

**Oral History Interview of
Bernie Barasch**

**Interviewed by: Robert Weaver
June 25, 2012
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*World War II Veteran Interviews***

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Bernie Barasch as he describes his Jewish faith and heritage. In this interview Bernie discusses how he wound up in Lubbock, the Temple that he attends, and his time serving in World War II.

Length of Interview: 01:22:07

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Robert Weaver (RW):

This is Robert Weaver, today's date is June 25, 2012, and I am here with Mr. Bernie Barasch at—let me see, in Lubbock, TX. Mr. Barasch if I could get your date of birth?

Bernie Barasch (BB):

April 30, 1921.

RW:

I'm going to put this here, she won't bother it or he won't.

BB:

April 30, 1921.

RW:

Nineteen twenty-one. Well then—and where were you born?

BB:

I was born in Brownsville, Pennsylvania.

RW:

Oh, Brownsville Pennsylvania. What did your parents do?

BB:

We were always in the men's clothing business.

RW:

I know that's what you wound up doing here at—

BB:

Well the family had the business the same way back in Pennsylvania.

RW:

Did your parents move here, isn't that right? Didn't they come down here to purchase a store?

BB:

No we came down here. We had had stores in Pennsylvania for a long time, and then economic conditions were changing in Pennsylvania, so we were looking for greener territory. So we had had some contacts over here of people who had already come here, and he wanted, this particular fellow wanted to sell out his stores that he had had, and we picked Lubbock and came to Lubbock.

RW:

Well now, was that just you and your wife, or—

BB:

Well my brothers and I came here.

RW:

Now I guess when you were growing up—jump back for a second, when you were growing up, I guess, what was—the main thing we're looking at is the Jewish life, what was it like going up in Pennsylvania? Did y'all attend services or were you just—?

BB:

Oh yeah we had Uniontown where I was actually living, which was twelve miles away from Brownsville where I had been born. We had two congregations, we had an orthodox, and we had a reform congregation. We had always attended the reform congregation.

RW:

I guess you grew up all the way through the end of school there?

BB:

Yeah I went to the University of—I went to the Wharton school, and graduated there in '43, and then after the war, I came back to Uniontown until we decided to move the stores out of Pennsylvania and come to Texas.

RW:

So you served in World War II?

BB:

Yeah I was a gunner on a B-29. I flew thirty-three combat missions.

RW:

Oh wow. Europe or pacific?

BB:

Japan.

RW:

Japan. My grandpa was a tech Sargent, fixed propellers on B-29s and other stuff, but he was in England, Holland and France so he went all through there.

BB:

He was probably on a 17.

RW:

Yeah, yeah that's what it was.

BB:

They didn't have 29s over there.

RW:

His brother in law did fly 29s, his name was Jack Christian, and he—a navigator or something like that over in the pacific for a long time. So you said you served from '43 to '45 then? What was that like?

BB:

Well that was a pretty exciting part of my life.

RW:

I imagine so. Where did you do training?

BB:

Well actually I was sent to gunnery school over in Colorado in Denver, and then they put the crews together in Clovis, New Mexico, at Cannon [Air Force Base, then called Clovis Army Air Field]. They sent all the different guys, bombardier, navigator, gunners, radio operators and so forth. They put the crews together in Clovis, and then we left from Clovis and went to Kansas. Picked up a plane right off the production line because they didn't have any to spare, they were just coming as they were coming off the line, we were picking them up. Then we were originally based in India, and I flew the hump over there to western China, and we would attack Japan from western China. Then when we go the bases in the Pacific then we moved the whole air force to the pacific, and that's where I was. I was stationed on Tinian. That's the same place where they sent these atomic bombs from.

RW:

Wow. So you did that for a couple of years and then came back to Pennsylvania like you said. When did y'all move to Texas then?

BB:

Well, we moved to Texas in '54, 1954 we came here.

RW:

It was Budd's Men's Shop right, because I made sure to find that out. So you opened that in '54?

BB:

Right.

RW:

So your brothers were working with you then?

BB:

Yeah I had one brother, and then eventually the two other brothers came down but they all left, and I was the only one that finally ended up here.

RW:

Why'd they take off?

BB:

Well they just wanted to do other things. So one became a foot doctor, and another one became an insurance man, and another one went into the jewelry business. They followed different things that they wanted to do, but I stayed here.

RW:

I think—my parents live in Oklahoma City, and my mom she lived here for two years in junior high, and she swears she went to junior high with one of your daughters over off of—oh where would that be, somewhere around 50th street and Quaker. Right in there, there's a little junior high school. But does that sound about right?

BB:

Yeah I'm sure.

RW:

It would've been about '63.

BB:

Yeah I had four daughters, Arlene, Barbara, Carol, and Debbie, so she could—depending upon how old she was, it was probably Debbie or Carol.

RW:

I better write it down so I remember because I'll talk to her tonight and wind up telling her. Arlene, Debbie, Carol and—?

BB:

Arlene, Barbara, Carol and Debbie. And she probably, with your age, I would say it was probably Carol or Debbie.

RW:

Yeah like I said it would have been, she was born in '49 so it would probably have been '63, or '64 right in there. It's a small world, when she said that I said, "I'm going to interview that guy."

BB:

That's right.

RW:

So you ran Budd's Men's Shop for a long time.

BB:

Yeah it was over fifty years.

RW:

When did you leave the business?

BB:

We sold the business about twelve years ago. But the guy couldn't keep it up, so he went out of business, he lost the store.

RW:

It was there on 50th, wasn't it?

BB:

Yep.

RW:

When you moved here in '54 to open that up—that's interesting—I think that's the same year that the Shines moved down here for Henry to teach.

BB:

Yeah the Shines came about the same year.

RW:

When you came here did you get involved with Shaareth Israel right away?

BB:

Oh yeah. At that time the show was over there on—what was it, 22nd street?

RW:

At 26th and Q?

BB:

26th and Q.

RW:

Yeah I live right by there and you know I keep meaning to go by and look at it, I'm terrible. Did you meet somebody right away, I mean how did you find out about it?

BB:

Well you inquire, and you find out if you have a temple, and then there was some other Jewish merchants. So you introduced yourself, and you make contact that way.

RW:

Who all do you remember running into first?

BB:

Well at first there was a fellow by the name of Sam Moses that had an auto parts supply, and a guy by the name of Sam Levinson [?] [00:11:31] and he had a wholesale dry goods. Then at that time there was the Goldstucker [?] [00:11:44] brothers that were downtown. The Ginsberg family that was running S and Q.

RW:

When you started attending, did you notice it being real different from Pennsylvania?

BB:

No it wasn't that different. They used the same prayer book, they were reform, and they used what they call the union prayer book, which was the same that is used all over the United States. It wasn't any different it was just that it was smaller. It was only about, I think about sixty-five or seventy families that belong, whereas there was a larger Jewish community even though it was a smaller town, there was more Jewish people back in Pennsylvania than there were here.

RW:

Was the way the people went about the—the Jewish people, the way they worked with the community or the way they were perceived in Lubbock, I don't know if that makes sense, was it

different? Because I know there's a much larger Jewish population back East than there ever was here.

BB:

No it was the same except that there wasn't very many professional people, there was just a couple at the university at that time. Most of them were merchants, there was only one lawyer and I don't think there was any doctors at that time. But there was one lawyer called by the name of JR Bloomrose, but all the rest were merchants. That's what has changed, is that the Jewish community now is all professional people. There's—anybody that's left near retail was the Skibill's and they're out of it too.

RW:

That's right I talked to—

BB:

Charles is in investments, and his brother is in the restaurant business. So that's what's changed is that they've all gone into more professional occupation.

RW:

So more professors, and doctors, lawyers, those types of things. Do they tend to go to services as often? People have told me that they're not always around.

BB:

You have a core of people that are pretty regular. I would say that it's still about sixty, seventy families that attended pretty good. There's a lot more Jewish people here, but they're not affiliated.

RW:

Why do you think that is?

BB:

There's—I don't think people have the same attitude toward religion, in all religions as what they used to. I think there's too many distractions. For example when we first started, that was the only source of community life, or to belong to some type of charitable organization like that. Like I belong to the Masons, and the shrine, or some of the other charitable deals like the Lions and so forth. But today you got TV and they don't want to go and attend meetings, they don't even want to go to church. All the churches as far as what I've been able to understand, have all lost membership, none of them are as big as they used to be. I think it's a different attitude of young people today toward community life compared to what we had. If we wanted to associate

with people we had to belong to a group, there was not anyway that you were going to be able to meet people, and socialize, and so forth unless you participated. Today people don't do that.

RW:

You mentioned all the groups that you were in, the Lions, Masons, and were you in B'nai B'rith or any other things like that?

BB:

Well we didn't—we had a B'nai B'rith organization and that was the only Jewish organization. The ladies had a Hadassah organization, which was promoting Israel at that time. They didn't have a strong Zionist organization, men's organization, but they had a stronger women's organization. The B'nai B'rith was like a Jewish lodge compared to the elks, or moose, or one of those other—or Masonic organizations like that. They were interested in charitable, not only Jewish charities but all kinds of different catastrophes that took place and so forth. It was a means of fulfilling charitable purposes, and at the same time do it as a Jewish group.

RW:

The congregation gave us a bunch of the records, the congregational records so that we could preserve it up at the collections, and one of the things I found in there was—remember the little tins they had to support Israel that you could put the coins in?

BB:

The blue boxes.

RW:

Yeah the blue boxes, we had one of those. My office mate, she's Jewish and she saw it and said that she hasn't seen one of those in forty years, and she started playing with it.

BB:

Well they were used to contribute to Israel through Hadassah, and Jewish national fund had a group island. I'm not sure, I think it was the Jewish National Fund that put out the blue boxes.

RW:

I think that sounds right, I have it sitting over near my desk because I haven't finished putting it in boxes but—

BB:

But people would put change in it, you know, and so forth, and at the end of the year they would collect them and send the money in.

RW:

Okay so they would basically sort of put all the money together and send it off to the Jewish.

BB:

To the national organization.

RW:

Now your wife—her name is Alice, is that right? She was involved with the sisterhood wasn't she? Hadassah?

BB:

Right.

RW:

I thought she was pretty heavily involved.

BB:

Yeah the sisterhood was the ladies arm of the temple. It wasn't a national organization it was a local.

RW:

Did she get involved with that right away?

BB:

Oh yeah.

RW:

What all did she do there?

BB:

Well, used to have social activities, promote dinners and lunches, and so forth, and get together for the women. Then at the same time promote activities to support the congregation.

RW:

Did she get involved with foodarama? I mean everybody did.

BB:

Oh everybody was. That was a very big project that they used to—for the sisterhood to help support the congregation.

RW:

What did she do with it? I've been told—I think Sandy Layman told me that Alice was really involved with it.

BB:

Well they all did, they would get together and cook together and then also cook at home depending upon what they wanted to make and so forth. Some activities they would work together at the congregation in the kitchen there, and then they would supplement that by doing cooking at home, individual cooking. Some would bake cakes, and candies, and food, took food items and this and that, whatever they wanted to do they would participate.

RW:

That's the one thing I wish I could've gone to. I only moved here three years ago but every time I hear about it—I heard there were lines down the street to buy the food and everything.

BB:

Well it was pretty popular because there was no other way of getting Jewish foods. Most of these women were terrific bakers, and knew how to make dishes and so forth. In this environment they weren't familiar with Jewish foods.

RW:

So it was gentiles then coming, I mean everybody all over Lubbock.

BB:

Well that was who they would sell primarily too. Jewish people would also buy, but not like the gentiles because once they got familiar with it—like dishes like stuffed cabbage, and certain kinds of cakes, and then we would also bring in food from delis out of the Chicago, and hard crusted breads like rye breads, and corned beef and salamis. See all those foods were made with all beef, there was no pork in them. It was pretty acceptable to everybody. Where they couldn't buy it in the regular stores and so forth, we sort of had a deli counter. Phil's Ranch House had a little deli set up, but it wasn't very big and he couldn't do too much with it. Because that kind of food takes—to be good it has to be fresh and turn over all the time, nice and fresh. So these are the kinds of things that just wasn't available in this market.

RW:

Makes sense, it's a long way to everywhere.

BB:

Yeah.

RW:

Well another person I know who was really involved with foodarama of course was Eleanor Kline. What do you remember about the Kline's?

BB:

Well the Klimes, of course, were the Rabbi and the Rabbinite, she's called the Rabbin, the wife. But besides being spiritual leaders they were both primarily interested in art. They also had a connection neighbor, eventually put on at Texas Tech. I don't know whether—I think both—it was like-- almost like a couple was put on up there, and they conducted lectures in not just modern art but classical art and so forth. They really didn't have anybody with their experience in the art field. They were glad to have them, and their courses were very popular. Then they conducted—and when they weren't lecturing at the university, they would conduct classes in their home, and people who wanted to participate would sign up and join and they would have art classes at home. They weren't teaching so much on how to draw or how to create art, but more the appreciation of art, and to know about different painters and their lives. They had done so much research and reading on the different painters and so forth, that they could lecture from here to Samoa and never run out of material.

RW:

We've got some of his stuff that was a box that was just stuffed full of clippings he'd made out of different magazines and examples of some of these different painters. I mean, there was a lot in that box. But he also as a Rabbi how was he? I've heard he was scholarly.

BB:

Well, of course, they were reform and they weren't real orthodox. We really haven't had anybody more toward the orthodox until we got this lady here now.

RW:

Hollander?

BB:

Hollander is a little bit more toward the conservative view. So the reform attitude was to adjust Judaism to the times of what they are today. More English beings in the services rather than Hebrew, which most of the people didn't understand anyways, they weren't brought up that way. So if they were going to pray they could at least pray in English, and knew what they were going to be praying about. They didn't because of our set up out here, it was very hard to maintain a so called kosher home, because you couldn't get kosher foods without having to have them shipped in for long distances. You could have them shipped in from Dallas, and El Paso had a kosher butcher shop down there. So the dietary laws weren't kept over here for the most part, and still not. But the idea of having your service conducted more in English rather than in Hebrew, but

we still observed all the holidays and stuff like that, but it was done in more English rather than—and that was the heart of the reform movement was to do it in English rather than in Hebrew.

RW:

So the Rabbis before Kline, they were reformed? I mean they approached things the same way?

BB:

All the Rabbis that I knew were reform. They may have been orthodox when they were kids, but they had changed and gone the reform way.

RW:

Do you remember anything about those Rabbis since you've been here a while? The Rabbi's before Kline? I guess Kline got here about 1960.

BB:

Well there's another one named with a K—Kaulton? But I can't remember his name.

RW:

I've heard people speak a lot about Eleanor, apparently she was really popular, and she was a lot different from her husband. What was she like?

BB:

Well she was very friendly, and a very warm type of person. He was a little bit-- little more distant, but he was still—you'd get down and start talking with him, he was fun. But she was a very warm type of person. She had no trouble at all involving you in conversation, and found something that you would be interested in talking about. She understood people, and knew how to deal with them, and as a result people liked her.

RW:

I guess he retired around 1980, then what was that like? Were people prepared to change to a new Rabbi, or was it a weird transition?

BB:

No I don't think so, I don't think people—nobody likes change. You start out with that, you know nobody likes change if they don't have to. But at the same time, most people are pretty practical. If a person doesn't want to continue you can't force them. So people are pretty practical that way, pragmatic, and accepting change because they know it's going to come. Come more or come less, you don't like it for the most part, but it does happen. Then always getting a new person that is acceptable to everybody, is an impossible task. You know, the preachers have

the same problem going to new congregations. Some guys like you, some don't, and some will just take a dislike to you to start off, they don't like the way you wear your hat, and this and that. Who knows? There's always something. In most cases there's no real foundation for it that means anything but still that's the way people—there isn't any type of organization that doesn't fight that all the time.

RW:

This brings to mind something that I always have to ask even though not everybody wants to talk about it. When Rabbi Weisberg came in a little bit later, a conflict came up, that was one of I guess the biggest events in the history of the congregation, when some members split off and did their own thing. Do you remember that?

BB:

What they had is that the regular conduct as far as a pulpit is concerned, is that when a Rabbi is hired, he's in charge of the pulpit, and he does things the way he's used to, and the way he wants to do it. Now if he does something particular, like say maybe he brings in to many Hebrew songs, see? So somebody may object, they'd rather have songs in English. Well you try to work those things out, but ordinarily the conduct of the pulpit is administered by the Rabbi, and the way he wants to do it, that's the way people, they conform and they listen, and they go along. Now it doesn't mean that they always like something that you do. Like when he was here and they had that problem, there was a small group of people that wanted to do things on the pulpit their way. It wasn't that they so much objected to him, he felt there was—like there, for example, so many people being called during a service to come up to the pulpit, or so many during a religious event like a bar mitzvah or a conformation. Well some of these guys want to call seven, eight, ten people well it's too much and most people just don't want to go through that. Well we're used to it being conducted in a certain way, and these people wanted to conduct it their way, and they got mad enough that they left. Well that's bullshit. Any kind of an organization, if it's so called democratic, you go by the majority, the way most people want it. You can't please everybody, so you try to please the most people. It's not that you do things against these other people, it's just that you just don't do the things they want, which would conflict with the wishes of the way most people feel. That happens in churches as well as in synagogues.

RW:

Yeah I mean it happens at work, you know everywhere you are.

BB:

It happens in work. You still have to go by what the boss wants. The guy that's paying your salary, he has the final say. Well that's the way things are. Well there's always some people that are going to tell you, "If you can't do it my way, to hell with you, just I don't have to belong here," so that's just the way they do. So we had a split, it wasn't that bad, it wasn't—didn't ruin

the congregation, it didn't stop the congregation from conducting itself but it was—nobody—where you have a small congregation you don't like to lose anybody. That part was—and it causes bad feelings, people get mad and so forth. When you leave, that means the financial burden is redistributed over, and more people have to put up more money and so forth, and there's a financial deal that's involved when you have people walking out and so forth. So those are the things that happened, but it becomes a personality type of deal where one type of personality feels that the way they look at things is more important than the group, and so they leave.

RW:

How did most of the group take it?

BB:

Well, most of them just took it the way they had too. They—you accepted it, they didn't like it, and felt bad about it, but it wasn't—they felt that the Rabbi was right in going along with the way he wanted to conduct the services and so forth. So that's the way it became.

RW:

So how did it resolve itself, the way you saw it?

BB:

Well we just adjusted to a smaller—not that small but to lose—I don't think it was over seven or eight families that left.

RW:

So did they come back? I know the Shines, are involved again and attend, him and Vecelli [?]
[[00:45:06].

BB:

Well, whoever—I don't remember that the Shines walked out, but they might not have liked it for a while, but at the same time they did come back, there was a couple of families that did come back. But there was three or four families that stayed away, and they went their way and we went ours.

RW:

I guess a little bit after that Weisberg left? Is that right?

BB:

Yeah he left—it was about a year, year and a half, two years. It was within two years I think that he went back east.

RW:

I forgot to ask, so did you ever serve on the board?

BB:

Yeah I've been president several times and served on the board. I've been on the board the last couple of years. I'm not as religious as far as attending services as some, but I believe real strongly that we should maintain a temple, and have a Jewish presence and so forth. Even though I individually may not be as strong of a goer, I still feel that the institution should be there, and supported, and taken care of.

RW:

When you were president those times, do you remember any of the projects that you did or the major things you tried to get going or direct people towards?

BB:

Well the main thing as a president is to put out little fires. As problems come up or people object to certain things like that—"What's going on?" Either real or imagine, you try to become a peacemaker, and that's what you try to do as a president. Because the services are pretty well set, they've been doing it for four thousand years, and you're not going to change those, except for their reform movement which started in Germany, and it started to do more of the—in Germany they had more services conducted in German. When the movement came to the United States, then they had more services conducted in English, and that was the main difference, plus there wasn't as strict to some of the regulations and rules and so forth that the orthodox had for maintaining yourself. You more assimilated it into the life of the country or the area around you. So you had your basic religion, but you have it more adjusted to what your education is, what your background is, and how you want to live and so forth. The orthodox always wanted to keep things exactly the way they were four thousand years ago, whereas the reform movement, even the conservative movement, feels that religious practices should change with the times, and you have less problems with you neighbors and less problems all around if you can be more a part of the community, not separate from the community. Just the fact that you live there but not participate, the reform movement doesn't believe that, they believe that it's just as important to be true to your faith as it is to be true to your community, your neighbors, and your friends and so forth, even though they may not be Jewish. That's been—and by adjusting religion to all religions to—the way you live has been able for religion to survive. I don't think religion would've survive the other way, either Christianity, or Muslims, or Judaism, whatever. There has to be a certain amount of flexibility to adjust to times, and I think you get along better.

RW:

Well one of the things that I guess the congregation did to—well to try to keep going here was to move to that new building. Were you involved with that?

BB:

Yeah we—well what we had, a big gift was given by somebody in Dallas, and then we matched it, and that way we were able to finance a whole new building and move.

RW:

Did you manage any of that or were you on the board then? What did you have to do?

BB:

I was part of one of the building committees, and we gave a nice share of contribution on our part and so forth. But everybody participated to one extent or another, some more, some less.

RW:

Do you like the new building more? Or what's different about it for you?

BB:

Well for—

RW:

I mean it's got parking, everybody loves the parking, because there wasn't any at the old place. I know that.

BB:

Well there wasn't anything there to park, but you also had a small building. This way you have individual classrooms, the Rabbi has their own office and study, and you just—it's a beautiful building. Have you ever been in it?

RW:

No I haven't, I'm just terrible. I've interview ten or eleven people and done all this work, maybe I'll drive by it on the way back actually.

BB:

Well what you ought to do is come out on a Friday night, and you're welcome to come to any service, and most of the service is conducted in English so you know what's going on. I think you would have—I think it would help your work to get a feel of what goes on over there.

RW:

I guess I'll have to—a couple of other people have invited me as well.

BB:

But if you come on a Friday night, especially during the fall, services start at usually at eight

o'clock and they're over within an hour. Then they always have coffee, and cake, and treats, so forth afterwards where people socialize after the service, and we have a big room for that. But you should see the place where they hold the service because we have—the way they've decorated it, with the glass and so forth, it's really an art treasure compared to anything in—I have a picture of the inside. [pause] But if you come out on a Friday—are you married?

RW:

No I'm not.

BB:

Well you can come out by yourself or you can come out with a friend or whoever.

RW:

It's high time I did it, you know, I don't know why I've waited this long.

BB:

Well I think that you'll be very pleasantly surprised as to—because that cost us over a half a million dollars to build in those days, today it'd be worth about three times.

RW:

Was that the early nineties? Right around there. [pause] Well what else—I guess would you say about the Jewish community in Lubbock? Oh wow, it's nice I had no idea it was so big.

BB:

Well we can seat about two hundred and fifty just with permanent seats. See there's the alter and this is this big glass, it's made with chunks of glass. It was made by a local artist, and this was the first real work that he did, although they saw some of his work, and then he designed—this is a burning bush.

RW:

Okay, of course.

BB:

See and its fiery red in shades of glass for color, put together by humps of glass. Since that time he's done work all over the United States.

RW:

Do you remember his name?

BB:

I don't remember his name.

RW:

I bet we've got it somewhere.

BB:

But see there's the alter and behind here is where they keep the scrolls—are kept over there. Then the choir is over here, we've always had a professional choir.

RW:

Oh really?

BB:

Yep.

RW:

People from Tech or—?

BB:

Yeah. We have people from Tech that have been here for over twenty-five years, been there longer than some of the people.

RW:

Like I was saying, do you remember anything else, or is there anything else you'd say about Lubbock and, I don't know, the way it's changed over the years for the community? Even if it's not the Jewish community, because we've talked a lot about that. You've been here a while.

BB:

Well I think that the biggest changes that has taken place is what I talked about. I think that outside of that getting bigger, and it's always been a nice place to grow up—I mean people say that but it's true. If you're family and interested in people, you have no trouble at all talking to neighbors and people and so forth, you can talk to anybody on the street and nobody would get mad that you approached them. You just wanted to say hello, or this, or that. Family wise, it's a very good place to bring up kids, and to associate with other people. But I think community life, and it's happened all over, its not just Lubbock, is that people are not interested in community functions like they used to be, mainly because of this.

RW:

That television. Gets me too.

BB:

Yeah it's changed the way we live, and the way we act to each other and so forth. I've always enjoyed my life here. It's still a thriving type of thing, I think people may be a little too conservative for my taste.

RW:

A little conservative here.

BB:

But you can't—that's the way it is. But we've been fortunate that we grew up with groups of people that weren't always this way, as ultra conservative as what they are today. I think we're fortunate here, we've got a pretty decent climate. It's—

RW:

It's a hundred out there today but it's dry.

BB:

Yeah. But still it's not, if you've been to down South, you know, to Austin or so forth, you can't go outside, you'll wet—your shirt gets wet right away.

RW:

I lived there for thirteen years. That's where I did undergrad, and yeah you'd get out of the shower and sometimes you're still wet an hour later.

BB:

Well you know the kids, all my girls went to school there, and they all wanted to live there, and they did. Young people love Austin because there's so much for young people to do. But their climate doesn't compare to here, overall. It's nice in the fall and it's nice in the winter time, the spring, but summers are pretty damn hot.

RW:

The last couple anyway. There's something—I forgot to ask back at the beginning and I should have then, is obviously you grew up in the thirties and then you went to war in '43. Over in Europe bad things were happening, what did y'all hear about what was going on in Germany and Poland to the Jews.

BB:

Well, we knew it wasn't good but we didn't get the full story during the—as much as we would hear through the great vine and periodicals and so forth, as to what Hitler was doing in Germany, we still never got quite the full story. It didn't come out until after the war. Our own government

knew what was going on, but they didn't—they didn't know about the camps, or they didn't talk about the camps as to what was done to the Jews over there. It was really rough knowing that these things were going on, and where you couldn't bring people out to escape.

RW:

The Skibell's had family over there, did you have any distant relatives?

BB:

I never had any family. Now my dad's family came from Austria and my mother's family came from Russia. Both families had already come over in the early nineteen hundreds, when the big move took place in nineteen hundred—I'd say in the early nineteen hundreds, 1898 to 1904.

RW:

There were a lot of people from Russia I know.

BB:

They came over by the boat loads from all over. People who were of a mind to move and had had enough picked up and moved.

RW:

Were your parents born over there then?

BB:

My parents, my dad was born over there and he came over when he was a small child. They came to New York. Whereas my mother's family came to Montreal. I still have cousins up in Montreal. On my mother's side, the whole family moved at that time, there might have still been some people over there, but we never knew them, but they moved to Canada. My dad's family settled in New York, they came to New York. We knew it was bad, and we knew that Hitler was a no good munser [?] [01:08:33], and what he was doing to the rest of Europe and so forth. But we had no conception of the idea of what was really going on with the Jewish people.

RW:

I mean who could unless they saw it. It's hard to imagine.

BB:

Yeah that came out later after the war.

RW:

Do you remember how that was received? I mean obviously people were shocked, but do you remember any specifics?

BB:

Well I was pretty sad because so many people did have family over there. They felt that if our government at that time could have possibly have made it easier then they could've lifted quotas and then they had strong quotas as to who would come from whatever part of Europe and so forth. All that stuff never changed until years and years later, and then it wasn't changed a lot. They're still is quotas that came come from each particular country to the United States. There's only so many visas are allocated to each country, it's still that way. We felt that—and a lot of people felt that, with a different type of policy we might've been able to save thousands of people, at least make it possible for them to come and have a safe haven. But they didn't, and even as friendly as Roosevelt was to the Jewish people, still he could've done untold amounts of different things that would've made a difference, and there wasn't. So people still feel bitter about losing family.

RW:

Sure. Well I figured I should ask about that since you lived through that time.

BB:

But that's true. I think you can understand that.

RW:

Yeah I would hope anybody could, the way people felt about him and still do, it's hard to hear about.

BB:

I'm not saying that you have to be overwhelmed by migration all the time but some of these conditions are so bad in Europe, South America, different places, Africa where people are persecuted. It's just unbelievable that these things can still take place, and you turn your head, you're just not concerned.

RW:

Maybe it's the TV again.

BB:

Well when people don't share experiences, they're going to have a different attitude. You take—we fought the Vietnam War, and you've had the Korean War, and you've had the Afghanistan and you've had the other, and all those wars people have acted as though nothing has taken place. That's because only a small minority of people are involved in the service. Now if we would have—everybody has to go to the service or to the government in some way or the other, that has to serve three years or two years like they do in Israel, where everybody goes regardless of—there's no deferments. You're not out for ailments, or this or that, everybody goes. People

would have a different attitude towards going to war. You're not so inclined that right away we're going to bomb Iran and this and that, and we're going to send a group over there, but we'll say—we'll salute the flag when they're killed. I mean there's a—when you're not touched by your own family, by these things you have a different attitude. I think it's just in a country like this that is so—to conduct almost four wars.

RW:

Yeah in the last thirty years.

BB:

And people don't even know that that's going on. There's a terrific article in line with what I'm saying and you get this, I just saw the article. You might pick this up in the library and I think the amount of missions at that time was twenty-five. One tour of duty of combat is enough already. Now here these guys have been going over two and three and sometimes four times, this is completely unheard of in the history of mankind. Never have people fought that many times in actual combat to go through that kind of an experience.

RW:

That's true.

BB:

You wonder why they're committing suicide. Well they're terribly—they've gotten so depressed and then you come back, you can't get a job, you can't do this, you can't do that, they won't give you this or that. You stand in line at the VA—I go down there for medications because I can get medications cheaper than what I can even afford to pay for them over there, but I never wait less than an hour and a half, it's always at least an hour.

RW:

And they're all there for all sorts of other things, not just that.

BB:

This is just—most of these guys haven't even been in combat. They were veterans, I mean they served, but they weren't in combat. But combat tours of having guys go to Afghanistan and go to those Iraq for two and three and four tours is unheard of. When people don't have family—he was only a national guard, or guys that joined the national guard because they needed the money, or the wanted the experience, but most of it was minorities and blacks, and a few whites. That's who've been fighting the wars. Well when nobody else has a share in it, how are they going to think different?

RW:

Yeah, it's not like it was, maybe people don't see a treat, I don't know.

BB:

World War II, everybody did something. My mother drove an ambulance, and there was no war in here but she was assigned and she would do ambulance work, and of course all the people were involved in rationing, and quotas, and things like that, so forth. People went and worked in defense plants and participated, everybody participated. You had nighttime raids and drills, so forth, air drills and things like that took place. So everybody had a chance to do something, some part of it. So everybody knew what was going on and when it was over they wanted it to be over, not to drag on, and to have kids killed for—just to put their name up on a screen, it's cruel. These are the things that bother me today as far as—and I'm ninety-one and I've done my duty, I've done my time. But I feel very sorry for young people today as to what they have to go through. I wish it was different, but it isn't. you might just—if you get a chance get that May issue as to—because you are interested in history but this is a thing that's going on right now and you wonder why people feel that way. How is it possible conjured to—that they want to get us involved in Iran, or to bomb them, and go to war and this and that, because they don't have to. They're going to send somebody else, some other family.

RW:

Yeah and maybe their kids don't go, and then everything, it's true.

BB:

That's my deal.

RW:

Well those are the questions that I had. What will probably happen is that I'll leave and you'll probably think of fifteen things that you wished you'd have told me.

BB:

Well I think that we covered it pretty good. I hope I didn't—do you want a drink before you leave?

RW:

No, no, no. I'm good I actually left one in the car, it's probably hot.

BB:

Well here take a—you drink Dr Pepper?

RW:

Sure. Well let me go ahead and thank you for the interview on tape—

[End of recording]

