TT: This is Terry Tlustek, I am the son of Hein Tlustek and I am about to interview Hein Tlustek about his experiences in World War II as a child. Today’s date is October the 5th, 2003. Hang on, alright, what is your name?

HT: My name, you don’t know my name?

TT: I know your name.

HT: Hein Jurgen Hugo Tlustek.

TT: Okay.

HT: That was my name when I was, when I was, born. But now I have just Hein Tlustek.

TT: And where [when were] you born?

HT: September 18th, 1936.

TT: September 13th?

HT: 18th.

TT: 1936?

HT: Yeah.

TT: And where were you born?

HT: Berlin, Charlottenburg.

TT: Charlottenburg?

HT: That’s Charlotte’s castle, translated.

TT: And where were you raised?

HT: In Berlin, Spandau, the neighborhood of where the Nazi’s were spending their time in the prison after the world war.

TT: Is in Spandau?

HT: Yeah.

TT: Huh.
HT: It was a couple of three blocks down the road, [omitted], go ahead.

TT: Who were your parents, what were their names?

HT: My mother’s name was Marie Pflug, my dad’s name was Hugo Oskar Constantine Tlustek.

TT: Where did you live during the war?

HT: In Berlin, Spandau.

TT: Where were your parents from?

HT: My mother was from a town of Rubeland in the Harz Region, and my dad was from, Berlin Weissensee.

TT: Okay.

HT: That’s translated Berlin, Whitelake, section of Berlin, Weissensee.

TT: Where did your father work? What did he do for work?

HT: Oh, I don’t know half the things probably, but after he graduated from the [inaudible] school which was an engineering school, he worked as an engineer for the place called the Kabelwerke, which means cable works, and then he also worked for a company called Lantzmaschienbau, that means harvest machinery company, which later on was John Deere after the war. He worked after he divorced my mother he worked as, representative for Lantz, for John Deere for years and years and years, like a service representative you know. He had a whole region under him in the service so to say.

TT: What did you father do during the war?

HT: During the war he was working for the O.K.H., which means the Ober Komando Desheeres, which means the high command of the Army.

TT: And what were his responsibilities there?

HT: I really don’t know but most of the time was spent in an office in the main building you know.

TT: You don’t know what his responsibilities were?

HT: Well no, I think most of it was office, some kind of office work you know, management, in other words management position. And the other thing was he was for, he did some research, ammunition research, in the respect to that the ammunition was
supposed to last longer so that they had, he did it with some nitro paint to make it last longer. It was supposed to be able to prevent corrosion on the bullets and the casing and the, it was supposed to also not plug up the rifle when it was shot you know. So they did some research in that field, that I know of because he done some of the research at home in the flower box [laughing] of all the places in the world.

TT: What did he do in the flower box?

HT: Well he just took the ammunition and buried it in the dirt. And then proceeded to water it, the flowers, just like he normally would and then after a certain time he would dig it up and see what the bullets looked like you see, the ammunition would look like. I remember that’s one of the things he did.

TT: What were you parents’ views on the war?

HT: Say that again.

TT: What were you parents’ views on the war?

HT: What were they, what?

TT: What were their views?

HT: Oh their views. Oh my dad’s views were obvious; at least to me they were obvious. He didn’t he was not too much in favor of the war or of Hitler or that whole system even though he worked for them in the sense that he was working in the high command. He was not in the high command as an Army employee he was a, what ya call it, a private employee you know so, or public employee or something, what they call it, it wasn’t a uniform officer.

TT: Contracted?

HT: Yeah kinda like that and he, that’s pretty much it. He also worked of course after the war, he was working for the East German government as an Underminister of Forest and Harvest Machinery. In other words, you call it here the, what you call it here, the Minister of Agriculture. He was the Vice Minister of Agriculture for a time until they wanted to have him join the East German Communist Party, and when he didn’t want to do that then he left [laughing], he didn’t want to work for them no longer.

TT: So, your father didn’t like the situation?

HT: He never liked political situations, he was always quite different than the regular people, you know, he did not favor belonging to any particular party.

TT: What do you think that was?
HT: Why was that? Well I think he was smart enough to know that political allegiances only last as long as the political parties in power, and then you’re out. That does not make for [a] very safe employment environment, and the other thing is I think you have to be honest, to often to dishonest and I think that didn’t appeal to him either. In general my dad was a fairly pretty honest guy, he wasn’t always agreeable with everything, you know, that people said, but he was I think he was honest in his opinions. He didn’t say something just to please somebody, you know.

TT: Now what were your mother’s views on the war?

HT: Oh she was a Nazi all the way through; she still was years after the war. She always glorified Hitler and thought he was the best thing that ever happened to Germany and that sort of thing, you know. It was quite upsetting to me anyway, after I came back from Germany or from America after I lived all these years in America, and found out what Hitler had done and seen some of the films of the concentration camps at the university and was made familiar with what was going or actually what was going on in Germany, you know. Then I come home and hear my mother talking like that about them, about him [Hitler], that was quite a shock to my system [laughing] to say the least.

TT: Do you ever remember you parents?

HT: Do I what?

TT: Do you ever remember your parents trying to teach you different things about the war or…?

HT: No, no, that was in generally kept very under the table, you know, very much under the table. Also in school they didn’t talk like that. They didn’t when we asked in school the teachers, the history teachers, tell us what happened? What was going on, there was always one standard comment answer and that was, well that’s not a part of history that we are very proud about we don’t really need it, you know, dirty linens here. We need to forget about that time and go on, ya know. There wasn’t a history teacher that wanted to talk about it in school so in school it wasn’t ever mentioned in any regard to anything, you know.

TT: And that was after the war?

HT: That was after the war. What was talked about in during the war I don’t even remember, you know. I was under nine years old so here you’re talking about age between six and nine years old, you know. That three years, span of three years of which hardly, at that time. I remember having been in school some time, but a lot of time I did no go to school because of the bombings and all that. We just didn’t live in area, in Berlin for one and didn’t go to school there.

TT: So, you don’t remember anything that was really taught in school?
HT: Well yeah, the ABC’s, and so on, you know, so anything we got in the first year the first three years basic years in school a lot of that was learned by assimilation instead of real learning it, you know. There was just no steady school.

TT: So you weren’t…

HT: For a certain length of time, and I don’t really know exactly for how long I’d have to, you know, research that sort of thing if it is even researachable.

TT: You don’t remember being taught any anti-Jewish propaganda or any Nazi propaganda in school?

HT: No, no, no, not in the first three years of school, you see the war was over when I was nine so no, no in those three years there was I don’t remember doing that.

TT: What do you remember from your experiences as a kid about Nazi propaganda?

HT: The only thing I remember is on the corner of the street we had what we call a litwas-saule, it’s like a piece of large over-sized concrete fence post. And they used to have, oh big pieces of paper glued to it. It was something like an advertisement board, you know, but here you have flat advertisement boards, well they had on every street corner they had one of those round ones, concrete things. And then they just plastered with that paper, you know. And I remember, I remember, one advertisement vividly and that said, “Don’t talk about anything to anybody and the enemy is listening”, it had always said, you know. And of course when Hitler was in, you know, there were lots of advertisements for whatever he stood, you know. I remember that, actually somebody I think somewhere printed a book on that sort of thing, the public advertisements that they put on these, on these advertisement boards. And later on in years I saw one of those books a lot of them came to my memory, [speaking of the book] yeah I remember that one, I remember that one, others I didn’t remember, you know.

TT: On those propaganda posters do you remember any anti-Jewish ones?

HT: No, I don’t, I don’t. I remember, I remember really most of this anti-Jewish thing came to my memory when I went to the American University. Before that, in Germany, it was not an issue I mean nobody talked about it, you know. Like gas chambers and people burned in gas chambers and all that kinda stuff, I don’t remember having ever heard about it during the war nor after the war.

TT: When did you finally hear about those kinds of things?

HT: At BYU, history class. That’s where I heard about it and man it was quite a shock to me [laughing]. As a matter of fact it must have been a very visible shock because the professor some afterwards, after the lesson, after the first viewing of this, he came and sought me out and said he was sorry for having to show this to me because he knew what it would cause within me. And I told him, I said, well I didn’t think it was his fault I
think I’m glad kinda, like I finally found out about it [laughing]. I had no idea, but it was quite a shock to see it let me tell you, it was a shock.

Matter of fact for a long time even today I have what I call a shadow guilt feelings. Kinda like it isn’t my fault, I know it isn’t my fault, what went on but that doesn’t relieve you from the guilt, so to say, the guilt of your fathers. When your father has done something real bad and wrong, you definitely feel guilty for them, so to say. And even though my dad, I remember my dad didn’t do that sort of stuff I don’t think he even had a rifle in his hand to shoot at an enemy soldier. I definitely and I think he was not in favor of that sort of thing, I assume that I never talked to him afterwards. But I am pretty sure it caused, it caused those feelings within me I realize I didn’t do wrong and I know he didn’t do wrong, yet I feel guilty. It’s a crazy feeling let me tell you [laughing]. I don’t know, I don’t [know] why I even should feel that way my mind tells me, you had nothing to do with it, you still feel guilt.

TT: As a child how did you view the Jews?

HT: On nothing particularly, I don’t remember having friends up and down the street that were Jews, that I knew of, being Jewish was not an issue to us kids, at least not to me, or my sisters either. It’s just like saying, how do you feel about Eskimos, we didn’t live around Eskimos, we didn’t live around Jews. That or people that proclaimed themselves to be Jews. Like Mrs. Jacobs [a family friend] we know she is Jewish and she is a member in the neighborhood and we know she is Jewish, but that’s where it stays we don’t have any bad feelings towards her, or good feelings towards her in that respect. So it’s a funny thing feeling to hear about it afterwards.

Interestingly enough though, last year when the Lawoff’s [relatives] came from Canada and from Germany to visit us in Utah, remember that? She brought certificates with us, birth certificates and things like that from way back in 1750. And that time and one of our [an] one of you great-great grandfathers must have been Jewish because it says on the certificate, I think it was a marriage certificate, it said that he was a cantor and a schoolteacher. Well a cantor is a Jewish lead singer in a synagogue.

And I always suspected there was person Jewish in our family at least during the time when all the people in Europe got a second name for the purpose of taxation. Because before that the people in Europe had only their first names and when the kings started their taxations that’s when they found out there were too many people in town that had the first name Terry. And so they had to determine which Terry is now paying what taxes, you see. And so there was Terry the Butcher, and then there was Terry the, I’m using your name just to illustrate here okay, there was Terry the Butcher, and Terry the Shoemaker, and Terry the Painter, and Terry the Miller, and Terry the whoever, you see.

So the people basically got their last names from the jobs that they did. Like a smith, a blacksmith, he was called a Smithy. And all these Christian people had either their profession as their last name or a Christian name as a last name. Like Paul or Peter and Lucas those type of names as their last names. But the Jews were always separated from the Christians; they could not live intermingled with the Christians. They could only live in ghettos and ghettos were places that were basically surrounded by [inaudible, technical difficulties].
TT: About the ghettos.

HT: And the Jews were living in ghettos and they didn’t have to pay taxes for a long time, they took the taxes from the Christians. So the Jews didn’t have last names. Until the king found out those Jews really had more money than all the Christians together. And so he decided to tax the Jews to but in order to keep the difference from the Christians to the Jews, the Jews could not have Christian names. So they only could have names of minerals and animals and plants and things like that. So that’s why you have a lot of these names, Jewish names, with Gold in them, or Silver in them, or Stone in them, or Rose in them, like you know what I’m talking about?

TT: Rosenberg?

HT: Rosenberg.

TT: Goldstein.

HT: Goldstein, ya Goldstein, and names like that you know. For instance you know the temp company called Whitestagg?

TT: Uh huh.

HT: Now those people were Jews. White is the name of a color, you see, and stag is an animal, you see. Hilch, in German, Weishilch. That’s an old Jewish name. So you could tell by their last name if they were German Jews. You could tell but the last name who was Jewish. That’s why it was so easy for the Germans to pick up the Jews wherever they were, they gave themselves away by the name they had. But our last name was a Czech name. And most Germans don’t speak Czech so nobody really knew what our last name was.

Well our last name is Little Fatso, in Czech. Well Little Fatso, that’s not a very pleasant name, I found out when I did some research at BYU and I had some classes on that. That sometimes the person, when then the assessor came to the door and asked what his last name should be, my grandfather probably just snarled at the guy and said, “None of your business, get the hell out of here,” something like that. And the assessor just wrote down, this is Terry the Little Fatso, you see [laughing]. So that is what your name is now, Terry the Little Fatso. Of course that wouldn’t be that in English, except, it is of course, a Czechoslovakian name, and no Christian would have had that name, Little Fatso.

So I always suspected that it was a Jewish name, so I saw that certificate from Great-grandfather. Now in Germany in order to have, to be considered Aryan you had to show four generations worth of Christians in the family, or non-Jewish anyway. And my dad hadn’t had a certificate like that, that said that at least the four, last four generations there were nobody that was Jewish you see. But the fifth generation was [laughing]. So we are still alive. If the Aryan people had found out, first of all what that Czech last
name was that would have been interesting and second of all if they would have found out that there was Jewish blood in our family that would have been bad for us, you see.

TT: Now I remember a picture that you had of you and your father on a boat and there is a Nazi flag on the boat.

HT: Oh well, everybody had a flag that time. It was the thing to do. Like today with America when they blew up those two centers in New York everybody all the sudden waving flags, you notice that? Well that thing was the same in Germany. For instance when it was a holiday of anything like that or political day or something like that or like Hitler come through town everybody would hang the flag out so the Hitler, the hakenkreauz, the swastika was displayed everywhere. That was nothing unusual. It was just like as if you would have a boat and you would fly the American flag on the back of your boat. They did that, everybody did that.

TT: How did you as a kid, view the Allied forces?

HT: The Allied forces? They were the enemies [laughing], they were the enemies. We used to play you know like you play cowboy and Indian? As a little kid? We played soldier, that means German soldiers against foreign soldiers. And we used to have a little sandbox behind the house for the neighborhood. It was a pretty big-sized sandbox. And all the kids in the neighborhood of that same age were playing in the sandbox all day long. I remember we had little tin soldiers, made out of tin, I should have kept some of those but at that time it wasn’t important. But we had little tin soldiers and we played war in the sandbox, of course the ones that always won were the German soldiers you see. So that sort of thing was going on. I remember that vividly that we did that sort of thing.

That was about the only thing that was bad about, or you know what I’m saying is the thing that was political, that we did as kids, at least the age between six and nine. After that we didn’t play that no more, because we found out we didn’t win [laughing]. So from then on there was no more playing in the sandbox I think, except in the sandbox we had a, the sandbox was fairly close to the house and we had a garden hose from the house and we played river in the sandbox. In other words we made a, got the water hose over there and we made a little river and we built a little dam and we got a kick out of the dam breaking and the water rushing down the river and that sort of thing. We had those kind of games we played I remember.

And then we had the game of growing things behind the house [laughing]. We all the sudden had chickens in the basement, that were laying eggs. Dad had planted a vegetable garden and a few fruit trees behind the house. Built a little fence around it, indicating that’s his property now [laughing]. We did that sort of thing all the sudden. And we would go to the forest and we would find a lot of food in the forest. We weren’t living too fact away from the place called the Grunewald; it’s a big patch of green forest in the middle of Berlin. Really it’s on the outskirts of Berlin. And we had lots of oak forest, I remember and I remember we would, on the edge of the forest there would be lots of everything growing.
One of the things I remember vividly were little blackberries growing like berries and stuff like that, raspberries. We picked a lot of those. We picked different kinds of mushrooms and dried them and ate them. And there is a blackberry that we made juice out, out of it has a big white flower in the spring and then later on in the summer it ripens and it’s lots of little black berries next to each other. And we would harvest those and we would make a juice out of them, boy that was the best tasting juice you ever ate. We had those with pancakes for instance, we had syrup.

And I remember we would go to the fields and we would collect sugar beets and we would shred the sugar beets with a knife, you know a kitchen knife, and then we would put them in a big kettle and we’d make our own sugar syrup. And boy that was the best-tasting sugar syrup you ever had it was pitch black stuff but it was good [laughing]. We never bothered making it into sugar you know, in other words going further with the process, other than that, but we had lots of that. And we would go in the fields and we’d do a lot of gleaning like when the harvest machines would go through the field they would always miss certain areas where the wheat grain you know the top of that holds the kernels, would be laying in the field and we’d go behind those machines and pick it up and we could keep those we didn’t have to turn them in anywhere. And we used to eat those wheat kernels raw. We had them in our pocket, we’d take the grain, what you call that grain top that, wheat the wheat, what you call that part, Terry?

TT: I don’t know?

HT: Well the top where the wheat is actually in, we’d rub it in between that hands and let the wheat kernels come out and the blow off the chaff and then we’d pop the wheat in the mouth and eat it, until it became chewing gum, you know we chewed on it and chewed on it and chewed on it, ‘til it became chewing gum. And when it was totally gone that’s how we stayed alive for a while, let me tell ya. That sort of thing I remember we did.

We went of course lots of fishing we did. We did lots of diving, we’d go for, we’d pick up, from the river we’d pick up fish. Even in the winter I remember catching fish by hand. And my dad would gig eels. He made a big pitch fork sort of thing out of nails, out of long nails, he made a pitch fork and he would spear the fish in the water. He’d go dive for them and I would go to the river, when he would go, and I would pick up the mussels and we would eat these black mussels, that are in rivers, we’d eat those and crayfish we used to have buckets full of crayfish and eat crayfish. Make a salad out of mussels, that was delicious let me tell you it was good tasting stuff.

TT: Was this during the war?

HT: During the war, after the war, we did it whenever there was an opportunity because even during the war you didn’t have a lot to eat. And we had what they called ration cards, which means you got so much sugar per month, if there was sugar available. And you got so much meat per month and you got some much whatever there was for sale per month. You stood in long lines too, at the butcher or the baker or wherever. And you waited for the food and if the food came, got what the ration card said you get, you see.
And many times the line would stop just before you got to it, before you got to the store and somebody would come out of the store and say we are out of everything [laughing].

You stood there in line for two hours and still didn’t get anything. And let me tell you that’s where I developed a great distaste for standing in line. Even today at church when we have, what ya call it, potluck dinner or something like that? I refuse to stand in line. I utterly, I have a hate for lines like nothing you wouldn’t believe in man. I still have that hate. I don’t think I will ever lose that hate. I’ll die with that hate for lines. If there is anywhere a line that I have to stand in line for, I do not want to stand in line. I let everybody have their fill and if nothing is left after, before I get there that’s fine with me, I’m not starving to death anymore, I mean ya know [laughing]. But I will not stand in line.

TT: What kind of food did you have during and after the war?

HT: Well during the war you just had the basics, butter, if you were lucky. I think margarine was discovered during the war with Germany. I don’t think anybody had what they called then ersatzbutter, or margarine. And I don’t know what they made out of it, but I know they had margarine, lots of margarine. You didn’t get the butter. And bread, well you know the bread that I am still eating, when I can get it here?

TT: Yeah.

HT: That was the kind of bread we had then. I still love it. And later on when the British came to our part of town they brought that white fluffy cotton bread. Everybody thought that was the greatest thing. But we didn’t eat that for long, let me tell you we found out pretty soon that it wasn’t all that good, to eat. You know what I mean that white toast bread.

TT: Yeah.

HT: Well it was, first of all if you didn’t know how to cook you were in bad shape. Then there was no McDonalds around or anything like that. And there weren’t any restaurants around either and if there were restaurants you couldn’t afford to buy it there. Because you didn’t have that sort of income and so if you didn’t know how to cook you learned how to cook real fast, let me tell you. And I did. And that’s why I still have some of the skills of cooking that I learned as a kid that I still have today. There are the skills I learned as a kid. And I can still cook better than your mother does [laughing]. Of course when I cook food it will be close to what we cooked in Germany. You know what I am talking about, horse meat and things like that?

TT: Yeah, so you had, you ate horse?

HT: You ate horse, you ate plenty of horse.

TT: Oh yeah.
HT: You don’t remember?

TT: Not really.

HT: Yeah when we lived in Oregon.
TT: I never lived in Oregon.

HT: Oh okay then you didn’t have horse; you may have had some horse here. Because we had a couple of horse’s here in Indiana that we butchered. One we butchered with Brother Ray, and one with Brother Myers. So you may have had some horse here but you may have been too young to notice.

TT: What other kinds of things would you eat?

HT: Oh I think my dad would bring deer home from the place where he used to do his experiments, you know out in the field? There was kinda like an open field like camp Ataberry [an Army base in Indiana], you know camp Ataberry?

TT: Yeah.

HT: Well they had a place like that around Berlin where they would go and do practice shooting with the ammunition they were experimenting with. And when he would come home on the weekend he would bring a deer home, or half a deer or part of a deer or whatever. And they usually shot it there. Which was of course illegal but when you’re hungry you do anything. And I remember I suspect we ate a cat or two once in a while because I remember what my dad used to say when we asked him what we were eating, he’d say we eating roof rabbit. Yeah roof rabbit in Germany is a cat. Eine dach, eine dach, eine dach-hase, we would eat a dach-hase. And dach-hase translated into English would be called roof rabbit. Of course in Germany, in the city they all think that cats line up on roofs [laughing]. Thinking of these old things is interesting. Next summer when you come home you ought to do a lot more of this recording.

TT: Oh yeah.

HT: You said you were gonna do that last summer but you never did.

TT: Yeah, let me switch the tape out, I’m running out of time.

HT: Alright. You still there?

TT: Yep just started again.

HT: Alright.

TT: Now.
HT: Are you sure you got it on recording?

TT: Yes.

HT: Alright, have you got an opportunity to use a regular tape recorder there, like in the library or some place like that?

TT: Like what?

HT: My dad has a regular tape like they used to have some years ago. Regular-sized tape, like a quarter-inch wide tape? I don’t have a machine here anywhere to transcribe it into a smaller tape or something like that. Find out if they have something like that up at the university there I will bring it with me.

TT: Okay.

HT: He has a wealth of information on that tape, that I recorded with him when he was here.

TT: It’s like a reel to reel?

HT: Yeah it’s like a reel to reel, right.

TT: Okay.

HT: Find out if they have something like that in the library where you can transfer that to a disc or something like that, you know.

TT: Okay, now what were your experiences with the bombings in Berlin?

HT: Say that again.

TT: What were your experiences with the bombings?

HT: Well personally I didn’t. I wasn’t ever in any bombing raid itself. But we used to be able to observe illegally, so to say. That means may mom was not in favor of me being up there in the house when a bombing raid was on to watch what was going on. We were all downstairs in the basement, in the bunker inside the house. Inside the apartment building in the basement when the alarm went on and said the flyers are here, you know the alarm. We went all to the bunkers. And some days I didn’t go and I stayed upstairs and watched what was going on and you could hear the bombers flying over and there were hundreds of them. And it was just like a million Harley Davidson driving down the road you know. The whole air would just roar, you know. And it was quite impressive and them guys would fly over I tell you, and we were living on the outskirts of Berlin and we were living in a third-floor, in other words we were barely high up on the hill.
And we could see when the bombers would fly over they’d select a certain section out of Berlin, and this was at night not during the day, they would, the lead bombers, would send out floating lights, kinda like these lights that they put on the highway, when there’s an accident. And they would float in the air and then the following bombers would drop every bomb inside that square area. And of course everything that was in that square was totally demolished. I mean there wasn’t one brick on top of the other; it was all just totally wiped out.

And I remember one day, we got out of the house in the morning and it was smelling a spooky smell in the air and we heard that the next block over, the whole block got wiped out. And oh that was about three hundred yards down the road. So we went, we tagged over there as a little kid and I was eight, eight and nine years old by that time and well actually I was eight, I know I was eight. And we hiked over there and the whole block was burned down.

And they threw something like napalm out of the planes. And that napalm hit the building and it splatters phosphor. The napalm bombs looked like big pencils. When they hit anything solid they break open. And the moment that phosphor would be exposed to the oxygen it would start burning on its own. And anything that it would touch it would burn you see. So it’d burned everything but the brick. And here the ruins would be standing, anything that was burnable was burned, of course people and everything else too.

And of course that smell is quite a smell, let me tell you. You’ll never forget it. You can’t describe it, you can’t describe the taste of eating a banana to somebody that never ate a banana, doesn’t know what it is like. I cannot tell you what that smell [was], but a few times after the war I had a smell, experienced a smell like in a camp fire of something like that. And boy it hit a raw nerve, right that fast. I remember that smell, I’d say. I’d say hey that smells just like after the war, I mean during the war when the block burned down. And it was usually something like when somebody took a hamburger or something like that and threw it in a fire and burned it. That gives a definite smell of burning flesh. And it’s a smell you will never forget. And we smelled it; it was quite strong in the air. And along with the burning stuff of everything else. But well that was an impression. I’ll never forget that picture that’s still burned into my mind.

TT: Now you’ve told me of the experience that you had while trying to escape Berlin towards the end of the war.

HT: Oh you’re talking about.

TT: Yeah, now why were you, okay the question is why were you escaping and could you share that experience with me?

HT: Yeah, since Dad was in the high command he was privy to the information of what was happening, what was actually happening, not what was announced over the radio to the public, the general public, but what was actually happening. He knew that the Russians were encircling Berlin. And he knew of circle was supposedly still open towards the west. And there was plenty of propaganda on how brutal the Russians would be dealing with us. So he was able to procure an Army truck and a few soldiers or
friends, whatever these people were, I don’t know, I know some of them were uniformed. A matter of fact I think all of them were uniformed, the men on that truck. And then of course lots of women and children. My dad was not on the truck. I remember that. And he said head west on this and this road and you’ll get out.

Well we headed down that road and all the sudden we would experience fire, small arms fire. Rifle fire, pistol fire that sort of thing. And first they tried to get through that fire but the fire would just get heavier. And they lost their nerve and turned around on the highway, one of the soldiers, as they turned around, they had a trailer on the back and a small two-wheeled trailer of some sort of the back and they had to unhook it in order to turn around and hook it back up. And during that time they discovered a Russian soldier sitting at the edge of the road at a creek washing his feet. And I remember one of the Navy officers got his pistol out and shot that guy. And when he shot him we took off and went back to Berlin. I remember that guy falling, just falling over into the water you know. And that sort of thing was, in my mind, rather, rather vividly still.

And we went back to Berlin and got to the outskirts of Berlin and went to the place where my father was employed. And we knew there was a bunker and so we headed for that bunker and there was nobody in so we occupied the bunker together with all the other people that were on that truck. And that’s the place where actually the Russians got into contact with us. In other words that’s where we made contact with the Russians. They would, there was a railroad track about a hundred yards or so from the bunker. And on the other side of the railroad tracks there were Russian sharpshooters. And they had, the railroad track was something like ten, fifteen feet off the base of the valley, you know the floor of the valley? And they could shoot into the valley, into the area where the company was anyway.

And all the food was in the barracks next to the bunker. And the barracks were about; I would say about oh something like twenty yards, thirty yards away from the bunker entrance. The bunker was underground. And everybody was hunkered down in the bunker except we needed food. And I don’t know how long we were in that bunker but it was long enough that we kids went to the barracks to get the food. That was just stuff like bread and stuff like that. And the sharpshooters every time one of us would leave the bunker to jackrabbit over to the barracks they would shoot at us. And you could tell by when they shot you couldn’t hear but you could see the bullets hitting the ground. And everywhere the bullet would hit the ground a puff of dust would come up. And so we would dodge the bullets, so to say, going back and forth to the bunker. And you know none of us kids got hit. I’m sure we would not have continued it if one of us kids would have gotten hit. And all the other kids would have observed that. But we played catch me, so to say, with the Russian sharpshooters.

And that morning when they actually took us, it was early in the morning they rapped on the bunker door which was a metal door with two locks, lever locks. I remember those lever locks there was one on the top and one on the bottom of the steel door and that would airmatically [?] seal the bunker, I mean make it air tight actually. And they rapped on the bunker door, and said open up, open up. And then they marched us all out and they took the German soldiers over to the wall of the barracks and shot them. Now I don’t remember that, but my sister remembered that she said, yes she still does remember that very vividly. And somehow, I must of seen it, I locked it out of my memory, I don’t know why I cannot remember that scene.
But I remember the scene where they all lined us up and all the kids were in front of the parents and they, the Russians got that Russian bread out and put actual butter on there. And gave it to us kids to eat. And I remember my mother just got hysterical along with all the other mothers, got just, just got hysterical. And started screaming not to eat that bread. And those Russians just unhooked the safety on the rifle says you eat or we’ll shoot. And of course you have those two choices you’re gonna eat [laughing]. And all the while we were munching on the bread the women were screaming that we would be dying. Because they thought, by the propaganda said that the Russians would come to poison us, you see, and of course there was no poison and that’s what they were demonstrating to us. That they were not coming as the enemy but this is a liberation. And I remember still the taste of that bread. I mean it was the best-tasting bread you ever had and it was rough bread. You know that hunsabread that I’m eating here?

TT: Yeah.

HT: You know that Himalayan bread? That was very, very similar to that bread. Except there were larger salt crystals in the bread, I remember that. I remember we chewed on that bread and there would be a big salt crystal in our mouth. But it was the best thing we had eaten for a long time I remember that. And then there after the Russians were there for a while I don’t remember exactly how long but then they were released by the agreement between the four powers that part of Berlin would become French, American and British and our sector became British. Spandau became British. And others they were American and French sector. And the British soldiers when they marched in we lined up the road up and down to cheer them on. I remember that still very vividly. That was a great day [laughing] the British marched in, yep.

TT: Now the experience that you had when you were in the bunkers. Is there anything else that stands out vividly to you that happened?

HT: Yeah I always remember some things, like we raided the food storage place, not the kids but the parents. And they could come home with sacks of sugar and this and this and that. Where did you get that stuff? Oh we just raided the food storage area. And I remember that. And then of course, I remember we played in old burned out Mercedes and things like that. They were our toys all of the sudden. And we’d start eating horse meat and start chopping trees down for wood. And that [was] where I got my nose broken remember that story?

TT: Yeah.

HT: We did all kinds of things. We were looking for food in the forest, roots, mushrooms, blackberries, any kind of berry that was edible. A few people got killed that way too because they didn’t know what, which berries were poisonous or which mushrooms were poisonous. But we learned fast let me tell you [laughing].

TT: So is that what living in post-war Germany was like, in Berlin?
HT: That was in Berlin yeah, that’s the post-war Germany, right.

TT: Is there anything else that stands out in your mind?

HT: Of I remember the bridge that was between our section town and the forest, it had collapsed. It was either bombarded or blown up by the German soldiers to stop the advance of the Russians. And we had to climb over that old bridge rack from one side to the other that was always an experience I’ll never forget.

TT: What were your experiences with the English, and the French and the British, and the Russian soldiers?

HT: Well the French and the Americans we rarely saw. But we saw the experience between us and the British. And it was mostly a pleasant experience. We of course all the sudden had to learn English. And then I remember the English that we learned in school we tried to listen to the British soldiers that were riding with us in the streetcar on the way from or to school.

There would be always a few British soldiers on the streetcar and we’d listen to their English. And a soldier that came from Lancastershire or Manchester or some place like that we tried very hard to understand what they were saying but their dialect was so bad that you just couldn’t get what they were saying [laughing]. It was just real awful. And if you ever heard somebody from the part that’s called Sohol in London, you’ll know what I’m talking about. It’s a, it’s bad. It’s like from somebody in the Deep South here in America. You have to really listen close to understand what they’re saying.

TT: Now you have told us the story of receiving some Coke and some chocolate from an American soldier.

HT: Oh that one, yeah well we went to a, my sisters and I, went to a school where children went that had a few health problems. Like I had health problems with asthma. And so the doctor decided that I better go to the forest school. And since I went my sisters went also. And that was the school that was held in the forest. And our schoolroom was a barracks, I the forest. And during the day, if there was nice weather, we weren’t in the barracks we were sitting outside in the forest in amongst the trees. The trees were supposed to have a good affect on my lungs. And whether they did or they didn’t I don’t know. But that’s where I went to school.

Anyway that was a few miles down the road and we used to have to take the streetcar to get there. Of course the streetcars at that time weren’t quite in a good shape as they are now. They didn’t have heating they didn’t; they took a long time and all that. And every block they would stop and pick up a few and let other people off the streetcar. So it would take them half an hour to get to school. And we found out that if you stand on the side of the road and hold your thumb up you know, hitchhiking, that the soldiers that would pick us up and drop us off at school.

That was great we actually had some that we made friends with, that we knew, that if he’s coming he’s gonna pick us up. And so we developed certain friendships with certain guys. I remember that one day we came home in a Jeep and a soldier had picked
up a German girl somewhere. Either she was his girlfriend or she was a pickup, I don’t remember, I don’t know that. But anyway they were munching on ice cream and Coca-Cola. And our eyes got big, and we looked at it, we must’ve made a real hungry face, because when we hopped out of the car here he gave us the rest of the Coke and the ice cream.

And boy that was like hallelujah we didn’t care whether somebody had taken a sip out of it already or not, or somebody had licked on the ice cream or not. That was no issue, that was the first ice cream and the first Coke we drank. And I tell you it was like Christmas had been. And we ran home as fast as we could and it was just about a block from where they had left us off on the highway to the house. And shared it with the rest of the family. Oh that was a big experience I’ll never forget.

TT: Now what was your experience with Russian soldiers?

HT: The Russian soldiers, none that was too negative with us kids actually. You heard about that experiment with the bread and the butter?

TT: Yeah.

HT: That was a memorable one. The only other one was propaganda. And some it was true propaganda that was after the war. That came out after the war that the Russians were raping a lot of German women, you see, especially the good-looking ones. And did that supposedly in retribution for suffering that the German soldiers caused on the Russians that was payback time so to say. And I know my mother hid many times and I know other women did too. When the soldiers were somewhere in the neighborhood then the women all would tag off and hide wherever they could hide.

And I know a lot of women got raped and later on when the truth came out I found out that that was actually the truth that was not just propaganda. But I’m sure that that’s what the German soldiers did in Russia. And I’m sure that’s what American soldiers did in Vietnam and Korea. That’s the sort of thing that Russians, I mean soldiers do as a kind of memorial. I don’t know why that happens other that the moral fiber of the soldiers in general is no too high a fiber.

TT: What, you told us about the Stalin’s organs.

HT: That what?

TT: The Stalin’s organs.

HT: Say that again?

TT: The Stalin’s organs.

HT: Oh the Stalin organ oh yeah, yeah. Well they were rocket launchers on trucks. That would look like, they would have a good-sized truck, you know like a, not like a semi but like a big, big truck. And on the back of the truck they would have this pack of pipes
lined up. I don’t remember how many but it looked kinda like there would be at least fifty to seventy pipes stacked up on the top of the back of the truck at a forty-five degree angle, so to say. And they would load those things with rockets, with well today they call, today they call them things rocket launchers.

But we called them things Stalin organs and they would load those pipes up as fast as they could load those pipes up and every time they would send them off. In other words they would shoot them off. It’d make a very specific sound. They would go like this [imitating the sound] dweee, dweee, dweee, dweee, dweee, you know they would go off like that, just one, two, three, four at a time. And they made this weird, weird sound and we called them the Stalin organ [laughing]. I remember that sound real vividly.

TT: Now what was the story about the chicken coup in your basement?

HT: Oh we had chickens in the basement. Of course protein was one of the prime necessities after the war. And my dad, since he was working in the East German government, he had secured some chickens. Some baby chicks basically, that’s how we started out. We had some little chicks and they grew into white leghorn chickens. I remember, I’ll never forget that name, leghorn, leghorn they called ‘em here I think. White chickens. And they were the most prolific egg layers. And we would go out in the forest and we’d catch frogs and grass and anything that was edible for chickens, we’d bring it home and feed it to the chickens.

And of course when the chickens started laying eggs and we were hungry we would devise a method of, well we just went to the basement and we would steal the eggs. Of course in order to steal the eggs you couldn’t take ‘em upstairs in the house, in the apartment, you had to eat ‘em right there in the chicken coup [laughing]. And we’d poke a hole in each end in the chicken egg and just suck the egg yolk out. The whole egg, we’d just suck it out. And then we’d crush the eggshell in our hands and throw it back to the chickens and they would eat ‘em. They would eat their own chicken eggshells. So the criminal activity of stealing chicken eggs was taken care of, so to say. There were no traces of anything left. Of course we were sure that we didn’t eat all the chicken eggs. We ate only so many each day.

My dad could never figure out how come the chickens weren’t that good of layers after all. But one day he decided somebody must be stealing the eggs, and somebody must be also stealing chickens because somebody went around the neighborhood and stole the chickens. And my dad designed a trap. He had on the door a little electrical contact made, I mean he made a contact and then an explosive and the explosive there was this nitro paint that he had to paint the bullets with. Remember that nasty-smelling paint? And he had it rigged up so that if somebody opened the door too far the explosive would go off and the person would be coated with that nitro paint. And he would catch the guy who stole the chickens; because that nitro paint he just wouldn’t get off that fast. All he had to do was go around the neighborhood with the policeman and say hey show yourself and [laughing].

The problem was, one day my mother was in the basement and the thing went off when she opened the door too far. And she got painted. Well [laughing] that was the funniest thing that you ever saw man. My mother came out of that basement just black
from foot. And it took her days and days to wash that old paint off her and that was a funny one I’ll tell you. I won’t forget that one either.

TT: Your father was captured by the Russians right?

HT: Yeah he was captured by the Russians.

TT: What was that experience?

HT: Well that was a, we didn’t see it you see. But he was on the way to the west and they [Russians] caught him somewhere in the middle of the countryside. And of course he didn’t have a uniform on and anything like that. But they figured out that he was somebody hiding from justice since he was heading for the west. And they were gonna shoot him. And they put him in a pigpen. And the pigpen must’ve been a building with little windows kinda of about the height of the window, the height of where your head would be about, kinda like five, six feet off the ground, there would be a little window there that you could look out of the pigpen. And everything else was locked up. So they had locked him in the pigpen to shoot him the next morning. Well my dad was quite a sports character so he knocked the glass out of the window and then took a running leap and jumped right through that window to get out of that pigpen. And he got out of the pigpen all right and got away from the Russians. They didn’t get to shoot him that next morning. And of course he made it home.

TT: Now what was it like trying to see your grandmother after the war?

HT: After the war?

TT: Where did your grandmother live?

HT: She lived in East Berlin, which was roughly about twenty miles from where we were living. She was living on the east side of Berlin and we were living on the west side of Berlin. When I say west side I’m talking about the suburbs of Berlin. And I venture to say Berlin is at least, at least at that time from my place to her place was probably at least twenty miles distance. It would be about an hour and a half ride with a train. And you had to [two] transfer stations where transferred from one train to another to get to her place. And then when I was old enough I had a bicycle I just bicycled that distance. And then later on the last days of being there I had a little fifty-cubic-centimeter motorcycle like a moped.

And I’d ride that to her and at that time you just, you crossed the border from west to east no problem at all they wouldn’t stop you or anything. You just go from the one sector into the other sector. And we’d, I’d visit with her on Sundays usually, not every Sunday, but some Sundays. And whenever I wanted some psychological relief I’d go to Grandma. It was always safe and she was never putting me under any pressure of any kind. So it was always a pleasant experience with Grandma. And she’d always have food, good food, I mean Grandma was always well-organized and she always had something good to eat.
TT: What was your grandmother’s name?

HT: Margaretta Clara and her maiden name was Poese. Which is interestingly enough a French name. What it means I don’t know, but spelled it is P-O-E-S-E. You might ask a French teacher there or some students that take French what that means let me know.

TT: Now are there any other World War II experiences that you can think of really vividly?

HT: Oh lots of them, lots of them. Vividly, we had that experience we went in the middle of the war, that means the last during the last three years of the war, between thirty-nine and. Well actually the war started in thirty-nine I was three years old. I think it was during the last three years of the war when they started bombing Berlin. And I don’t know exactly when they started bombing Berlin, but during that time they evacuated most of the kids that could find a place where they could go to in the countryside to evacuate them. That means to get them out of Berlin so they wouldn’t get bombed.

So I remember my family must’ve had relatives, in what would be today called Poland but that time it was called East Prussia and it belonged to Germany, and but there were Poles living there too I remember that. And we went there on a farm. And I remember the far, some pictures I remember vividly from that farm, one of them was a big pond sort of thing. It may have been even a small lake.

And there was a big tall fishing dock, and we’d be fishing from the fishing dock for little pan fish, you know white fish or pan fish they call them today, kinda like, kinda like bluegills but they looked white the fish. In other words they had white scales. And we’d usually catch a lot of those and eat them. And we’d fry them in the kitchen; I remember the first time we got to the kitchen, that was a vivid experience. It was not a kitchen like what we were used to but that was a farm kitchen. And it had not been used for a while apparently because the hearth, or the cooking area was kinda like a large fireplace. Like a fireplace that would be up to belly height. But it would have that big overhang like a, well like our exhaust, our kitchen exhaust. You know what I’m talking about?

TT: Yes.

HT: That thing was made out of stone and it was a big chimney there and that’s where they would cook. And I remember the first time they turned on the, made a fire there to fry or whatever they did cook and all the sudden there’s a whole bunch of cockroaches were falling out of the chimney. They had lived up there in the chimney. And when the heat came up the chimney they let go on the chimney. And they all came running down and started running all over the kitchen floor. That was an experience let me tell you, I never forget that.

And then I remember on the way back after the Russians came from the east and went towards Berlin and of course all the Germans that were in East Prussia went back to Berlin, or towards the west. And for our family that meant go back to Berlin. And we
hopped on the railroad train and I think we had some relatives in a place called Posen. And the train they were supposed to stop and let us off. They were supposed to stop and let us off. They were supposed to pick us up from the railroad station. And I remember we were standing on the railroad station, I still remember what it looked like, and our rucksack and all that stuff that we had with us. We stood there on the railroad station, waited for the relatives and they never showed up. So we hopped back on the train and went back to Berlin. I remember that experience very vividly.

TT: Are there any other experiences that you can think of?

HT: Oh probably there are a lot of them, one would have to have a little more time. And one would, you know, we would have to actually sit down and put a time calendar to it or something like that, to see what happened when or approximately when.

TT: Well if there is nothing else you can think of I’m taped out of questions.

HT: Yeah not right now I don’t.

TT: Alright I’m gonna go ahead and stop this then. Thank you Dad.