that was very good.

LB: It's not easy.

JR: Yes.

LB: But I do appreciate the fact that you took the time to do that project. Did you volunteer for that or did they pick you for that?

TT: This class?

LB: Yes.

TT: Well, it's a class we registered for.
LB: But how come you three decided to do the interview and not somebody else?

TT: Everybody gets an interview, but with a different survivor. There's four survivors and three people.

LB: Oh, there's 12 of you that do that.

TT: There are 13 actually. There's a group of four, but we were fortunate enough to get you and not somebody else.

LB: I was fortunate enough to get you.

TT: You probably know the other survivors.

LB: Inge Weinberger.

TT: Inge Weinberg, Sol Manischewitz and Mr. Stern. I forget his first name.

LB: Stern?

TT: Stern. He's older. He's 93.

JR: But we knew when we signed up for this class that we would be--

LB: Stern. I met him, yes. I know Inge personally very well. Last year I did Rachel Goldner and Roman Shapiro and the Kessenbergs. They were in feelings. Everybody has a different story, and that's all what it is. Every story is different and every story should be recorded because history and that's what you learn from. You have a new danger out there. That's Ahmadinejad. Wants to deny the whole thing. He knows what happened, but he's a demigod, so we have-- By the way, the Israeli Foreign Secretary, participated, did a talk today at the United Nations and I got it on the internet. She mentioned very, very good points. She was very cogent and very, very incisive with her remarks. I liked the way she presented it and I hope it has an effect. Do you have, you have computers?

TT: Of course.

LB: Do you think I should forward it? It's pages and pages, her speech.

TT: You could, definitely.

LB: Yeah?

TT: Mmm, hmm.

LB: Who should I do it to? To one of you and you can share it.

TT: Sure.
LB: Who wants to get it?

JR: Do you want to just get it over there, or you just want to write it down?

LB: What's that?

AKJ: Do you want to give me your email address and then I'll email you and then you can email me?

LB: Yes.

AKJ: Okay.

LB: Leapintodarkness@aol.com.

Interviewers: [laugh]

LB: All in one word. All in word. Can you give me that--I will get your address and then I forward that to your address and you share with them. Go through the whole pages. It gives you a few phrases, three or four phrases, excerpts from her speech, but then it says, "click here for the whole text." Little. Then you get pages and pages. It takes you about maybe 12 minutes, 15 minutes to read it, but it is a very effective speech at the United Nations. We're again facing the threat of being destroyed, and what she said was so poignant. The destruction of one member nation by another member nation of the United Nations, and that's against the charter. She brings that out. Very interesting. Will you do that for me?

AKJ: Mmm, hmm.

LB: Amber?

AKJ: Yes.

LB: Good.

JR: Any questions, any more questions?

LB: Did you all have lemonades?

JR: [laughs] Yeah.

TT: I drank some. We're just so enraptured that it's hard to mentally detach ourselves and drink lemonade.

LB: Did you finish all your questions that you had listed on there?

TT: On my arm? I think so.
LB: Did I just tell you the number, did I tell you the story about the fellow who won the lottery?

TT: No.

LB: That's what you call gallow humor, dark humor, but there's a fellow who is like I, a survivor let's say. He's in America for about 50, 60 years. One day he wins the big lottery, the jackpot, like 50 million dollars. It happens, you know. You hear it from time to time.

JR: Rarely.

LB: He takes $5,000, five million dollars and gives it to the Holocaust Museum and five million to his favorite causes in Israel and then the Wiesenthal Center and the Red Cross, all his favorite charities, and he shares his newfound wealth with his favorite charity. And then he leaves one dollar to that group in Germany. They still exist, the old SS Nazis. They gather from time to time to have meetings. Remember--you don't remember Reagan. Do you remember Reagan, President Reagan?

TT: We weren't born.

LB: He went to the Bigburg Cemetery in Germany to visit where the SS are buried and Wiesel came to him and told him, "Mr. President, you should be with the victims, not with the perpetrators." He still went there.

JR: Why did he go there?

LB: Because president, Chancellor Kohl of Germany was elected and he wanted to show his solidarity. Be this as it may, this group of SS, they're still having an old S, the old veterans, you know, meetings once in a while. This fellow leaves that SS group one dollar. So his friend, "What are you crazy? Why would you leave anything to the SS?"

He says, "Well, it's only a symbol."

"Still," he says, "leaving money to the people that killed your parents."

He says, "I want to tell you something. They gave me my winning number that we played on the lottery."

TT: [laughs] Oh, my G-d!

LB: Did you get that?

TT: Wow.

LB: He had been playing that number for years and years and years and finally he won. He said, "They gave me my winning number." Isn't that interesting?
JR: Actually there's--

LB: Is that dark humor?

JR: There's a "Curb Your Enthusiasm." Have you heard of the Larry David--

LB: "Curb Your Enthusiasm."

JR: There's one--I forget.

LB: That was that series on television.

JR: Yes, you show watch. There's a lot of references to the Holocaust and survivors.

LB: Yes, and he uses all kinds of vulgarity, too.

JR: Yes.

LB: Endless, almost gratuitous.

JR: Yeah, very politically incorrect.

LB: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

JR: There is one.

LB: But that's why I said it's a black humor, dark humor, but it is symbolic that way.

TT: It's really interesting.

LB: They gave me the number. They gave me the winner.

TT: It's really interesting that you shared that because the thing that we did on our first day of class was we read this cartoon and there's this little child sitting next to a man who's obviously a Holocaust survivor, and the son, the child says to the old man, the elderly gentleman, "What's that funny tattoo on your arm? You know, that's a really ugly tattoo. Why would anybody ever get just numbers? It's kind of boring." And the--

LB: Grandfather.

TT: And the older man or the grandfather says, "Oh, you know, it's to, it's a reminder of a time when, you know, there were no morals in the world and destruction and evil and blah, blah, blah, blah.

And the little child says, "Oh, so you kept it to remind yourself of these things?"

And he said, "No, my dear. I kept it to remind you," like--
LB: I get that from time. It's on, get on the computer.

TT: You've seen that one?

LB: It's called remembrance I believe.

TT: Hmm, hmm.

LB: Isn't that called that?

TT: I think.

JR: Yeah, I think.

LB: It starts with a cultural, yes. It's very significant. That's, that's--it tells you what. He told the child the right thing. Isn't that right? That's what you're talking about.

TT: Yes.

LB: Perpetuating the memory and care and passing it along and from generation to generation. In Hebrew--

TT: Va door, va door.

LB: Va door, va door. That's what, that it was coming. Va door, va door. Va door, va door in Hebrew. Door means generation. Flo?

JR: Wait. What does lad va mean?

TT: Well, va is and.

LB: And, it's and.

TT: And la is from [tape skipped]

JR: Okay.

LB: La door va door. La door means and. [Hebrew saying] meaning--

TT: I am you.

LB: I am you. [Hebrew saying] You speak a little Hebrew?

TT: [Hebrew saying]

LB: [Hebrew saying] Austria.

TT: Oh.
Flo Bretholz: You call me, Leo?

LB: Yeah, I just wondered what happened to you. Where did you--

FB: There was some paperwork at the office I had to finish. We're going to go away so I had to--

LB: Flo, we're finished here with these young ladies.

FB: Hmm, mmm.

LB: They will not be--

FB: They look so tired. You tired them out. [laughs]

TT: [Hebrew saying]

LB: They spoke, we spoke.

TT: We're speaking.

LB: We're speaking.

TT: [Hebrew saying]

LB: [Hebrew saying]

TT: Du brot.

LB: [Hebrew saying] freed.

FB: You hate to say it in German, too.

JR: What does that mean?

TT: We're speaking in Hebrew now. Ashav.

LB: [Hebrew saying]

FB: [laughs]

LB: Ashav means now. Ashav means now and machar means tomorrow.

TT: And lifnay.

LB: Lifnay before.

TT: You said you taught Hebrew before--

LB: I learned.
TT: You learned Hebrew before when you were living in--

LB: Living in Austria, lifnay, before, 75 years ago.

FB: I bet you can use some coffee.

LB: 75 years ago.

FB: Would you like to have some hot coffee?

JR: Oh, I had some. I'm sorry. I'm tired. I had a lot of work, but courses.

FB: I know it’s tiring.

JR: He has more energy than me.

FB: Me, too. [laughs] Myron was speaking Chinese in the restaurant. I don't know how he--

LB: Well, he's a Chinese major.

FB: I mean, the waiters come over to him and he speaks Chinese. I don't know how he remembers it all.

LB: He speaks good Chinese.

FB: Hmm, mmm. I thought it was a Japanese restaurant, but he said-- I said, "How did you learn Japanese?"

He said, "No, I was speaking Chinese."

TT: [laughs]

FB: Even though it's a Japanese restaurant, all Chinese people work there.

LB: They're two entirely different languages by the way.

FB: Yeah, I know that.

LB: Like French and, French and--

FB: I still can't tell the difference.

LB: French and Spanish and Italian and Portuguese are related, romance languages, but you would think in East Asia, Japan and China facing each other, two different, entirely different languages.

TT: But you're a linguist. You speak six languages.

LB: Yeah, well, I'm able. It serves me well.
TT: I'm into languages.

LB: Our son is also into languages. He speaks Spanish. He speaks in German.

TT: It's genetic.

LB: French. He's a French minor and a Chinese major.

FB: That's why he plays Irish music.

LB: Which means that he can go to a Chinese restaurant and order in Chinese, you know. But he plays Irish music. Normal, right?

TT: [laughs]

LB: Paranormal.

JR: It must be genetic, like a gene.

LB: This came from Holland. When we lived in Holland, we bought that in Holland.

JR: It's nice.

FB: Couldn't resist. It was in a store window. I was walking by.

TT: How did you get it here?

FB: I couldn't believe the price.

LB: A metal container, ship.

FB: It was like $600. It was crazy.

TT: And you shipped it.

FB: Solid oak.

JR: It's really nice. Engraved.

FB: The company Leo was working for paid for the, paid for everything to be moved back.

TT: Ooh. Can I still borrow your beret?

LB: I'll bring it to you.

TT: Okay.

LB: I'll bring it. Flo, don't forget. When we go there at the end of November with Denise and Andrea and Samantha, we can bring it.
FB: Do they know the date yet?

TT: We don't know the date yet.

LB: They will let me know.

FB: But you don't know yet yourself.

TT: No.

FB: Okay.

LB: And, and Tova said she would like when she presents my, my story, she would like to at one point when it's indicated.

FB: Wear your beret. [laughs]

LB: To put on the beret for effect.

FB: Okay. [laughs]

TT: Just talk about how you used to be quite the Frenchman when you wore his beret.

FB: Is Jean-Paul, is it always French, Jean-Paul? I called the company, some company today from the office and the guy, Corporate Express to order checkbooks for the doctor, and some guy named Jean-Paul answered.

LB: Jean-Paul?

FB: It didn't seem to be a French accent.

LB: It could be from, it could be from Canada but Jean-Paul, J-E-A-N and then Paul.

FB: I didn't ask him to spell it.

LB: Well, you should have.

FB: He just told me his name was Jean-Paul.

LB: Maybe it's John, J-O-H-N and then--

FB: He had a heavy accent, but--

LB: Then it's Jean-Paul.

FB: He didn't sound like French.

LB: Jean-Paul, Jean-Paul, yeah.
FB: Leo asks everybody how they spell their name or he guess how they spell their name, always does that.

TT: Cause he’s such good, he’s so good at spelling.

LB: Do you know that person yesterday where I signed that book at the church?

FB: Hmm, hmm.

LB: On Sunday we went to church at the, at Northern Universalist Unitarian Church, Unitarian Universalist Assembly.

FB: They don't call themselves a church.

LB: No, they don't call themselves a church. But anyway--

FB: In fact, Myron, when I told our son about it, he says--he has a joke for everything like his father--and he says, did you hear what they, they were burning, they were burning question marks on the front of these people lawns. Instead of burning crosses they were burning question marks because they have a mixture of religions.

LB: I see.

FB: They're very good people. They're really nice. We had a nice experience.

LB: But remember when that woman said to me. I said, "How do I sign it?" She signed it whatever, Linda Chenoweth, you know. And I said, "Is that C-H-E-N-O-W-E-T-H?"

"Yes!" she says. "You're the first one that ever spelled that correctly."

FB: Because you like words. You like names.

LB: Yeah, I'm, I'm into words and names or whatever. That's my hang up or whatever.

TT: Your forte.

FB: Not hang up. I wouldn't call it hang up.

LB: Well, it's my whatever.

FB: Another weird thing about you, honey. Ask him if he would, guessing people, guessing to spell other people's names when they're introduced to somebody.

LB: Weird thing.

FB: I always want to give him a good kick.

LB: It's a weird thing.
TT: [laughs] It's a quirk.

FB: Quirk, yeah, it's a quirk.

LB: A quirk, okay.

FB: That's the word.

LB: And no, an idiosyncrasy.

TT: Yes, an eccentricity.

LB: That's it.

TT: [laughs]

FB: Oh, well.

LB: Indubitably.

TT: [laughs]

LB: Yes.

FB: So what else is happening today?

LB: Tomorrow I got--

FB: I may go in for a few hours.

LB: I got my haircut in the morning. Then I have a doctor's appointment at 2:30.

FB: Do we have anything on for Thursday?

LB: Then we have 7:00 the, the library.

FB: Tomorrow?

LB: Yes, I got the books in the, back there.

FB: Tomorrow? But Thursday during the day we have nothing, right, because I may have to go to work a few hours.

LB: No, Flo, not--

FB: I had to rush out of the office today to meet your son.

LB: You rushed out? What do you mean?
FB: I left a lot of things.

LB: You left at 5:00. You usually work.

FB: I left a lot of things undone.

LB: When did you leave the office?

FB: A quarter after five.

LB: Well, you normally leave at five. Why did you have to rush at a quarter after five?

FB: Because we're going away. Because we're going away. I had to get a lot of things done before.

LB: We are going away.

FB: Yeah, remember. [laughs]

LB: Maybe you can take some of the office work to Vienna.

FB: [laughs] Yeah, sure.

JR: I think this is a great way to end this. Normal--

[Everyone laughs]

LB: You know what? In that office, that's what they-- In that office, if they have to order paperclips, they call Flo. Whatever, whatever is, it's Flo's business, you know. The simple thing like paperclips, "Flo, where do we get paperclips?"

Interviewers: [laughs]

FB: Don't listen to him. Everybody knows you buy paperclips at, in a shoe store or something.

Interviewers: [laughs]

LB: I'm just trying to make a point.

FB: In fact, I was interviewing somebody for the job.

LB: In fact, the doctor told her, "Flo, I'll get out of this office. I'll retire when you retire." That's what he told her.

FB: Been there 22 years.

LB: Isn't it a feather in her cap?

FB: Mmm hmm.
TT: Why did you decide to retire?

LB: It was time.

TT: It was time?

LB: In ’95 I was 77. I was 70--

JR: Wow. That's still a long--

FB: Yes, I guess that's--

JR: Now, well, not nowadays, but--

LB: I mean, I didn't retire. In fact, frankly, after I got out of the, in the store, I knew I was there 10:00 to 5:00, 10:00 to 4:00, certain days. Now you look at my calendar. It's busier than when I was working. Working was repeat every day. Now, I got--

TT: Well, you're busier than us.

FB: Well, all your fault for writing that book.

LB: Well, that's another thing. That brought some of the things--

FB: You're not still taping, are you?

TT: Mmm hmm.

LB: No, I'm not complain--

FB: You're not. Are you really?

LB: And I’m not complaining. I don't complain. I'm just making a statement that, that is a fact.

FB: [laughing, to interviewers] You're not, you’re not.

AKJ: Alright. Turn it off. Just normal--

LB: I got a lot of--

FB: This is just plain old talk.

TT: No, he's talking about, about the book publishing.

LB: Well, just, yeah, that's what caused a lot of these contacts and I met some wonderful people like these people on Sunday in the church. And when I go to schools, the students and it's always, it's always a good experience.

AKJ: What about--
LB: I have some three, 4,000 letters here from students. I don't know what to do with them. I, I can't, I can't get myself to throw them out.

JR: Yeah.

LB: Because everyone is nice, you know. There are some of them that are special that are worth framing, but I can't throw these letters that we have there.

FB: Well, the main letters we have that are beautiful are from--

LB: Yeah, but I didn't--

FB: Sister Jeanne d'Arc.

LB: That's another thing. I speak about students. What do we did with those letters from students? Go through them again.

FB: I don't know. I was looking at some last night.

LB: And pick out the best ones and keep them, or should we just-- Huh?

FB: You know, we have some in the file cabinet, too.

LB: Yeah, I know we have.

FB: I found them yesterday. [laughs]

LB: You saw them--

FB: When the book first came out--

LB: You saw that yesterday?

FB: We were filing.

TT: I remember your term over Holocausted. I really like that, that term.

FB: Yeah, when we--

LB: What?

TT: The term that you used to [tape skipped] Sometimes I just get over Holocausted.

LB: I said, did I?

TT: Yeah.

LB: I mentioned that once or twice here, yeah.
TT: I really, I really--

FB: If were in the Giant Foods sometimes, and somebody will be approaching and say, "Leo, you're just the man. I want to ask you a question." Leo says--

TT: I know what they're gonna--

FB: Not the Holocaust now.

LB: Do you, do you appreciate the fact that I feel that way sometimes?

TT: Oh, of course. It's refreshing that you--

JR: No, I think it's great. I think it's a new perspective that, the most honest perspective because-

TT: Because it's something I always want to ask a survivor. I would always want to say, "Is it ever just too much? Do you ever just get, get sick of being a Holocaust survivor? Don't you want to just be a retired book man? You know, and, book retailer and--

LB: You're right, you're right.

JR: It's so sensational.

TT: I'm glad that you just sort of brought it down to earth and you're just like, yes, sometimes it's too much. It's like anything else. Say that I was--

LB: Well, I appreciate that.

TT: --a miracle baby or something.

FB: Just a person.

LB: I appreciate that and you will reflect in your presentation, I'm sure, because that's the way I feel and it's no shame, no, no hesitation about that. It's a burnout. Some people get burned out. Mechanics get burned out. You know, about mechanic who, who got a--

AKJ: Is this going to be a joke?

FB: [laughs] Probably.

LB: Mechanic, he needed, he was sort of had problems. He went to a psychiatrist. Even mechanics have emotional problems. He went to a psychiatrist and the first question the psychiatrist asked him, "What do you do for a living?"

He says, "I'm an automobile mechanic."
He says, "Get under the couch."

**TT:** [laughs]

**FB:** Oh, Leo. Leo.

**TT:** I was going--this is something that we, no it's sort of corny. This is something that we actually debating about because we couldn't quite remember in the car on the way home last week was, when you were in Belgium, you trained as an electrician. Was that right?

**LB:** Yeah. I went, in the school I was a, it's a--

**TT:** A trade school.

**LB:** It was a trade school for electricians.

**TT:** Did you ever work as an electrician?

**LB:** In Vienna.

**TT:** In Vienna before you left.

**LB:** Yes, for six months.

**TT:** So, when you were 17.

**LB:** Seventeen, because my aim was always to go to Palestine and it was good to learn a trade.

**TT:** Right, to have a trade.

**LB:** And why electrician? Because my Uncle Jacob, who left Vienna in 1930, was an electrician.

**TT:** So when--

**LB:** So I figured, well, I might as well learn, be an electrician. I was employed by an electrician for about half a year.

**TT:** When you were forced to leave school, is that--

**LB:** Yes. Another--did I tell you anything about my friend Robert in Vienna?

**TT:** Hoffman?

**LB:** No, another Robert.

**TT:** A different Robert.

**LB:** Robert Potochka. By the way--
FB: He's our prison friend.

LB: I didn't hear from today, but everything is alright speaking of such. Robert is the principal now at the school in Vienna where I was enrolled as a, as a student at age, whatever, 16 1/2 or so. Now listen to this. Robert Potochka in 2002 or 3 took it upon himself to find out, or to try to find, some of the students that were in his class and were Jewish.

FB: That were in the school.

TT: To see what happened.

LB: That were in the school and he found four of them--one in New Jersey, one in Florida, one in Israel and me in Baltimore. And he came here to visit me.

TT: Wow.

LB: He had a friend living in, near, in Laurel.

TT: That's nearby.

LB: A Viennese woman, Laurel. He came to visit me here and he invited me to go to his school in Vienna to do a talk to the students. And I tell you there's another thing. He scheduled the talk for the 25th of October, 2004, and the 25th of October was the day I left Vienna and was the perfect, perfect into for me to tell the students. What a strange coincidence Professor, Engineer Potochka didn't know that when he gave me that day, that the 25th of October, today, this day today, I left Vienna 65 years ago. But since then he had me back there and he found us, and now he was in Israel and he spoke to the other fellow. He says, "You have to tell me all about it," and through me he found another fellow.

He writes to me, would you have known a fellow by the name of Julius Muskaplate? I said to Flo, "You know what, Flo? Mrs. Freedman, my friend Herbie Freedman at whose wedding I was the best man, his mother is a nee, nee?

FB: Maiden name.

LB: Maiden name Muskaplate.

FB: So I said to him, "How would you know Herbie's mother's maiden name?" You know, it sounds real weird.

LB: So I called Herbie.

FB: How would you know that?

LB: I called Herbie. He was in Florida then. "Herbie, what was your cousin's name that you told me about, the one that was deported?"
He says, "Julius."

FB: And that was the one Robert knew.

LB: That was Julius. Julius was the only one from that school who went to Auschwitz.

FB: The others all survived. All the Jewish kids all survived.

LB: Isn't that interesting?

TT: These aren't coincidences. These are just Leos.

LB: She thinks I have a knack for these things.

FB: [laughs] Yeah.

LB: Tova keeps telling me that.


TT: Yeah, he was just saying that.

FB: That is weird.

TT: I'm going to stop recording now, but I just want to say on tape, um-- [laughs]

LB: You want to say what?

TT: I just wanted to say, like, we can't thank you enough. I think this from all three of us. I can't-

LB: Thank you.

TT: I can't speak for the three of us, but this has been such an experience.

LB: Thank you. I thank you because you made the effort. You worked hard. You applied yourself to the nth degree. I appreciate that. It goes both ways.

JR: I found this very inspirational and it really has changed me and I have, I really want to read more about Judaism and the Holocaust. I really, it's been a very--

LB: You might even convert.

JR: [laughs] I am Jewish. [laughs] I am.

LB: You know why I'm saying that.

JR: [laughs] Yeah.
LB: Because that fellow that, that invited me to come to speak to a college in South Carolina. He was a student at, at John Kell Catholic School in Malaya and he said the same thing when he called me. "When I heard--"

FB: The same thing.

LB: "I read the book. I read the book. I bought other books on the Holocaust. Then I read books on Judaism. Mr. Bretholz--"

JR: [laughs] But I'm Jewish.

LB: "I just converted to--"

FB: He said, "Why? You're crazy. Why do you have to do that?"

LB: I said, "Are you crazy? Don't you have enough problems being a Catholic?"

TT: [laughs]

LB: He told he left and he's married, getting married to a Jewish girl and he's now going to be bar mitzvahed and his rabbi told him that he's a better student in Hebrew than some of the Jewish students.

TT: That's because, because--

LB: Eric Jaycock.

TT: --wants to.

LB: Eric Jaycock. I didn't tell you that?


FB: Are you sure?

LB: Go and look at the computer, EJ.

FB: I thought I'd seen the papers.

TT: Look at all this influence you have.

LB: Isn't that interesting? John Kell. His parents sent him to a Catholic school. Paid tuition. It's a private school. And then he converts.

FB: I feel sorry for the parents. They're nice people.
LB: He says, "How about your parents?" They say, "Whatever makes me happy is fine with them." They were going to be at his bar mitzvah. He's now 25 and is becoming bar mitzvahed down in South Carolina. Went down to speak to his college in Conway, South Carolina near Myrtle Beach. In April, we're going.

FB: In all the years Leo is speaking to students, that's the only, only one whoever did this with Leo. We're not out to convert anybody. [laughs]

TT: [laughs]

LB: This is not--

TT: [laughs] No, no. You're not missionaries, are you?

LB: This is not my aim. My aim is not to--

TT: But that's the--

FB: In fact, Leo was upset about it. [everybody laughs] that way.

LB: If he reacted that way, that's his business.

FB: Yeah, but, you. I remember you said, "I hope his parents don't think I had anything to do with that." [laughs]

JR: Okay. I am Jewish.

LB: Guess what?

[everyone talking simultaneously]

LB: Guess what? You know who else thought I had something to do with it? Margaret.

FB: Oh, Bonnie's mother, yeah.

LB: Margaret Wurst, Bonnie's mother.

FB: Oh, that was--

LB: A young woman who worked for me in my bookstore before we went to Amsterdam. She converted to Judaism.

JR: I think it's good that you don't want people to convert.

LB: No, no.

JR: I think it's--
LB: You stay what you are.

JR: I think it's--

LB: I prefer to have a friend that is not Jewish than, because that, that, that is, that shows that an understanding. We don't need to--

JR: Good idea. I like that.

LB: To convert people.

JR: Yeah.

FB: I mean it's an honor when they do, but on their own, but it's, but we go after. We don't proselytize.

LB: If you find something inspirational in Judaism that you didn't find in your own religion, so be it.

JR: Yeah.

LB: But there's also Jews who convert also to other religions. But that's the individual decision, but that's not my aim. I don't like it too much.

JR: I meant embracing the culture part because I don't, that's what I meant.

LB: The culture.

JR: Yes.


FB: Oh, like Michael. [laughs] Mmm hmm.

JR: I like that.

FB: I told you this, this young woman that just, that just started in our office today. It was her first day. I told her I would like to see everything under control before I go, go overseas. She said, "Oh, you're going overseas. Are you a missionary?"

Interviewers: [laughs]

FB: [laughs]

TT: You're a missionary of sorts, but not a religious missionary.

LB: [German saying]
AKJ: Yeah.

LB: Tastes good?

AKJ: Yes, very good.

LB: Yeah. [German saying]

AKJ: [German saying]

LB: [German saying]

FB: You're thanking too much.

[End of Interview 3]