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## Kurt Marburg oral history interview by Tori Lockler, November 4, 2010

Kurt Marburg (Interviewee)

Tori Chambers Lockler (Interviewer)

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**Tori Lockler:** Today's date is November 4, 2010. The interviewee's name is Kurt Marburg; name at birth, Kurt Siegbert Marburg. The interviewer is Tori Lockler. Our city, state and country is Bradenton, Florida, U.S.A. The language is English, and our videographers are Nafa Fa'alogo and Richard Schmidt.

Okay, Mr. Marburg, if you can tell us, please, your name, full name at birth?

**Kurt Marburg:** Kurt Siegbert Marburg.

TL: Okay. And can you tell us the date you were born?

KM: August 17, 1924.

TL: Okay. And where were you born?

KM: In Berlin, Germany.

TL: Okay, thank you. And can you tell us your mother's full name?

KM: Maiden name or married name?

TL: Both, please.

KM: Married name, Margaret Marburg, or Margaret Singer.

TL: Okay. So, Singer is the maiden name?

KM: Singer is the maiden name.

TL: Okay, thank you. And can you tell us your father's name?

KM: Bernhard Marburg.

TL: Okay. And are you the only child, or do you have siblings?

KM: Only child.

TL: Only child, okay. So, can you start by telling us a little bit about your childhood, the things you remember from the city you lived in, and your family?

KM: Well, when I was born, Germany had been—before that, shortly before that, had been defeated by the Allies in World War I. Before they were defeated, it was a monarchy, and after that, 1918, it became a republic. I was born within the Weimar Republic, which actually was in effect from 1918, after the Versailles Treaty, till 1933, when the Nazis took over the government. It was a very tough time economically. I do remember that my father paid about a thousand marks for a loaf of bread; later on, even half a million marks. The inflation was unheard of. The unemployment was tremendous. This gave cause to a very, let's say, political uproar during that time, and it gave the Nazis a foothold, because they wanted to change those two things that bothered the German people and they thought they had the answers to those problems, and the Germans believed their rhetoric, the lies and all that. And it came to pass that in January thirty-three [1933], the Republic, the Weimar Republic, ended and a dictatorship took place on January 30, 1933.

TL: If we were to go back a little, can you tell us what your father did for a living?

KM: My father was a branch manager of an international real estate and management company. The main seat of the company was in Munich and the branch office was in Berlin, and he was the director of that office.

TL: And your mother?

KM: My mother was in a retail shoe business. It was a small chain. But when she got married she retired early and devoted her time to rear her one and only son, and did nothing more as far as in her working life.

TL: Okay. What do you remember about your early years in school?

KM: Early years in school: I started school in 1930. At that time, it was still the Weimar Republic. There were no signs of any, let's say, political or religious problems. I interfaced with a lot of non-Jewish people, didn't make any difference. I didn't feel any anti-Semitism at that time. But it changed shortly thereafter.

In 1933, when the Nazis took over and the Party became the major factor in the government—it was not the delegates of the people; it became the Party's that actually dictated the policies of the government. The teachers, in order to maintain their position in the school system, had to belong to the Nazi Party. And if you belonged to the Nazi Party, you had to teach what the Party told you to teach, and they twisted the truth already then. That started to affect me, and I—well, later on, during my years in the German public school system, I told that to my father, and he decided, "Well, I'm going to take you out of the public school system and I'm going to put you in a private school." That, of course, had to be paid for out of his own funds, but I didn't want to subject myself to the lies and the innuendos that the teachers threw at the students, at the Jewish students. That became evident already, in the early and middle thirties [1930s].

TL: So when you were in the public school system still, the teachers changed. What about the other students? Did they change also, the way they treated you?

KM: The students, not so much, no. No. The kids, I guess, held on to their childish notions. No, it was the adults, and of course the adults imposed their views onto the children. I did feel some pressures when some non-Jewish children told me that they couldn't play with me anymore because their father and mother said that they shouldn't, and they didn't give me—they just stayed away from me. Yes, well, that was evident that

the parents influenced the children already, of what the Nazis spoke about and their propaganda. Yes.

TL: Okay. And as you went into the private school, how were things different in the private school?

KM: Well, the private school held to the actual, let's say, curriculum that was taught. We had—I felt no pressures, I felt no discrimination, and I felt comfortable and I felt relaxed. The teachers pointed out already—they could still point out the difference of what we were taught in the other schools, and tried to correct the lies, tried to change our thinking of what was being told to us and, I would say, succeeded in that. I got, let's say, the last two years actual, rational, truthful information and teachings. Yes. That was certainly a positive change.

TL: And the school, when you say private, it was a religious school also, right?

KM: It was. They taught religion, but they taught the secular subjects. It was run by the greater Jewish community in Berlin. They paid the teachers. You must remember a difference in support of the school system and the religious organizations. I should point that out. And it still exists today. When you belong to a faith and when you declare your taxes in Germany, to the German I.R.S., you declare what denomination you are. Every person who belongs to a certain denomination pays a percentage of their income tax to that particular—

TL: Wow.

KM: Yes. You're being taxed on it. They don't depend on donations or once-a-year finance support, financial support. It is a taxation system that the Catholic, the Protestant, the Jewish organizations get from your taxes that the I.R.S. turns over to that particular denomination. And that's the way they support the schools, the temples, and all that. It's not voluntary that you give; you pay a tax on it. It's a different taxation system—it would never work in the United States—but they had it then, and that still exists today.

TL: How is that affected by the rise of Nazism?

KM: They didn't change that.

TL: Didn't change it.

KM: They didn't change that. They let that stand.

TL: Huh.

KM: So that the—well, a lot of people left organized religion, so to speak, and once you say that you don't belong to any, then you don't pay it. They let you do that. But they didn't change that system; they stayed on, and it even exists today in modern German government. Yes.

TL: That's interesting.

KM: Yeah.

TL: Can you tell us how religious was your family?

KM: Conservative.

TL: Conservative?

KM: Conservative Judaism. No liberal or no Orthodoxy. My grandparents observed strictly kashrut. We relaxed that a little bit already, but still did not eliminate it. I would say that we didn't eat pork, or we didn't eat any of the other things and all that; that didn't exist. But a strictly kashrut home where you have two sets of dishes for everything to separate the dairy from the meat, my grandparents had that, but we didn't have that anymore. A modern dishwasher and modern soap and things took care of that. Maybe in those days it didn't, and therefore they had to have two separate sets to observe the strict kashrut, yes. That's right.

TL: Can you tell us some about your grandparents? How much time did you spend with them? Was it just at holidays?

KM: My grandparents on Mother's side lived in Berlin. There was no travel involved—I mean long distance travel. Travel by bus or by streetcar, whatever, or taxi, yeah. But my

grandparents on my father's side, they lived quite a distance. They lived in a different what we would call state. We lived in Berlin and they lived in Hessen. I travelled on my vacation to them, and when I was a little boy I was—my parents dropped me off at my grandparents' home and they went on to the seashore in Belgium; they sort of got rid of me for four weeks, and I played around and enjoyed my stay with my grandparents.

There is a picture on the wall here. This picture denotes a remembrance of where I was as a small child. This castle was built in—I think I mentioned it to you, Ms. Lockler—in 1301 and was finished in 1399. That green lawn in front of it was a playground for me. When we went back to Germany in the eighties [1980s], it had been converted to a modern facility to host musical programs, theatre, seminars, meetings and all that, and that green lawn where I played disappeared and is an ugly parking lot.

TL: Oh!

KM: (laughs) But that is—yes. So my youth was sort of divided between the two grandparents, but I enjoyed this much more because it was a different setting. It was, let's say, I could be my own self, had a lot of non-Jewish friends in that little village and so forth, and when we went back and we visited the area, I had asked about some people—I did remember their names. And the answer was, "He never came back," which meant that he was drafted in the German army, these several friends, and they never made it back 'cause the Germans had terrific losses during their campaigns in the east and in the west.

TL: Right. So if we talk about your family being religious, Conservative, can you give us examples of maybe a holiday at your home? What was it like?

KM: A holiday at home? Well, a holiday at home meant, let's say, a preparation for a special meal. That is, I would say—Mother wasn't the greatest cook, but she did—(laughs) she did prepare, let's say, the most common German dishes that are usually served on special occasions. She managed to do that. We did say the appropriate prayer before the meal and after the meal. We lit the candles, the two special holiday candles, and on the holidays my father and my mother both took me to the local temple for the service, for the service for that particular holiday. My father and I, we sat downstairs, and Mother had to sit upstairs. That is still practiced, I think, by the Muslims today: in their mosques, the women do not pray with the men. Since Judaism and Mohammedism are desert religions, the sexes are separated during a prayer service. You still find that today in Orthodoxy. You don't find it in Conservative or Reform—certainly not in Reform, but in some Conservative temples you still find the separation; in Orthodoxy, definitely.



TL: Okay. And you had mentioned that January 30, 1933 marked—(clears throat) excuse me—the end of the Weimar Republic.

KM: That's right.

TL: Can you tell us a little bit about what happened after that, what you experienced after that?

KM: January 30, 1933 was the turning point. It ended through a political scheme, which was perpetrated by the then-president of the Republic, Paul von Hindenburg. The Nazis took—Hitler became chancellor, and they marched through Berlin at night with a torchlight procession. The Nazis liked torchlight processions: that gave them some sort of—I don't know, aura or some sort of feeling of superiority, power, whatever. And they marched into the city and the people hailed them as saviors. It was either staged or they were convinced that now a new era would start. The inflation would stop; unemployment would stop; we would not pay reparations in the Versailles Treaty anymore, which paralyzed the finances of the Weimar Republic as well as the dictatorship; and that sold the Germans on their support and they hailed him.

And he was, I remember, on a balcony, and he stood there with his hands on his hips and looked down. "I finally made it!" He started in twenty-three [1923], when he failed, which I point out in my little talk. That's right. He failed in twenty-three [1923], he was arrested, wrote *Mein Kampf*, but he succeeded ten years later. It took that long for him to make the move, and that's when the actual—well, he spells it out in his book, what he was going to do, what the Germans could expect, what the world could expect. It was on black and white. It's not that he did something that the free world never knew. It was already on black and white ten years ago in twenty-three [1923], when he wrote the book. And every German couple that was married got the book for nothing. (laughs) The—what do you call it? The office where you get the license, the marriage license, handed them the book.

So, the lies were inculcated already and permeated throughout the society and so forth. That was the turning point, and the free world stood by and saw it and did nothing, did absolutely nothing. It was an internal affair in Germany. Well, the free world doesn't interfere with internal political changes. That's a cop-out! That's nonsense! But they knew what was going to happen, and let it happen.

TL: What are some of the first events that you remember?

KM: The first event? Well, that was the takeover. And the second event came in February: to be exact, on February 27. And that was early in the morning, I would say about three, four o'clock. The police, the fire department, the rescue squads chased through the city with their sirens on and all that. Didn't know what was going on. We got out and we looked and everybody screamed. "The Reichstag is aflame!" came the word. We didn't live so far from the Reichstag building. The Reichstag is the equivalent of the Capitol in Washington. It holds both houses, the lower house and the upper house—which they actually combined, they didn't have a lower house and upper house anymore; but that's beside the point.

So this caused, of course, a political uproar. The Nazis went out and arrested Social Democrats, Communists, Jews, Gypsies, anything but the Aryan prototype of the German, let's say, people. They used it as a propaganda tool. They said to the Germans, "You see? You have enemies among yourself and you don't even know about it, and they burned down our government buildings. We will punish them. We will get rid of them for you." That solidifies a movement. And they did arrest people, and they did charge a—well, I would say a person whose mental capacity wasn't 100 percent. He [Marinus van der Lubbe] was actually a Dutch citizen who was a very strong leftist, and they charged him with setting the fire. They decapitated him after he was tried for setting fire to the Reichstag. But when it was all over, when they investigated what really happened, the Nazis had set fire to the building themselves and used it as a propaganda method to solidify their early changeover from the Republic to the dictatorship.

TL: And do you remember the atmosphere in your home changing after that? Did your family become nervous?

KM: I don't remember that. I don't remember that. Father and Mother didn't talk much about politics at home. Well, I was—what was I, nine years old? I was interested in playing with the kids, maybe going out with them to a coffeehouse and have coffee and cake with some whipped cream on it. But I had no political interest. I don't remember. I don't remember. It came later; it came later when Father mentioned that he couldn't hire any competent help for the office anymore because they didn't permit non-Jews working for Jews. That was a political—a program that they didn't allow that. My father said, "My God, I can't operate that way," and that's when we decided—that led to the decision to decide to leave the country, even though my father fought in World War I, as I told you before. Yes, we both had the—I don't know; well, yes, you might say "honored distinction" that we were both combat soldiers: he in the First World War and I in the Second World War. No, we weren't armchair soldiers. We were out there, both of us. He was and I was.

Then it became—yes, then I heard some—and then I noticed already—I can tell you of an incident that really drove the point home to me. I wanted to see a soccer game with

friends of mine on a Sunday afternoon. I think it was—the Olympics were in thirty-six [1936]. It must have been in thirty-five [1935]. We went to the stadium and we wanted to pay our admission to the football—to the soccer game. There was a big sign over the box office, in big black letters on white background, and it said, “Jews and dogs not allowed.” Well, here is a ten-year-old looking at something like that, able to read already. It set me on my rear end. It couldn’t be plainer than that. Yeah, it did something to me. “My God, what is this?” Yeah. That was my personal, and I have another experience I can tell you also, which is even worse. Do you want it?

TL: Please.

KM: Yeah, okay. Yes. It was on my visit to my parents in Hessen, my grandparents in Hessen. And during my vacation, I was there and I had a bicycle there; every kid has a bicycle. And I rode my bicycle that day. I rode it in the street—not on the sidewalk—in the right direction. But I had to make a sharp right turn to go back to the house where my grandparents lived. When you make a sharp right turn you don’t know what’s going on; you can’t look around the corner.

As I made that turn, a Nazi official stepped from the sidewalk into the gutter, and I knocked him on his rear end with my bike. Well, I heard words that I wouldn’t even repeat anywhere, words that I never knew existed. He said to me, “You did this deliberately! You wanted to kill me! You will get punished for that! I will report this and you and your family will go to the concentration camp.” I helped him get up; he was already a little elderly. He brushed off his uniform, straightened out his cap, and went on his way. But that’s what I heard, and it was clear to me what he was going to do.

Here’s the irony of it: When I went back to my house where my grandparents lived, I told them of the incident. It shook everybody up. Now the Gestapo is gonna come and arrest us. The irony of it is, he never reported it. Nothing ever came of it. My question to you is, what would have happened if he had reported it? Okay? The beer and the girlfriend must have taken everything away from what he was going to do. Okay? That’s probably what happened. But he never—it never came back to us in any form. The threat was made, but it became an idle threat. And who knows—who knows? Maybe I wouldn’t be sitting here talking to you had he made that one telephone call when he went to that meeting.

That is the incidents that affected me personally: the discrimination; the, let’s say, rejection; what you might call being pushed away from things; being eliminated from things that normal people do. You couldn’t go here, you couldn’t go there. You were afraid to do this, you were afraid to do that. You became completely, let’s say—well, you had a complex. It affects you mentally. That was sort of what happened to me personally. Yeah. That’s that.

TL: So, if we were to go back just a little, you were talking to me about in 1933, the end of the Weimar Republic; then we talked about the burning of the Reichstag. Is there any other major event that you remember in thirty-three [1933]?

KM: Yeah. They decided, the Nazis decided, that the German people would only read what they think is proper for the Germans to read. In other words, only that became supportive of the Nazi government. Yes, there was an incident. Oh, yes, there was. Yes. The Nazis decided that writers like Jewish writers, writers who had a very strong leftist view, communist writers, social writers who—again, who they thought would lend a proper perspective on something. They wanted a one-sided view on Nazi propaganda, on Nazi philosophy, one-sided only. They decided to get rid of the literature and the books.

Now you're gonna ask, "How did they do that?" It was no problem for the Nazis. The word got out that they wanted to confiscate the books, papers, magazines, manuscripts. They went to public libraries, they went to school libraries, they went to private homes, and the authors and the titles of certain books were just pulled off the shelf. They were loaded on trucks and they were taken downtown to the famous street of Unter den Linden, which is one of the main thoroughfares in Berlin, in front of the Humboldt University, which is also a longstanding of learning, and they piled the books sky high and they waited.

And they did that on a national basis; they didn't just do it in Berlin, because the Nazi Party had organizations in all towns and in all cities. And at night, again, the torch parades; that's S.O.P., that's standard operating procedure for Nazis. Torch parades—again, that lends, let's say, the impact, makes the impact stronger. They marched from the side streets onto that square, played music. They waited until it was really dark, until the torches on, then they threw gasoline onto that mountainous pileup of books. And then they took their torches and threw them onto the books. That was the end of literature, of free literature, in Germany.

Now, I remember one thing. My father read the book that was written by Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which was also—Erich Maria Remarque was—I think he had some French relatives in his family. But anyway, he wrote the book, and it tells about a German group of students, university students, who volunteer in World War I. And he describes the agony of the trench warfare, and none of them come back. Of course, that was anti-military: that book had to be—my father hid that book, because it told his story. It told his story, what he went through on the Somme in 1917. But that book was also banned. That goes to show you that, again, the—as I spell it out in my talk, a holocaust is something that is cultivated. A holocaust is something that moves step by step until it hits a final stage. And these incidents are all steps which he planned, which

already was black on white, as I originally told you. And to ban the literature and confine the thought to only Nazi thinking was a step in that direction. And that happened in May in 1933, as early as that. That's right. Yeah.

TL: And you said you remembered your father hiding the book. Do you remember them coming in and taking, or coming to your home and taking the books?

KM: They did not come to the house. For some reason, our house—no, I don't remember that.

TL: Okay.

KM: Now, I may have been in school that day. But Father never mentioned it. I don't think they came to the house. They did go into houses, yes, they did. They went into libraries, into stores, into schools, into universities. Yeah, it was a radical elimination of democratic literature. But your question? No, I don't remember that.

TL: Okay.

KM: Yes.

TL: And can you tell us—so, that's in May. What do you remember from that point forward? You've told us about a couple of specific experiences of the rise of Nazism with the soldier—

KM: I do remember another incident, in 1936. The Olympics were in Berlin. The one and only time that Germany had the [Summer] Olympics were in 1936.<sup>1</sup> I happened to—we still could—they relaxed all the discriminatory rules and regulations during the Olympics. In other words, we could go anywhere without being, let's say, told that we were not desired. Yes, because foreigners came to Berlin to watch an international event. I went to see the final gold medal run in the 100 meter dash, and a Buckeye made the win. The Buckeye was Jesse Owens. You know what a Buckeye is? A Buckeye is a member of the football team at Ohio State.

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<sup>1</sup>This was the only time that a united Germany has hosted the Summer Olympics. In 1972 the Summer Olympics were held in Munich, which was then part of West Germany. The 1936 Winter Olympics were also held in Germany, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

TL: Oh.

KM: He was from Ohio State. And John Metcalfe [*sic*] was from University of Southern California.<sup>2</sup> He made the silver medal. And Hitler and some of his entourage were present at the event, because to get the gold medal of the 100 meter dash is a very important Olympic event. But when he saw that the two blacks beat the German who made the bronze medal, he didn't wait for the victory presentation. He got up and walked out.

TL: Oh.

KM: Yeah. He just got up with his cronies then, and he didn't want to—he thought it was a humiliation that these two blacks beat the German in the final medal run in the 100 meter dash. And so, there you see the discrimination against blacks. I ask—now, here's something. I ask the kids when I go to the school. I ask them, "Can you tell me what Hitler did to the blacks in Germany during the Nazi regime?" and the kids tell me that he did the same thing to the blacks what he did to the Jews. Well, I said, that's one answer. Anybody else have another answer? "Well, they probably expelled them or something." I said, "Well, it's really a loaded question." (laughs) And I tell them, "He did absolutely nothing to the blacks."

Now, you're gonna ask why. There were no blacks in Germany. Germany did not have a black population—except for the diplomatic representation of black nations that were already independent after World War I, who the French and English lost in their empire. But you didn't see them. In other words, there were no blacks in school; there were no blacks in—there were none. So, he couldn't do anything to them if there are none there. Very simple! My first contact with a black was when I walked off the ship. Today, seventy-two years ago, I saw a stevedore in Hoboken, New Jersey. He was black, and I looked at him: something I hadn't seen before, that close. Well, yes, he was black, but he was at a distance; there's a distance when you see something far away and when you come in close contact with somebody.

So, that was an experience. Yes. And the kids sort of smile when I tell them he did nothing because there weren't any. Well, that's just beside the point.

TL: So, as we are moving through, we have talked about things that you remember in 1935, 1936. What happens next? Any other experiences specifically, or changes in the atmosphere of your friends?

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<sup>2</sup>Ralph Metcalfe.

KM: Well, Father—we had a nanny at home, or you might say a domestic, I don't know. She took care of me after school and so forth, and she did housework. At one point, she said, "I cannot work for you any longer. I have to go home." I remember she was with us for quite a while. That sort of gave me a little bit of a shock, 'cause I liked her and she was—she was very good to me. When Father could not hire proper help for his office, he said—I remember he said to Mother, "I think I'm going to have to take some steps that we have to leave Germany." Now, the family history goes back to 1705. I have it black on white in a genealogy. I had it done when I visited back in Germany. A high school teacher took it upon himself and researched it for me, and I have it. He said, "We have to leave."

Now, you just don't pack a U-Haul trailer and go from Georgia to Florida. You have to get—since you leave the country, there is a big procedure that you have to go through to emigrate from one country to and immigrate into another one. My father had two uncles, one in California and one in the State of Washington, who left Germany in 1888—in 1888. Sorry, 1888. And he contacted them and said, "Would you send us the affidavits of support?" The American government wanted no part in supporting any immigrants that came here legally!—and I say again, legally!

They wanted no part of that, the federal government, the state government, or the local government. Citizens had to vouch for immigrants, and they had to give affidavits of support in case we would come to the United States and could not support ourselves, became ill, that they would take care of the finances of that problem—of those problems.

We did get the affidavits of support. Then there was a quota. The American government, the State Department, and the Department of Immigration and Naturalization had a quota of German immigrants coming to the United States. That quota was open to those people who qualified, and once the quota was filled, that's it. No other people would be admitted. We had strict control of our immigration problem, strict with a capital S.

We got a quota number. Then the State Department called us down the office and screened us: medical screens, psychological screens, social screens, party affiliation, whether we were ever arrested or had any anti-government involvement or things like that. In other words, a total background check whether we were "desirable" citizens to be admitted. That was immigration under the dictatorship—while people were being arrested, killed, and everything else! It didn't matter to the United States. And as I point out in my talk on Kristallnacht, the U.S. government did not increase the quota of German immigration, left it in place as it was in the early thirties [1930s], and did not change it. That's right. That was under the Roosevelt administration, because we had an anti-Semite as Secretary of State. His name was Cordell Hull. He didn't want—he made no effort to change that immigration quota, and so it stood.

And we were lucky to get it, and we were lucky to pass the interviews at the American consulate in Berlin. And then we booked the passage and went to Rotterdam, boarded a ship, and landed in Hoboken on November 4, 1938, seventy-two years to the day.

TL: To the day.

KM: Yeah.

TL: So, you said that this is in 1938, November 4. That is how long before Kristallnacht?

KM: Five days.

TL: Five days before Kristallnacht.

KM: Kristallnacht is November 9, this coming Tuesday.

TL: Okay. Right before you left, can you tell me were there any identifications on you or your family as Jews?

KM: No. That came later.

TL: Okay.

KM: I'll tell you one thing. Yes, there was an identification. Yes. Before we got the exit visa from the Nazis, they wanted to see the passports, I remember. My father had to take them. I didn't get one; I was a minor. He took down my father—my father, he took his passport and my mother's passport down to the office, to the Nazi office, and they stamped a 'J' into the front page of the passport. That indicated to the border guards that Jews were emigrating. Now, another ironic statement. Do you know who required that 'J' to be put into the passports?

TL: No.



KM: It wasn't the German government. No! They acceded to another country's wishes to put the 'J' into the passports of German refugees and German people who wanted to immigrate. And you know the name of that nation? Well, you're gonna learn something. Little old Switzerland—

TL: Really?

KM: —required that they put 'J's into it, and the Nazis acceded to that wish.

TL: Wow.

KM: There you go. You see? You see? That's it. They didn't want—they didn't admit anybody, the Swiss, at that time. They wanted no part of it, and they wanted to make sure that when people come to the border they knew who they were dealing with.

TL: Right, right.

KM: When we came to the border, here's another incident. When we came to the border on the train, we were told to come off the train; they would search our baggage and they would stamp the passport that we would leave the country. Well, they had SS at the borders. I remember my father handing my mother's passport to this SS official, and he looked at it and he was looking for an irregularity. My father saw that the train was only standing there for a certain number of minutes; if we didn't make that train, we couldn't make the ship. So, my father saw that this was gonna be here a trumped up charge for something that didn't make sense, but he wanted to—this guy wanted to do something.

My mother stood to the left and my father stood to the right. My father reached across and pulled a ring from my mother's hand, and put the ring on top of his passport. The guy took the ring—it was a platinum ring with a diamond in it, I remember that. He took the ring, he took the passports, slammed them down at a desk, made an obscene gesture and an obscene expression, and said, "Don't ever come back." And we made the train just by the skin of our teeth. As we got in, the train rolled out. That was another incident at the border.

TL: Wow.

KM: We had all the valid papers, but he wanted to pull something, and a bribe took care of it. That's it. That's another thing. Again, had my father not had that presence of mind to do that, who knows what would have happened, what this would have come to? Because that was their way of doing things: from a small thing build it up into big, and put you away forever.

TL: Right, right. Well, we are just about out of time on this tape, so we'll take a break here, and then we'll pick up with the story on the next tape.

KM: Okay. All right.

TL: Thank you.

***Part 1 ends; part 2 begins***

TL: This is tape two. We are here with Mr. Kurt Marburg. Mr. Marburg, as the last tape finished, you were telling us about your—as you left, and as your family received the paperwork in order to come to the United States, and that your father had to bribe the guard in order to come to the United States. So, can you tell us what happened to the family you had that stayed in Berlin and the surrounding areas?

KM: On my father's side, the relatives—his cousins and his—what's the female part of a cousin?

TL: Cousin.

KM: Yeah, but in German—yeah, okay.

TL: Oh, in German it's a different word.

KM: It's a different word, yeah. Okay. The cousins had already left, to various parts in the world. On my father's side, the cousins, one went to Italy, one went to Uruguay, one went to South Africa, and let me see. Yes, that was about the breakup of my father's family.

On my mother's family, it was a different situation. My mother's family was born in the Province of Posen, P-o-s-e-n, which is now known as Poznań, Poland. That part—that

area had to be given to the Poles in the Treaty of Versailles in 1918. The German government—the American—I'm sorry. The American government recognized only the date of birth after 1924 for the appropriate quota to come to the United States. Since the family on my mother's side was now coming under the Polish quota, because the Province of Posen became Polish after 1918—incidentally, Hindenburg was born there, so it couldn't be any more German—they had a limited chance to get a quota number to come to the United States.

The end result is they couldn't emigrate, and they were caught up in the deportations in forty-two [1942]. Two of them went to Auschwitz; two of them went to Theresienstadt, or Terezin in the Czech Republic now; and two went to Riga, which is Latvia, one of the Baltic States. We did find that out after the war, because when we came here and we still corresponded before 1939—after 1939 it became difficult to correspond with Europe, because Europe was already at war as of September 1, 1939.

We did write, we did get some censored mail, which the Nazis censored, but we didn't know where they came from. If they were already deported or were they still at home, I'm not sure. But after the war, when the—during the war when the mail stopped, we thought that the Nazis didn't allow any mail or maybe something happened, but we didn't know what. Were they killed in a bombing attack—which was around the clock: during the day it was the British; during the night it was the Americans. It was around the clock bombing.

So we didn't know. But when the mail stopped, we knew something happened, and after the war the Red Cross told us that they were deported. I got the dates of when they were deported and where they were deported to. But I don't know the date of death: that, the Nazis weren't accurate enough to report. They did report everything else, even the number of the cattle car in which they were deported, but that I don't know. But I do know that the six members of my mother's family died in the camps, under miserable deaths, torture and what have you.

TL: And what about your grandparents? Were they included in these?

KM: Grandparents? My grandfather on Mother's side died already in 1926. My grandmother died a natural death in 1940 in a nursing home. On my father's side, my grandfather, he died in 1936, and I visited the grave in the city where he died, in Hessen. And my grandmother made it to the United States—on my father's side. She came here and she passed away in 1961 at the age of ninety-one.

TL: Okay.

KM: That's how the family, the relatives, ended. Yeah. And we did hear from those that were in the other free world countries, like in South America, South Africa, but we never saw them again. Maybe there was one occasion where they did come to the United States, but I wasn't here from forty-three [1943] to 1950 so I don't know whether they did come during those war years. I don't know. But that's the way that ended, yes.

TL: Okay. Thank you. So, you left in 1938, five days before Kristallnacht. You were fourteen?

KM: You're right! You're right. Your arithmetic is right.

TL: Okay, thank you. (both laugh) And you came to Hoboken, New Jersey.

KM: That's right.

TL: And can you tell us from there what happened in those years after you—?

KM: Okay. Well, what happened was that we were lucky to get our things packed in an overseas shipping crate, and it did arrive before the war. We got our furniture. We did get an apartment in New York, rented an apartment, and we lived there. My parents always lived in New York. They're buried in New York—they're buried in New Jersey, but they died in New York. I should correct that. Yes. My father and mother had—yeah, I lived with them. Yes, that's right.

And my mother decided I have to go to school. So after three weeks here in the country, she registered me in the New York school system. Well, I might as well have registered in the Nanking school system. I didn't understand what was going on. After she registered me in the—what's the first year of high school? Ninth grade. Ninth grade, that's right; they took me in the ninth grade. I got left back. There were no special courses for refugees or foreigners like they do now, or dual languages in Spanish and English and German and English. Nothing like that! Absolutely nothing! So, I didn't understand the teacher, and I sat there and I got left back. But, I don't know. I— (laughs) Even at fourteen, I sort of got friendly with a girl, and that helped me. You want to communicate.

So I struggled with the English, and I also did something: I listened to the radio programs. There was no TV. And the radio programs and the girlfriend made me, let's

say, at least some—gave me some understanding and fluency, and I passed the final exams in the spring semester. Got promoted. So, it was (laughs) it was that kind of exposure.

While I did have some English lessons in private school in Germany, it's one thing to go to school; it's another thing to hear a person talk fluently, quickly, rapidly, and understand an accented language. New Yorkers talk different from people from Georgia, and Georgians talk different from people, let's say, from Fargo, North Dakota. So there you go. That's the difficulty in communication. But, I managed. And for fifteen cents or ten cents, on Saturdays I was able to go to the movies. You see, I'm talking a hundred years ago. Ten cents for a matinee show. The movies, the radio, the girlfriend made the—let's say, what do you call it?—the acculturation, the communication, possible, became fluent.

And then graduated high school in June or May of forty-three [1943], and I got a job and I got a uniform, because in forty-three [1943], we were already at war almost two years. The war started on December 7, forty-one [1941]. America was at war in forty-three [1943], and we had already seen actions in the islands, in North Africa, and we were in Italy at that time already when I got into the act. I was drafted. My first job was Uncle Sam; he was my employer. (laughs) And I became—I went to Texas, took my basic training in Tyler, Texas, which is an oil town. That was very close to a girls' college in Kilgore, Texas, and that was a very nice time of service. (laughs) Yes, in the service. The girls from Tyler—from Kilgore, Texas; that was an oil town. They had oil wells in the middle of the street: the streets went around the oil wells! And those girls all had rich parents. Yeah. Well, that was a good thing going.

In September of forty-four [1944], the division was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Army, and we went overseas. We went to Boston, to a port of embarkation. We got a week furlough, I went home, said goodbye, and we went to Europe. We were put online—again, I don't know my history—the ninth of November. It's in the notes. On the ninth of November 1944, the division went online in the Ardennes Forest, where the Germans broke through in World War I. We were in the same place in World War II. We faced the Waffen-SS, and on December 16, 1944, the morning at four-thirty, the Germans broke through and made the last offensive in the west.

They wanted to get to the Antwerp harbor, because that gave them access to the sea, and they wanted to separate us from the British because the 1<sup>st</sup> Army bordered on the other line with the British forces, and they drove a wedge, a bulge, which is known as the Battle of the Bulge, into that area. It became a very bloody action, from December forty-four [1944] to January of 1945, and I think about 76,000 of our people, our soldiers, are buried in the—they weren't sent home, for some reason. Well, some of them couldn't be sent home; there was nothing left of them, because of the constant artillery barrage. But

some of them are buried—some of them were sent home. And it became one of the longest and bloodiest engagements of World War II.

We became victorious in the middle of January. I didn't make it through the entire action. We didn't have the right footwear, and one night in the hole, in the foxhole—we lived like rats in holes. They lived in bunkers, the Germans. They had heat, they had smoke coming out, they were comfortable. We lived in holes. If I ever had somebody tell me that you can sleep in snow, I would have told them, "You're full of crap. How can you sleep in snow?" Well, we slept in snow. What else do you do? It was the coldest winter Belgium had in years, and the snow would come down constantly. Yeah! Snow all around us.

But the footwear wasn't equipped for that kind of warfare, and I contracted a serious case of trench foot, which means that the circulation in the feet stops. The little arteries and the little veins close, because you can't change your shoes and you can't change your socks. And the moisture, because we still had leggings—leggings are canvas. Moisture seeps through canvas, if you expose it long enough. Closed that circulation, and that is painful, very painful. You can't walk. And your feet turn first pinkish, then they turn red like that Coca-Cola bottle there, and then they become purple, and finally they turn black like that sweater over there. And when they're black, they gotta come off: that's gangrene.

I was evacuated. I had it second degree. They got me in time. The feet didn't turn black, but they were dark purple. I went back to Belgium, to France, back to England, and when I was ready to stand on my feet again after ninety-six shots of penicillin—that's all they had, and sleep and open windows in the cold, because they couldn't take the chance that the veins would open rapidly when you expose them to heat, because that would break them. So, they had to take very small steps to acclimate the little capillary veins to open up slowly, to permit circulation into the feet, and the feet started to get normal. But they didn't feel I was qualified or ready for combat for the final phase, so I didn't go back to the outfit.

And guess what? They made an MP out of me. I went to MP school and they made a military policeman out of me. First of all, they thought my German would be helpful when we get into the cities and control the population and all that. So my last phase in the military, from combat infantry soldier, I became a military policeman. And I went to school in France, and we shared the—we shared the patrols with the French military police and civilian police. Well, the French had a problem with staffing their police, and they used women. We rode with women in our jeeps. And I got friendly with one of the women policemen, and it developed into something; it developed into a relationship. But she wanted me to stay in France and I didn't want to do that, and that ended that. It broke her—I know it did something to her. Well, that's the way it went.

But then we—when armistice was signed, May 7, in the Reims cathedral—or Reims, as they say in French—between the SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force] and the Russians and the American and British forces. Two days later we went to Germany as occupation forces, and I stayed another year and a half in the occupation forces, and was discharged in 1945. But before I was discharged, the European Exchange Service recruited people to run the post exchanges. They had asked me whether I would consider a contract for a couple of years to work in the Post Exchange system, as a civilian, and I said, “Well, why not?” So I did, and I went back. They assigned me to the Munich military post, and something happened there.

I was in the main PX in Munich, and I was in the—I worked in the personnel department. And one day there was a party for a retiring general, and I went to that party, and we were—well, young guys, we were drinking pretty heavily. On the way home, in cars that we had gotten with cigarettes, we had an accident. The tracks—they repaired the trolley tracks, and when the driver, a fellow who worked for the PX with me, drove the car out of the—from the location of the party—he drove it into the tracks and the car tilted, because they were exposed, and rolled down almost to the embankment to the river that goes through Munich, to the Isar River.

And I broke my shoulder and my arm, and when I came back from the hospital I went into the PX and I got my ration. There was a salesgirl behind the candy counter, and she gave me my candy ration and she told me to get a certain kind. I paid some attention to that, I paid some attention to her, and again, something struck. I married that—what do you call it, the million dollar girl from the five and ten cent store? Like the song in World War II went.<sup>3</sup>

My contract was up in fifty [1950], I went to school, and she came here in fifty-one [1951]—emigrated legally, legally with a capital L, which doesn’t happen under our present administration. I want to make sure we get that straight. Yes, she emigrated, and after I finished school I married Charlotte Bartluck, who became Charlotte Marburg. That’s the other side; that sort of is the other side of the story.

TL: Yes, right. Okay.

KM: I pursued a career in personnel management, which is now known as human resources. (phone rings) Let it ring. Human resources. Can we talk?

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<sup>3</sup>“I Found a Million Dollar Baby (In a Five and Ten Cent Store),” music by Harry Warren and lyrics by Mort Dixon and Billy Rose, published in 1931.

TL: Yes.

KM: Yes. And did that for twenty-eight years, and then came time to retire. Now, I didn't want to stay in New York. I didn't like that liberalism in New York. I didn't like their politics, so we—Mrs. Marburg and I had to talk. Where should we go? Oh, California? Yeah, let's look at that. Arizona? Yeah. Florida? Yeah. Well, California was ruled out immediately. It was too expensive, and it is still today. I got a friend who left here recently, and I got a letter from him: he's coming back, can't handle it. Okay, that's beside the point. Arizona? Well, that's the desert. Mrs. Marburg and I weren't too keen on the desert. That's why I am in Florida, and I will tell you that it is one of the best decisions I ever made. I like it here; I feel very comfortable, very easy, completely different lifestyle from New York. I don't like rat races, which you got there. I don't like lines. Don't have that here. Big city living is all right. Yes, it's an experience to live in New York, if you visit, but if you live there and work there it's a different ball game. So, that's why we decided to come to Florida.

And then it became a problem. Well, what do you do when you come here and you are in your middle seventies or early seventies? Well, I talked to some people. "Oh, I'll take you down to the club." Took me down to the golf course, handed me some clubs. I said, "You chase these little white balls into holes?" Yeah. Well, I did that once. That didn't do anything. I can't see that stuff, I can't see it on TV either. It's so boring and it's so inconsequential. I didn't do that. Talked to somebody else. "Come down to the club, come play tennis." Instead of a white ball, it's a yellow ball you chase. I didn't like that either. Sort of sat around, figured maybe I'd get a part-time job, and then I think I told you I went to a meeting, and it was for Holocaust survivors who had settled in Sarasota. Not in Bradenton, in Sarasota.

I went there, and I got to talking to one of the survivors, and he said to me—his question to me was, "What camp did you survive?" I said, "I didn't go to a camp. We left just before Kristallnacht." "Oh," he says. "I got caught up with it, and I survived fourteen." Fourteen camps? Yeah. And we talked and talked. All of a sudden, it dawned on us. Said, "You know, we got something to tell the people of the now generation." I said, "Yeah, you're right." [The other survivor said] "Why don't we do that?" I said, "Gee, that gets me involved in something!" And we decided—well, how do we do this? "Well," he said, "we just call the schools. We just call the English department or the social studies department, tell them what we did, what we experienced, and if they say yes we go to the classroom; if they say no, well, then we go to some"—that's the way Holocaust education started in Sarasota and Manatee County.

He passed away three, four years ago, due to cancer, I suppose; the camps left some residuals that showed up later on. But we got something started. There was no museum,



there was nothing. But the kids and the communities finally learned about something that happened in history. They didn't know it, and some of them don't know it now yet. But maybe these things will help to bring some understanding of history, 'cause if you don't know where you were, you don't know where you're going. Very simple. And as I point out in my little thing, remembrance is redemption, and that's what was our theme. You have to remember something that happened, that these people didn't die in vain. And that's how I come—that was my retirement, to go into the schools or to churches or whatever and talk about that. Not chasing little white or yellow balls! (laughs)

TL: Well, thank you very much. What I would like to ask you now is you—well, today is the seventy-second anniversary of you emigrating to the United States.

KM: That's right.

TL: And then November 9 is the seventy-second anniversary of Kristallnacht.

KM: You got that right.

TL: And you have written a letter that is in commemoration of Kristallnacht.

KM: That's right.

TL: So I was hoping maybe you would be willing to read that to us.

KM: Glad to.

TL: Thank you.

KM: (reading) "Next Tuesday, November 9, we commemorate the seventy-second anniversary of the infamous Kristallnacht. November 9 memorializes several important secular historic events. First, November 9, 1918, Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany abdicates, flees to Holland, and he dies there in 1941.

“November 9, 1923, second part: Nazi Party Munich Putsch to end Weimar Republic. Hitler attempts to establish National Socialism dictatorship. He is arrested, writes *Mein Kampf* in Landsberg prison.

“Thirdly, November 9, 1938: assassination of a German diplomat by a seventeen-year-old distraught Jewish boy whose parents faced deportation from Germany.

“Fourth, November 9, 1944, personal reminiscence: as a member of the 99<sup>th</sup> Combat Infantry Division, I was deployed onto the front lines in the Ardennes in Belgium, facing Waffen-SS units. Fierce combat action resulted in the Battle of the Bulge, longest and costliest action of World War II.

“And fifth, November 9, 1989 marks the date the Berlin Wall collapsed, physically and symbolically uniting a severed nation. The historic date is not a national holiday in Germany, in deference to Kristallnacht coinciding with this very day.

“Kristallnacht, Night of Broken Glass, occurred throughout Germany and Austria. Ninety-one Jews murdered, many beaten mercilessly, 30,000 Jews sent to concentration camps, 267 synagogues desecrated or destroyed, and Jewish businesses were looted and burned. Though preceded by a series of repressive anti-Semitic laws, as the first large-scale campaign of violence and internment against Jews by the Nazi government, it is considered to be the precursor to Holocaust. November 9 and 10, opportunistically chosen by the Nazis as the pogrom date, is of symbolic importance by coinciding with the death of Nazi martyrs who died on November 9, 1923, the failed Munich Putsch. November 10 coincides with Martin Luther’s birthday, who advocated destruction of Jewish homes, synagogues, along with impoverishment, forced labor, exile, and death of Jews.

“It is important to remember, because there are yet those among us who lived through it, witnessed it, and survived it. Moreover, it is important to remember, because after Kristallnacht, the free world no longer had any reason for not acting against barbarism or savagery of Nazi anti-Semitism. Kristallnacht teaches us the most basic lesson about anti-Semitism and other forms of hatred.

“The question arises: If we observe Yom HaShoah, why do we need a second commemoration annually on the anniversary of Kristallnacht? The answer lies in the different focus. Yom HaShoah speaks to horror of the murder of six million. It focuses on the savagery of man’s inhumanity to man that humans are capable of. Yom HaShoah is about remembering the millions of people whose lives were snuffed out because of hatred. Kristallnacht, nevertheless, is not about the final product of hate but the process. It

is the reality that a Holocaust does not just happen. It has to be staged, cultivated, first in small steps, then bigger ones, and then finally the biggest.

“Kristallnacht is about how the Holocaust occurred, evolved, and progressed. It reminds us that the Holocaust couldn’t have happened had there not been 2,000 years of demonization of Jews throughout Europe as reflected in the deicide charge and the scapegoating of Jews as an evil and powerful force. It could not have happened had there not been cynical anti-Semites who produce the infamous forgery, the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, which gave the credibility to the notion of worldwide Jewish satanic power. Hatred in its most extreme form, as in the Holocaust, evolves over time.

“The challenge is not to wait to resist until the final stage, when it is too late. Kristallnacht was the tragedy for the world to stand up. It did not. Many newspapers and government officials worldwide decried the barbarity and violence, but few governments were prepared to act. President Roosevelt condemned the outrage, but liberalization of America’s tight immigration quotas was, and he said, and I quote, ‘not in contemplation.’ Britain allowed 10,000 Jewish children in the Kindertransport, but refused to allow 21,000 more into Palestine. Kristallnacht proved the point: the world responded with harsh words and no action. Silence followed.

“Kristallnacht was the first nail in the coffin of European Jewry. Kristallnacht commemorations point to the need to show the world that we must stop hate in its tracks before it leads to the ultimate: a final solution. Yet, in remembrance, there is hope. Survivors cannot forget. Second generation survivors must not forget. *Zakhor*, translated ‘remember.’ Today, *zakhor*; tomorrow; *zakhor* the day after tomorrow; to infinity. Never again.”

TL: Thank you so much for sharing that.

KM: That will be read at a service tomorrow night. Yes, the rabbi thought it was informative, and he wanted to get that across to the congregation. So, we will do that.

TL: That’s wonderful. Mr. Marburg, do you have any last things that you would like to add?

KM: Yes. I have some things to add, and that is that the—when we say “Never again,” we must support that statement with action, action in the form of education and making the generations that come after us know the horror of what happened in the thirties [1930s] and forties [1940s] in Europe. The educators of our time do not—do not!—consider

history as an important subject in our school system. That's deplorable. That's seriously deplorable. You can't just focus on—what—?

TL: FCATs [Florida Comprehensive Academic Tests].

KM: What are the tests called?

TL: The FCAT.

KM: Yes. To prepare the students for some rudimentary questions that have no significance in what life and death are all about. History tells us that. You gotta know where you've been in order to know where you're going. Our educators don't do this, our educators, our disciplinarians and our teachers. Our parents don't teach discipline to our children. They let them do whatever they want. That is definitely not the way to acculturate people to twenty-first century living. And when you ask a student on the street—again, a sign of the times—who's Nancy Pelosi, that student stares in your face and has no answer. That is seriously a deplorable lack of understanding, of life in the twenty-first century.

And I feel that our educators need to revise their curriculums and give—let's say expose the students to some reality, and history teaches the reality of where we have been so that they know where to go. And we miss the point, we don't do it; at least, we don't do it in Florida. I'm not sure what the other boards of education in other communities do, but in Florida our children—when I go into the classroom, their eyes are opened. They should have been opened a long time ago and I merely should reinforce, but no. They are surprised to hear what I have to tell them. It shouldn't be a surprise. It should be merely a supplement to what they have learned. They haven't, as a generalization. In some—I see in some schools or maybe in some districts, that is different. They do. But for the overall, it isn't done. It isn't done, and that is something I would like to see changed so that “Never again” is not two empty words, but that through this educational system of the children, those words will have a meaningful translation to what happened and what they need to know in order for it not to happen again. That's my reaction to it.

Let me see, is there anything else that comes to mind? Well, no. I think that's it. Well, if something comes to mind it would be political, and I don't think we should include that in the talk. Am I right?

TL: Yeah.

KM: No, no politics. Okay.

TL: Okay. Mr. Marburg, thank you so very much for sharing your story with us. We appreciate the time that you've taken with us.

KM: All right.

TL: Thank you.

KM: If you want to take the pictures that you might want to in order to, let's say, add the pictorial part of it, you are welcome to do so.

TL: Okay. Thank you so much.

***End of interview***