

Interview with Allan Hall

Kathy Hersh: This is the Miami Beach Visual Memoires project. Today is October 15, 2018. We're interviewing Allan Hall. My name is Kathy Hersh.

Where I would like to start is: you have the most unique and complicated life story.

Allan Hall: Somewhat.

Interviewer: That I've read about in a long, long time. I don't know that we can hear the whole story here; but how it relates to your life and your adaptation after coming here, you mentioned in the book that you are probably the only graduate of Miami Beach High School that was a holocaust survivor.

Hall: No. There was one other.

Interviewer: Your brother?

Hall: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Hall: Well, there may be another graduate; I've never heard of one. I've never spoken with anyone who's ever heard another. Andy and I, I'm certain, are the only pair of brothers that have graduated at Beach High.

Interviewer: What I'd like to ask you, and maybe this is how we get into the past, the background on that, is you mention in your book, *Hiding in Plain Sight*, that you never really talked or revealed much about your background, your very sorrowful and troubled past, while you were in high school, and that you revealed it eventually at alumni.

Hall: At our 50th reunion.

Interviewer: Your 50th reunion.

Hall: I think probably very close friends of mine in high school. It was never that great a secret, but I never would overtly talk about it. I remember when I first came here and occasionally somebody, who had a very good ear, would hear a slight bit of accent and they would ask me about it,



and I'd say, "Oh, no. This country. Probably from New York," and I'd slough it off, and there were multiple reasons for it. I wanted to be "one of the people," one of the guys. At that time, people were not that welcoming, or really that interested, in the holocaust, and I just didn't want to go there; and for me, personally, it was a very painful subject. So, what I did is I just literally locked it away; it was a part of my background. My family all knew, my children knew, but it was nothing that I touted.

Interviewer: Interesting, too, that you were living in Miami Beach, at least part of the time, where it had one of the highest concentration of holocaust survivors, or concentration camp survivors, in the country.

Hall: Well, the answer is yes and no. Yes, you're right circa probably late '70s and '80s and early '90s; but I lived here from 1952, and moved away in '61, only to come back in '96. So, when I lived here, no, this was not very much populated by holocaust survivors; as a matter of fact, as I think of it, I cannot think of another holocaust survivor that lived here between, say, '52 and '61; there may have been, but we were not aware of it.

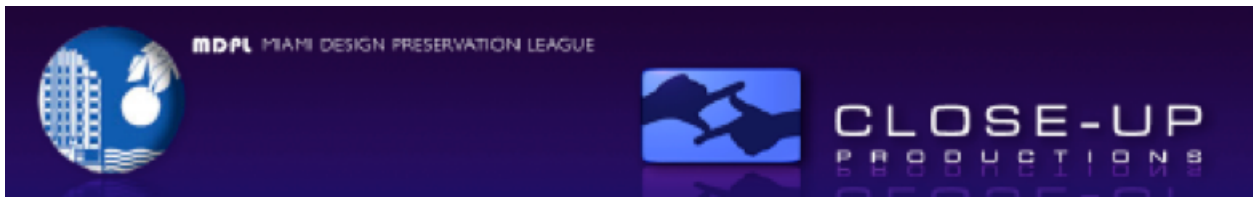
Interviewer: They were perhaps still working.

Hall: Oh, I would think so.

Interviewer: So, you didn't find that people were very interested in those days **[crosstalk][00:03:51]**.

Hall: No, they were not, and there was still a little bit of suspicion about foreigners, a little bit of xenophobia. Some people were anti-Semitic, but Beach High was the first that I found an absence of anti-Semitism, and it was just wonderful. I came here from Newburgh, New York. We lived in Newburgh for five years where I found some **[phonetic][00:04:19]** **viraling** anti-Semitism; and for the first time in my life being Jewish was not a problem, not an issue. The majority of my class was Jewish; as a matter of fact, I've got to tell you this story.

I'm probably the least athletic person that you'll ever meet, and I went off for football; exactly, I'm not sure why. The excuse that I used with my parents was that I wanted to build-up my body, and I was probably inept. So, they put me on the line. I was the biggest, heaviest guard that they had in Beach High weighing 169 lbs. Today, that would be laughable. I wasn't very good at it, and I practiced on Rosh Hashanah. Coach Feinstein, my Jewish coach, said, "You Jewish boys don't need to show up at practice tomorrow; and the Christians, you show up and coach **[phonetic][00:05:14]** Lana will take you through the practice," one of



the assistant coaches. The next day, or two days later, we asked, “How did the practice go?” and Tommy [phonetic][00:05:27] Cruise, still alive, still in this area, Tommy Cruise said, “I was the only one there.” So, I’m sure there were more Christians than just Tommy, but Tommy showed up and nobody else showed up, but it was predominantly a Jewish school.

Interviewer: What a relief that must have been after everything that you’ve been through.

Hall: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Your whole conscious life.

Hall: Absolutely. It was a much more intellectual environment, so much so, now granted my interests changed, but in Newburgh I was always part of the academic elite; top 5 percent, top 10 percent, of my class. Here, I would deem myself to be somewhere in the middle third of the class. So, much more intellectual in Miami. Great teachers here. It’s a great place to be. Of course, my parents were not really well off, and so I’d never seen a hundred-dollar bill or a fifty-dollar bill until I was out on a double date and one of my classmates was pulling it out of pocket, and I looked and said, “Wow. What is that?” So, the people here were much wealthier than I was accustomed to see.

Interviewer: One of the things that you mentioned is that you, having had to live by wits and survive, that there weren’t a lot of people that you could trust. There was nobody you could trust?

Hall: That’s correct.

Interviewer: And hiding. Can you talk a little bit about that? Surely, at some point you had the breakthrough and be able to trust people again maybe? Or do you still not trust anybody?

Hall: That brings a lot of pain, that question. Wow. I was held by Nazis and saw my dad come through the front door, at the risk of his life, and saw him speaking to a commandant where I was. He looked at me, I looked at him, so we had eye contact, and then I saw him turn around and walk out. As far as I was concerned...I was seven years old, but I knew everything and I understood. As far as I was concerned, he was leaving me there to die, my own father, so trust was difficult. Actually, he did come back and he bribed me out of that situation; but after an experience like that, and I’m using the most extreme, I had a Christian



man sneak me out of the Warsaw ghetto: I didn't trust him and I gave him a very hard time, because I hid from the man trying to save me, and I can tell you over and over again that trust just wasn't there.

Throughout the years, I learned to trust more and more; but even today, there's like a surface gloss of trust. Do I trust to the bottom, in my core of me? I'm sad to say I probably don't, just those childhood experiences where I was mocked for a near death twice. It's difficult. Trust is just not there.

Interviewer: You did experience post-traumatic stress, you mentioned in the book.

Hall: Yes.

Interviewer: But it materialized a lot later in your life. I'm amazed that you were able to keep the symptoms under control for that long.

Hall: Whether this is natural or acquired, I don't know, but I was able to walk across Warsaw with an open wound in my foot, and I was told that if I would limp it would attract attention, so I never did. So, I guess I have some self-discipline.

Would you repeat the questions?

Interviewer: Well, let's move onto another.

Hall: I've also used a great deal of psychotherapy over the years, starting at age nineteen, on and off. When I was at the University of Florida, I saw a psychologist for probably a year-and-a-half, subsequently sometimes it's as little as one or two session, just when the need occurs.

Interviewer: One thing that interested us was that the people felt that unless you had been in a concentration camp, you couldn't really understand the holocaust; and you had to I won't say fight against that, but you certainly had to deal with that attitude. Was that a prevalent attitude?

Hall: Yes. I lost my childhood during World War II; it helped to form and shape me, and it was a double injury. It was an injury from a source that I would not have expected from fellow Jews, and the way I dealt with it is I never talked about the holocaust. It pained me that from a source that I would expect support, I in fact found just the opposite, but I never spoke about it publicly.

It was not a secret, and I was invited to speak, somebody encouraged me to speak, and I thought it was appropriate, "Sure, I will speak," and



so much that I spoke to my children's classes, I helped them do projects, but I never really started speaking publicly until probably eight years ago my brother suggested it to me – he was Chairman of the Holocaust Memorial here in Miami Beach for I think six years – that I ought to speak, and I thought about it and thought about it, because it really would have required a total change of mindset. I realized that as the older survivors, the camp survivors, etc., were getting old, were getting infirmed, were less able to speak, that I really no longer had a choice; that as long as I was alive, I had to speak. Somebody had to speak, I could not stay silent, and at that point I started speaking publicly. At first, it was extraordinarily painful, and I almost never got through a presentation without choking up; as there would be many repeats, I learned to get through it, but even now you saw when you asked me about trust: I welled-up and I still have tears in my eyes.

Interviewer: In spite of that feeling of almost rejection, you dedicated a lot of your life work in the legal field and helping with reparations. Can you tell me about some of your earlier cases?

Hall: No. Actually, I was not involved in reparations.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hall: I was involved, when I dealt with holocaust survivors, in general representation. Whether or not they could afford to, I thought that I understood them better than most folks, and worked particularly with some people closer than others, but helped them in whatever legal issues they had. I frankly got very close to some people to where I felt, in one case, that I had a second mother, a survivor here in town, and I worked with her for many years, long after my mother was dead.

Interviewer: That must have helped in sort of a healing.

Hall: I think so. I think for both of us. She lost a child in the holocaust. I had not experienced brisening; of course, I lost my parents. My whole family was murdered. My mother [inaudible][00:14:51] my mother's. My dad's family did a little bit better, but it was nice; it was nice to have those relationships.

Interviewer: Just to reiterate: you felt that because of what you had been through, that you could understand and relate, and they to you?

Hall: Yes.



Interviewer: Was that a few cases? Or was that a lot of the bulk of what you did?

Hall: Right now, three come to mind as the **[inaudible][00:15:24]**, but there may have been more. But, no, that was not the bulk of my practice. Most of my work was in corporate and real estate, and most of it was in Atlanta.

This may be related: I did a fair amount of housing for low- and moderate-income families, help support non-profits and develop non-profits, that in fact, and subsequently, they created the housing, and I shepherded through the whole process.

Interviewer: Is that here in Miami Beach?

Hall: We did some in Miami. Most of them were in Atlanta. We did some up North. All of those on the Eastern Seaboard.

Interviewer: Are you comfortable talking about why you left Miami Beach and what you saw going on?

Hall: Sure. I graduated from the University of Florida with a degree, a Bachelor of Building Construction; in those days, that was more of a structural engineering program. I came down here and I worked for Bob Turchin Construction, I worked for M.R. Schwartz, Bob Schwartz, as a field engineer, and then subsequently... They were fine people, but the ethics down here in the construction industry, from '56 to '61, were nearly nonexistent; and I just couldn't work in that environment, so I packed up. We moved to Pompano, and subsequently Orlando, set up a series of companies in Orlando, was very happy there, until I decided to close those companies and I went to law school in 1965.

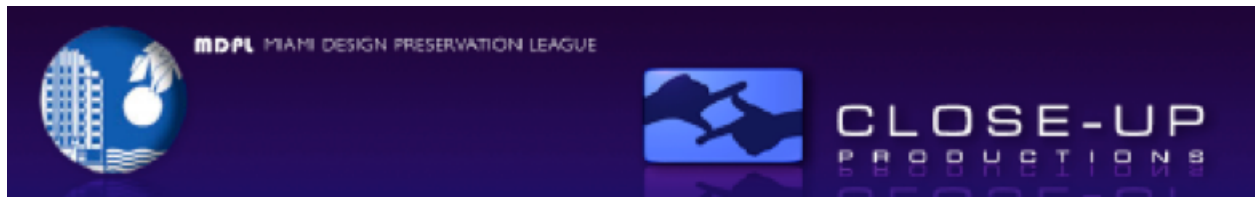
Interviewer: What motivated you to change careers and go to law school?

Hall: Well, I was tired, I was burnt out, I was very much under finance **[phonetic][00:17:2] stress**, always under stress. All of a sudden, I had some money, and my wife was not opposed to it, so the four of us – I had two little daughters at that time – went to law school together. Subsequently, at the same time, she had a master's in education, so it was kind of fun the four of us going to school together.

Interviewer: This was at UF?

Hall: Yes.

Interviewer: Then, here you are back. When did you come back? Tell us that story.



Hall: Well, we moved to Atlanta because there was a nice job there; I stayed there for 30 years, and had a lovely time there, had a great career. I practiced law and also taught there. When my parents died, they left us an apartment here. My wife, who had never been to Florida, decided that she loved it here, and it was pretty clear that she was going to come down here with or without me, so I thought it would be better to just come down here with her. So, we moved here in '96 when I retired. By the way, I was 61 when I retired.

Interviewer: Did you notice a lot of differences?

Hall: I'm always asked that question, since we've been here since '52. The greatest difference is the Jews have kind of moved north, and the Hispanics moved in and replaced them, and that's really the major difference, cultural difference. There are some bigger buildings, but the streets are pretty much the same. The city feels similarly. The tourist industry is still pretty much similar. We don't have as many when the rat pack was here, and the movie stars were here. So, I think the city is a little less glamorous than then, but otherwise it is pretty much the same. The textile industry's gone.

Interviewer: The textile industry?

Hall: Oh, yes. Miami in the early '50 was probably the epicenter of the bathing suit industry, the leisurewear industry, and Hialeah was covered up with plants, people were selling garments; and probably, I'm guessing because this is not my business, in the late '50s that industry left here and I think went mostly to Caribbean, to the islands.

Interviewer: Cheaper labor.

Hall: Yes.

Man: I need to hear your story about what you remember. Part of who you are now obviously is clearly from what you went through.

Hall: Sure.

Man: We have to understand, I need to hear, what are those salient points that you remember?

Hall: Okay. I can tell you that my life, until about eighty-four-and-a-half, was about as idyllic as a child's life could be. I was the only child. My parents



were economically secure. My mother was a professional violinist; my dad was an insurance executive working for an Italian insurance company, and he was educated in Austria, so he spoke fluid German. Economically, we vacationed on the seashore in the mountains, and life was great. There was a nanny, and I'm sure there were maids in the house. Life was great. To make things better, my maternal grandparents and my maternal aunt lived within a block of where we lived; if I wanted a toy, or if I wanted a piece of clothing, more likely than not I could get two of them **[phonetic][00:21:55] just for the asking.**

Then, I remember my mom and dad. There was never an argument in the house, and I remember some low-level fighting, and the fighting escalated. Apparently, three or four days my parents were screaming at each other, which is something that was frightening and unusual, and essentially the essence of the argument was my dad said, "The Germans are coming, and I feel very uncomfortable. Let's go to my home town," which was in Lvov, which at that time was Eastern Poland, and now it's Ukrainian and it's called Lviv. My mother said no.

Krakauer was where she was born, where her family was there for many generations; and besides, 25% of the people in Krakauer were of German descent, they were fine people, there was nothing to be afraid of, and my father was just being unduly alarmist, and that was the essence of the argument. My dad finally resolved the argument by grabbing me by my hand and literally dragged me, pulling me through the door and dragging me out, and my mother was flabbergasted, and she said, "What are you doing? What are you doing?" and he'd say, "Well, if you want to stay, you can stay. I can't force you to go, but I'm taking the boy, our only child, to Lvov with me, at which point my mother, with tears, crying, said, "Okay, I'll come with you." She only asked for one thing, and that was that she wanted to say goodbye to her parents: the only thing in my entire life that I've ever seen my father say a cruel thing, the only cruel thing that he's ever said to my mother was "No. You cannot say goodbye to your parents."

At that time, there was no public transit, there was no private transit, so we literally walked from Krakauer to Lvov, which I am guessing is probably about 250-300 miles; it could be even more. It took us several weeks, and we had to walk on the back roads because the main highways, there was a great deal of strife there with military there. Sometimes we were behind the German lines, sometimes we were ahead of the German lines, but they moved on the main highways, and we moved in the back roads and sometimes through the woods. Occasionally, you could see them. We came to a river, not a big river, and didn't realize that was such an important place.



My parents couldn't swim, nor could I, so we had to find a way across. There was a ferry about two, three miles up the road from us. We got to the ferry, and I can still envision a horse cart in the middle of this flat-bottomed boat, rectangular flat-bottomed boat; in the middle was a line of people one side and a line of people the other side, in the back a guy pushing us across the river with a pole, and in the front there was a rope strung across the river with this man pulling us across the river rope, and that's the way we got across the river. What I did not know at that time was that this was the dividing line between the Soviet controlled part of Poland, and the Nazi controlled part of Poland. By crossing that river, we bought 20 months' worth of life.

Shortly thereafter, we wound up in Lvov where my paternal grandmother lived; we joined her. My dad knew a lot of people there, he got a job, we got an apartment, and life went back to normal; except my mother kept on writing letters to her parents, and to her sister, and to her friends and cousins, and not one of these letters were ever answered; not one of these letters ever came back. As late as probably 2016, we learned, when we took our granddaughter to Europe, that the reason why is because all the Jews at Krakauer were rounded up, taken to a square, and from there they went to a concentration camp called Placezow, and that's where my grandparents died. I don't know about my aunt.

After that, life as I said was normal until June 1041, and then the Nazi's came to the Soviet portion: they attacked the Soviets, they overran Lvov probably by the end of June, and for us the real nightmare began.

Initially, maybe for a couple of weeks there were no changes. Then, we got a notice that we had to move out of our apartment, and we just assumed that the Nazis wanted the apartment because it was such a nice place. Subsequently, I figured that we were actually being moved into the ghetto, so that was my first ghetto experience was in Lvov. Then, again I heard my parents argue, which was a rare experience.

By the way, in the ghetto, initially we arrived at a place where we were supposed to stay; to our surprise, there was another family there. So, of course, we got the small bedroom and they had the master, because that was their apartment, and things got very, very uncomfortable when a third family was moved into the same apartment and they stayed in the living room.

My father, who again this was his home town, knew a lot of people, got notice that there was going to be a roundup of children, and initially my



parents couldn't understand who would want to round up children, what purpose. Out of abundance of caution, they secured a safe place for me outside of the city in a farmer's home – I assume it was a farmer's home – and got a Polish train worker to take me over there, to escort me to that safehouse; as he was walking me down the street, I saw a truck pull up and close-off the street end; and as we tried to turn around and go the other way, that other street end was also closed off, and I was literally the very first child taken in that child in that child
[phonetic][00:29:07] prodrome.

They took us somewhere; I assumed it was a police station; in retrospect, I think it may have been a concentration camp, I really don't know, and they put us in a corral. At first, there were only this truckload of children that I was in, and then more children came, and more children. I was greatly relieved to see my dad come through the front door. He and I made eye contact when I saw him speaking to a Nazi, I guess the commandant of the facility; and then he turned around, didn't even look at me, and at that point I was just dismayed that my father would leave me there to die, because I knew that was probably death. Several hours later, my dad came back and spoke to the commandant again. I saw the commandant turn around on his heel and walk off, and left my dad stay in **[phonetic][00:30:11] those rooms**, and my dad looked at me directly, and he went just like that, summoned me. I knew where the door was, and we walked out of there alive.

To this day I'm haunted that probably all those other children perished, and I was the only one who survived. I survived because, the first time my dad came in he said, as if a pedophile, "How much do you want for one of those children?" never identifying me; the Nazi named probably about two carats of diamonds, two ounces of gold, named the price; and my dad left, unbeknownst to me, to get the jewelry, and that was my price of life. Then, he raised it from his mother, from his sister, from his relatives, from friends; he raised it in little bits and pieces. When he returned the second time, he paid the bribe, and the Nazi threatened to shoot him right there on the spot, even though he got the bribe, and my dad said, "No. If you shoot me, that's all you're ever going to get; but if you let us go and they catch us again, they'll be more for you." The Nazi never said yes, no, thank you, or anything; he just turned around and walked away. My father took that as a contract and summoned me, and we walked out of there. That was my first brush with death.

My parents decided that I was all right there in the room, so I always felt part of it, but there was no privacy, that we cannot survive in the ghetto. It was just hopeless, and the only way that we could survive is by getting false ID showing that we were Christian and getting outside. Part of that



scheme early on, and I'm not sure whether this was in Lvov or in Warsaw, I think it must have been in Lvov, was my dad has a rather bulbous hooked nose; according to the thoughts at that time, he looked very Jewish, and dark hair. So, he went to a physician and he said, "See this? This is my death warrant." So, he essentially asked for a nose job. The physicians must have been friends of theirs because he didn't say no, he said, "I can't"; and because he could not take him to a hospital...If he would have taken a Jewish person to the hospital, they would have both been shot on the spot. So, my father said, "Then, do a rhinoplasty at your home."

This is the era where physicians carried their little black bag, and the doctor said, "I can't do that. I don't have a full array of tools, and I don't have any anesthetic, and I don't have a nurse or any assistant." My father said, "Look, there is no way I can survive with this nose; and if you say no to me, not only are you going to cause my death, but you're going to cause my wife's death as well." The doctor thought for a while and he said, "You know I'd want to help you, but I just can't. I don't have the anesthetic," and my father then played his ace card which was, "Not only can my wife and I not survive, but I have this seven-year-old son. Do you want to be responsible for the death of a seven-year-old boy?" and the doctor thought for a moment or two longer and he said, "Come to my house tonight and I'll do the best I can, but I promise you I can make you no promises."

My dad got a hold of a half a bottle of I assume Vodka, alcohol, and he went to the physician's house for that, and for anesthetic literally chugged down a half a bottle of vodka, or whatever it was. He was sufficiently awake until he actually held a tray that caught the tissue coming out of his nose, and occasionally would hand the instruments to the physician, and the physician did a rhinoplasty under those conditions without any witnesses, without any nurse or assistant. Well, it turned out to be a phenomenal job, very well done, totally changed my father's appearance; and he could pass, as soon as the swelling went down, which was probably a week later, he could pass as an Aryan. To complete the image, my dad would dye his hair, so now he was a blond with a small nose, there was not a problem, and spoke fluent German. So, that was our ticket to life for the next three years.

We left Lvov and went to first [phonetic][00:35:34] Treskahava; we thought that's the most sacred city in Poland, as far as Catholic religion is concerned, couldn't find a safe place there, and we moved to Warsaw. The reason why Warsaw is the capitol city of Poland, with a population even then over a million people: we gained anonymity in Warsaw. There



our mode of hiding was that we would rent a room in somebody's house; and as soon as those people got friendly, we could not stand them to ask... They could ask us any questions they wanted about us, and we could tell them, "Yes, we were born in Krakauer," and no problem; but as soon as they started about church-related things, religious-related things, had we made a mistake it would have been lethal, so at that point we'd move to the next place, and to the next place; that worked just fine for several months until one woman got suspicious and instead of saying to us, "Leave"... By the way, in those days if you harbored a Jewish person, you would wind up in a concentration camp or shot or hung, so I wouldn't blame somebody not wanting us to be there; but nevertheless, rather than telling us to leave she called the police.

The police came, and they were very courteous. They were not Germans, they were Polish police, and they said, "We're just doing our job. We were told that you might be Jewish, so we'll take you in." My dad happened to be away, and they took us to the police station; in fact, they took us in a cab, and in those days a cab was not a taxi like we are accustomed to here. It was a horse-drawn wagon like the ones mainly at Central Park in New York City, and one of them stayed in the horse-drawn wagon with us, we were parked, and the other one went inside for instructions, came back out, and he said, "We were told to take the two of them to [phonetic][00:37:57] **Umshotklatz**; it was just my mother and I. Literally, the wagon made a U-turn and right across the street was **Umshotklatz**, was the railroad station at the edge of the Warsaw ghetto from where the Jews were being taken to concentration camps, primarily Treblinka, almost exclusively Treblinka. When we arrived there, the place was empty, which was strange because railroad stations in Europe are almost never empty.

Shortly thereafter, people started arriving; and at first, I thought it was wonderful. I had the best time I ever had during World War II. There were children amongst them; I could play with them. I could run around. Prior to that, I was always in somebody else's strange home, or a place where other people were occupying, and to be quiet; or hidden in the ghetto, as we tried that for a little while. So, I loved it, and pretty soon the place was so crowded. We were there for two-and-a-half days. It was so crowded you literally could not walk; it was almost shoulder-to-shoulder. So, the police got together, and when I say police I'm talking about the Jewish ghetto police, the Polish police. The Germans they were in charge of everybody, and they decided to take the children out because we were causing so much disruption, I guess certain ages – I don't know, but I was included – and they literally walked us two-by-two into the ghetto, which was just across the brick wall.



I always thought I went to Janusz Korczak's orphanage, which was a very famous orphanage because the adults there were so kind to us, and I experienced very little hardship. I was used to minimal rations, people were very much on edge, and things were not good for children, and the best time I ever had in World War II was in that orphanage. I was there probably for about three weeks, more or less; all of a sudden, a man showed up in a Polish, in a Warsaw, trolley car conductor's uniform, and he said that he was there to take me to my parents. I didn't, as I said before, trust anybody. I didn't like this man. I wanted to stay in the orphanage, and I refused to go with him. Finally, he abandoned his efforts to try to convince me, and he went to the adults; the adults, literally in the orphanage, walked me to the door, walked me out of the door, slid back in, locked the door behind, and then I was stuck outside with this man. At that point, I had no choice, and so I went with him, and he put a cap on my head and pulled the bill way down, and he said, "Do as I say. Don't vary," and he said, "Whatever you do, do not look up." I had no idea what that meant, "Whatever you do, don't say a word," and lastly, "Don't let go of my hand."

So, he took me by the hand and we walked down the main street of the Warsaw ghetto, right up to the main gate, and the guard was on an elevated platform. Now, as an adult I realize that space perception is different for a child. It seemed to me like it was a four- or five-foot elevation. How high was the platform? I don't know, but he was above us, that I'm sure of, and he was looking down at me. I kept my head down, as I was used to at that point, so he could see the top of my head and the bill, and the guard said to this Polish man, "What are you doing here? Who are you?" and the man said, "Look at my uniform. You know who I am. I'm a trolley car conductor. What am I doing here? Well, I just brought my son to see these Jewish pigs," and the guard looked and hesitated and he said, "You must be stupid. It's almost curfew. You know that the patrols fan out throughout the city and they shoot onsite if you break curfew. Run as fast as you can and pray that you get home before the patrols get you," and that's the way I was snuck out of the Warsaw ghetto.

So, I was in a train station leaving for Treblinka. By the way, once you get on those trains, just about nobody survived going to Treblinka; it was a total, a grand total, out of 800,000 people, of 65 people that survived Treblinka, and I survived the Warsaw ghetto, and this man was good for his word. He dropped me off at my parents. One of the things that troubled me: not only do I think all the time about those children in that orphanage, and once again I'm reasonably confident that I'm the only person that survived all those people in the orphanage, but I also think



about this guy, about this man, who risked his life to save me; I never knew his name, never knew his address, could not contact him. One of the reasons that people did it in those ways was because if we were ever apprehended, they could have tortured us to death, we could never give him up, and I really feel a need to say thank you, but to whom? I've never been able to do that.

I do feel responsible, feel beholden, to all those people that did not survive. What am I to do? What are my obligations? What's my debt for just survival? All those people cannot speak for themselves, cannot do, and I'm here and I'm the only one who can, and that haunts me every day of my life.

Interviewer: But you do a lot.

Hall: I try.

Then my dad, with his German language and his new appearance, would socialize with some Nazis, and one of them was complaining that he had this two-room suite of offices in the tallest building in Poland, used to be called **[inaudible][00:45:11]**, in Polish means skyscraper. The top two floors were occupied by the command center of the German Airforce, and down below were various defence companies. So, my father nonchalantly says, "Oh, I've got this little defence company. We could sublet from you, the two-room suite of offices," and for the next two years, in the closet in that suite of offices, my mother and I hid. My father would go out, come once a day, come back at night, walk up the 13 floors, because we were on the 13th floor, and didn't take the elevator so he wouldn't see anybody else, bring whatever food he could, because we were totally off the radar, and that's the way we survived for two years. He had tuberculosis, and he sometimes couldn't get out. The only time we got flushed out is we literally heard the Warsaw ghetto uprising; we smelled it, but we couldn't see it because the windows in that two-room suite of offices that faced in another the other direction; we could look out this way, and then the ghetto was in that direction.

Interviewer: What did you smell?

Hall: I smelled smoke. About 13 months later was the Warsaw uprising where the partisans wanted to free the city in anticipation of the Russians coming in and wanted to welcome the Russians. The Russians decided that they were going to let the Germans annihilate the partisans, and they just stood about 20 miles away, and let the Poles and Germans fight it out. It lasted for more or less two months, and during that time we were hidden in our closet; an airway warden went from room to room,



from cabinet, from closet to closet, and he was the only one in two years' time that he found us. He would not listen to a plea that we felt very safe in that closet, insisted that we go down to the airway shelter; and for 74 years I always thought that man almost cost our lives because as soon as we got down to the bomb shelter, which was the basement of that highrise building, a bomb penetrated the building and landed in the basement, in the air raid shelter, with us. Had that bomb exploded, we would have been vaporized, there wouldn't have been remains at all; but it was a dud, it did not explode, but we didn't know it was a delayed fuse weapon or what, so somebody might have touched it and it would go off. So, we left there and went to another bomb shelter.

At this point, we're all particularly malnourished, and my mother showed a little bit of swelling around her belly, but that was not unusual. A lot of people, from malnutrition, had swollen bellies. We crawled under sniper fire on our hands and knees, arriving at another bomb shelter. For me, one of the most frightening things that ever happened was in the second bomb shelter – I was separated from my mother – because I was, for two years in that closet, my mother's feet and mine were interlaced, and so I could always just reach over and touch my mother, and that probably put my mother about 20-30 feet away. To make bad worse, they dropped a sheet between us, so I couldn't see her. My mother instantly knew of the fear that I would feel, so from the other side of the sheet she would reassure me that she was fine, and I would be fine, and not to worry, everything's okay; and every once in a while I would hear a groan and a grunt, followed by this reassurance.

Well, about several hours later, I heard a sound I had never heard before in my life; it was something like a squeak or a peep, or a howl, some combination of those three, and that sound was the announcement of my brother entering the world, and his birth weight was less than two pounds. I think of a supermarket chicken, and that was about the size of my brother when he came out into this world. My mother, because of malnutrition, had no breast milk. There were no babies being born at that time, there was no wet-nurses, there was nothing; and there were no animals, so there was no milk to be had. So, everybody thought this child had zero, no chance whatsoever, of living. One doctor, and to this day I don't know whether he was being a smart aleck or he was being genuine, but as he was walking out, over his shoulder he turned and looked and said, "Well, if you feel that you have to do something for this child, give some sugar water." It doesn't sound like such a strange statement to us today, but we hadn't seen sugar in three years, so it's like, **[inaudible][00:50:43]**. It was, yeah, we knew what sugar was, but it was just not available.



Almost immediately afterwards, a bag of sugar became available; and for those who are religious, they would say it's a miracle. I don't know, but a bag of sugar showed up, and after that – and I'm not exaggerating – 20 hours a day, every half an hour, we would give my brother an almost full teaspoon full of sugar water. If he was asleep, we'd just raise his head and his back, and pour the teaspoon full of sugar water in his mouth. Because his digestive system was so underdeveloped, if we ever tried to put in a second teaspoon full or even a half, he would regurgitate, so we knew that one teaspoon full was what he could tolerate. Well, if you ever meet my brother, he's not a small man, so sugar water worked. He's no bigger than I am, much larger shoulders than I have, and probably weights maybe 215-220 pounds, and he's not fat. So, sugar water worked.

So, then we thought, I should say I thought, that that baby was our death warrant because, prior to that, for three years we were surviving by being invisible; that's the name of my book, *Hiding in Plain Sight*. We were in plain sight, but nobody would see us. We would never call attention. As I said, I walked across the city with an open wound in my leg without even bandages or anything. We did whatever was necessary to be invisible in plain sight, and with a baby you can't do that. If somebody walked in this room right now with a child, the first thing that would happen is all heads would turn towards the child, so she **[phonetic][00:53:03]** wouldn't make it. So, I thought this was a death warrant, but it turned out it was exactly the opposite.

When the Germans were in control of Warsaw, we had to leave because they said they would, and they did in fact, dynamite the entire city; and if people insisted on staying there, they would die with the buildings. Then, of course, to walk out you had to go through a checkpoint, and we had no current papers. We had been hidden in the closet for two years, so we had no papers. So, only because my brother's birth was such a rare event, a physician put us on a hospital train, and here's the interesting part of it: we were in Poland September of this year, 2018, and the history expert said they were not aware of hospital trains leaving Warsaw in September, the latter part of September, we're talking about roughly September 25-September 30th, going out of the city with injured people, but we were on one, and we left there thinking that we were going to be evacuated into Germany, and then after that we had no idea what was going to happen. We were so shocked when the train finally arrived at our destination, and that destination was the very place where we started at the beginning of the war, which was Krakauer. So, of course, we knew the city. We knew the layout.



By that time, my father was involved with some underground folks, and for the last four months my father was active in the underground. Through them, we had a place to stay, and we had whatever food was available, and we were liberated in January '45. That's a brief part of the story as it relates to Germans.

Then, my father became part of the Polish government under the Soviets, and he was an insurance man. Well, of course, in the Soviet Union everything is owned by the government so there is no insurance. There's no need for insurance, the government is the insurer of last result, but he didn't understand that. So, as Poland was trying to rebuild itself, because it was in ruins, first thing he thought, "Nobody's going to start up a factory unless they needed insurance to secure their capital," so he went to Sweden, he went to Switzerland, he went to England trying to entice insurance companies to set up branch operations in Poland. Well, he made too many trips and he came up on a Soviet radar. One night, in the middle of the night, and they always came between three and four in morning...and when you heard that knock on the door, you knew what it was, so my parents opened the door. Sure enough, there were two uniform, and three non-uniform officers, and they said they had orders to arrest my dad.

Interviewer: Just when you thought you were safe.

Hall: You know, we considered the Soviets our heroes, our liberators, our friends; but we also, by that time, this is about a year and maybe four months under the Soviets, and we were beginning to learn who they were. So, they arrested my dad, and he was probably in local jail for about two months; I visited him there once. That was a bitter experience. Anyway, my mother came to me and said that the Soviets used the family as a hostage, so my father would have no chance of escaping jail, getting out of jail, as long as we were in the country. So, she sent my brother, at that time less than two-years-old – he was, to be candid, more like twenty months old, and that's unbelievable – and me walking with the DP groups to Palestine, and the way we went to Palestine is we went south to Trieste, initially with a cousin, but then the cousin disappeared. From there, we would take a boat to Palestine.

My mother, the first and last thing she said to me was, "Be sure they can't find you," and that was code talk. I knew that was a whole set of instructions. I would change my names periodically. I thought about dressing up as a girl and passing as that, because nobody had real papers at that time; this is 1946.



Interviewer: The reason for dressing as a girl is so that –

Hall: To lose identity, change identity.

Interviewer: They also would not check to see if you were circumcised?

Hall: No, at that time that issue was off the table.

Interviewer: Okay.

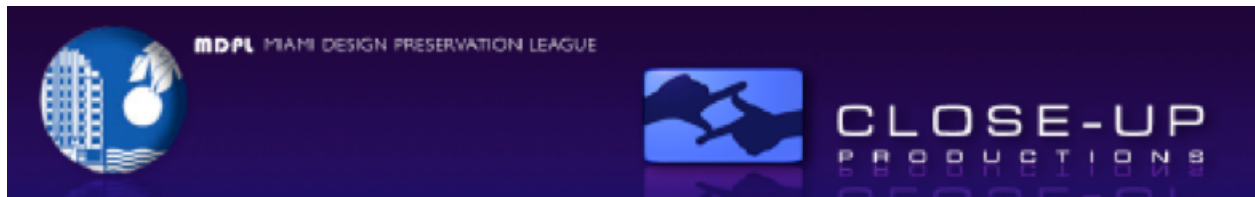
Hall: Yes. Now, they were looking for Jews, they were looking for us in order to induce my dad to come back and give himself up.

Interviewer: So, they were looking for two boys.

Hall: Right. Well, I never did that, but I thought about it. Everybody had short hair because of lice. Lice was ever present. Every time you went into a DP camp, they would make you stand in a pan, or some sort of enclosed space, and cover you with this white powder, and one of them was DBT. We would be loused really just about every day.

This was going just fine, and my brother and I were surviving just fine, until he got the measles. The measles is not a life-threatening disease ordinarily, but we were so malnourished, and frankly so tired, etc., that once the doctors got a hold of him they wouldn't let him out of the hospital, and I really wanted to go on and continue because I wanted to go to Israel, Palestine – this was before Israel – but they wouldn't, and I certainly was not going to abandon my brother. So, I stayed in that DP camp in **[phonetic][00:59:47] Bodney**, which is 40 miles south of **[phonetic][00:59:49] Keyano**, and I was approximately halfway to Trieste. Unbeknownst to me, my dad literally scaled a wall in a prison, escaped. He had some help from the underground, and joined my mother, and they immediately left and went to Paris.

In Paris, they were trying to find us and realized, what my mother had told me and what I was doing, that they couldn't find me by tracing names, and so they started looking for two boys traveling towards Trieste, from Poland to Trieste, from Krakauer to Trieste. When they couldn't find us, they started to look for two children, gender unspecified, and I think we were about the fifth or sixth pair of children that they visited. They used **[phonetic][01:00:47] Heiss and Unra**, their record, to track pairs of children heading south, because they knew I wouldn't abandon my brother; and they knew that if they told me to go to Trieste, that's where I was going, and we were reunited.



We went back to Paris with my parents, and stayed there for about five months. Then, they found an airfare from London to New York. We took a ferry to England, stayed in London for two days, and then flew into LaGuardia in January 1947, and been here since then.

Interviewer: What a story.

Hall: Well, it's amazing we're alive. As a matter of fact, part of my mind, with these experiences: I was desperate for a normal life. Of course, every one of us would say today, because we live normal lives, "What's normal?" Believe me, my experiences: I knew what normal was. Normal was something different than what I had experienced; and, no, I didn't want to talk about the holocaust. I just wanted to live a normal life. Probably from age 12, when I came to the United States, maybe my mid to late forties, that was my primary goal – to establish a normal life – and that is to get an education, to get a career, to build a family, and that was it, and the holocaust experiences were the last thing in my mind.

Interviewer: The children of holocaust survivors have some issues to deal with.

Hall: Yes.

Interviewer: Did that affect you? Did that happen in your family?

Hall: I don't know. You would have to ask my daughters. We struggled. My first wife and I were married 21 years, and we really struggled to give them as normal a life as possible. I think that they would probably deny that we did, but I don't...Here's an interesting dichotomy: I don't think the holocaust was a major issue in their lives; but they were so protective of me that I think it was a major issue in their lives, but one that probably was not secretive in any way, but it was not spoken. It was just they felt that they didn't want to see me suffer.

Interviewer: You had already suffered enough.

Hall: Whatever, I mean you'd have to ask them, but I do know they were very protective of me. We had all [inaudible][01:04:15], but daughters and I are very close. When my first wife and I were divorced, my older daughter went to college the same weekend as we split, and my younger daughter stayed with me rather than with her mother. My older daughter, when she came home from college that summer, moved in with me, so I think we had a pretty decent relationship because both daughters could have easily gone with their mother, and sometimes now they sort of...but I think they have a good relationship with both parents.



Interviewer: Have you thought of getting reparations for psychological damage?

Hall: I have received, and continue to receive, a 25 percent disability from the German government for that.

This is interesting: I was at the University of Florida, I was at law school, and first of all my parents, when I started speaking about reparation, and they thought I was entitled, I said, "No. I'm normal. I'm fine. It's great. I want no part of Germany, nothing to do with Germans," and it was repulsive to me, and they kept on nagging and nagging. Finally, I agreed to see a psychologist, who was a German psychologist, and I knew he had to be a Nazi. I went to see him, and I was in a most inappropriate mood. I was pretty feisty at this point. This man lived here in Florida; he lived in Crescent Beach, I believe. I drove over there, and I said, "I'm fine. There's nothing wrong with me. I'm here only because my parents insisted," and he said, "Well, why don't you sit down," etc. Two hours later, a fine old man, he says, "Look, I know you're fine, and I know you're going to live a good life; but it is my professional analysis, opinion, and I'm going to report that," and they did, and subsequently I've been receiving the reparation.

Now, Poland has issued reparations, and I'm having almost the same response. Literally, it's like two people in one body: one part of me says, "I don't want any part of those folks. Just stay away," and the other part says, "But it's your birthright," and there is a conflict going on within me right now.

The Polish government has taken a position that anybody who has encountered the German war occupation for four months or longer – and they're setting out the criteria, which I understand I fulfill all of them – is entitled to have some small like \$100 a month reparation. So, I am right now struggling, "Why don't I apply for that?" That's the latest.

Interviewer: We were talking about earlier how there's still anti-Semitism in Poland, and I was speaking with someone on the way over here to interview you, that we're going to be interviewing subsequently, whose family got reparation. She went to Germany.

Hall: Poland or Germany?

Interviewer: Germany.

Hall: Okay.



Interviewer: She went to Germany this summer and found the family's former home, and so forth, and was impressed that the Germans have put stars marking places where people died, the Jews, in front of former family houses. So, there's a real consciousness of coming to terms with the past, their past deeds. So, it's interesting. I'm not saying that there's no anti-Semitism still in Germany, because we do know there are neo-Nazi groups, but that the government has made such an effort to take responsibility.

Hall: Germans, Germany, more so than any country in the world. Remember, the holocaust did not occur because a bunch of foreigners, hated foreigners. Germans were not loved by Poles or Ukrainians. Well, Ukrainians may be an exception, but the holocaust was something that occurred because the local groups supported it. In these little villages, the locals pointed out the Jews, the locals oftentimes dug the graves, the locals assisted the Germans. In Treblinka, which is the place I was supposed to have been murdered, the guards in Treblinka: they were only I think 34 guards that were Germans, and about 160 Ukrainians, Croats, and people from other countries guarding this death camp killing Jews. So, there were people from all over the European continent helping, supporting, the Germans collaborating against the Jews, or others; not just the Jews, but gypsies, certain Christian groups, etc. But I don't believe, and I feel very strongly about this, that we can condemn. One should not condemn groups.

The Germans have certainly tried to cleanse themselves of the guilt, and to pay back, etc., but there are evil people. They are racist anti-Semites here in the United States, but you can't say the United States is anti-Semitic or racism. Some people in the United States are racist. Some people in Germany are this and that. Some people in Poland. Wherever you go. I've been pretty much all over the world, and there are good people and bad people, and I think God distributes it that way wherever you go. So, I'm often asked what I would want to say to youngsters when I speak to them, for the future: beware of the bad people; they're here with you. Preserve and protect your liberties and your future because it is just as much of a risk here and now as it was in 1939 in Europe; those dangers are ever present. The bad people are everywhere, and you cannot be silent; too many Europeans were silent. Evil can rise up anywhere, and it is for each and every one of us to stamp it down.

Interviewer: Do you work at that?

Hall: I try. That's why I speak. I try to help people that I think need help, I oppose the people that I think should be opposed, and I don't hide; I did



at first, but no more.

[end of recording]