

>> Interviewer: Okay, all right, we're going to start the interview, and the first thing I'd like you to tell us is just your name, where you were born. Let's start it out that way.

>> Heller: My name is Heller, Max Heller. I was born in Vienna, Austria, and I now live in Greenville, South Carolina.

>> Interviewer: Okay, and you were born when?

>> Heller: I was born in 1919.

>> Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell us a little about your childhood in Vienna, what your family life was like?

>> Heller: Well, I grew up in a very wonderful, loving, warm family. I have a sister and my mother and father. I would say we were middle income. My father was in business. I grew up in a very Orthodox Jewish home. My parents observed the Sabbath. They would not work on the Sabbath. They would not even touch money on the Sabbath. They would not ride on the Sabbath, and we kept the dietary laws. And I would say that we grew up a very happy home life.

But I also have to tell you that there was a lot of anti-Semitism even when I was going to grammar school. The big difference was that the government did not sponsor that kind of anti-Semitism. But the fact remains that it was there, and I had to learn to fight my way through school or on the streets or in the park. And my parents made sure that I learned something about my Judaism so that I could respond to some of these ridiculous accusations that were made, and I've always felt that it was important to know who you are and where you come from. It's not enough to say, "well, I'm proud to be a Jew," or "I'm

proud to be a Christian," or whatever you say. You've got to know why.

So I would say that I was taught -- I had a Hebrew teacher who gave me a good education, who taught me our history, and I led what we considered a normal life. We grew up with anti-Semitism. That was part of our life. And unfortunately, of course, what happened later on was totally different because it became so brutal and unbelievable to the average -- the average person would just not believe it.

>> Interviewer: If we can just backtrack a bit, you grew up in a -- did you grow up in a Jewish neighborhood in Vienna, largely?

>> Heller: Well, I would say that most of the people, yes. In Vienna, there were about 200,000 Jews, which is about 10% of the population, and I would not say that it was really a Jewish district because the apartment house where I lived, we had probably more Christians than Jews. But generally speaking, yes, there were a good many Jews that lived there.

I went to a public grammar school for four years, and then I went to a private high school for four years. That's all that was required. I finished school when I was 18.

>> Interviewer: Was that the gymnasium?

>> Heller: Gymnasium, yes, yeah.

>> Interviewer: And was the anti-Semitism that you personally encountered, was it more in the context of school, or was it in the press? Was it a general --

>> Heller: It was everywhere. It was everywhere. It disturbs me even today when I see some caricatures of people where they show a Jew with this big nose and big eyes and black hair because

that's what they did then already in Vienna, and that's what Hitler did even more so. As ugly as you could make somebody, that's what a Jew looked like.

But let me say this, that despite all of that, our life was a happy life because there was a lot of strength within our own family and, for that matter, within the Jewish community, and I had many friends that were not Jewish. There was no -- really, there was no separation as far as that's concerned.

>> Interviewer: As you were a teenager, when Hitler became chancellor, when were you -- were you aware very early on about Hitler?

>> Heller: In 1933, when Hitler came to power, we frankly could not believe some of the stories we heard because they were unimaginable. People would say to us, "Hitler is going to confiscate a business because you are Jewish," or "You can no longer work in an establishment because you are Jewish," or intermarriages were not allowed. It was so hard for us to believe, just like it was hard for the whole world to believe it. And yet we felt like the rest of the world was not going to let too much happen. I mean, how could the world stand by?

Just before Hitler marched into Austria -- the Nazi Party had been established as a party of violence. In fact, they killed a chancellor years before they even came to power, and the battles in the streets were fierce. And there were many political parties in Vienna at that time. And finally, the Nazi Party was driven underground. There were many political prisoners that had been taken by the leading party, which were the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats. So just before Hitler came, there was a lot of turmoil already.

And when Hitler finally marched in, in 1938, there was to be a vote whether the Austrians wished to become part of Germany. And

we had no way of knowing which way it would go, but the propaganda was tremendous, and the streets were full of political slogans, painted on. And the reason I mention this to you -- and the windows and the doors on the homes and apartment houses -- the reason I mention this to you is because, after Hitler did march in, the Jews were required to clean the streets, and they scrubbed the streets. And not only that, I was -- I know I'm getting ahead of my story, but I was forced by a schoolmate of mine, who I thought was my best friend, to get down on my knees and scrub the streets, and not only scrub the streets but clean out the gutters, and I don't have to tell you what you find in those gutters. That's just one of those experiences.

But let me get back to when Hitler did take over. First of all, I have to say that the population was jubilant. Jubilant. I mean, they were dancing in the streets.

>> Interviewer: So this is actually on the day of the Anschluss?

>> Heller: Oh, it was just -- and it was so well organized. You would just not believe how well organized the Nazis were. The day after Hitler marched in, our bank account was already confiscated because everybody had an ID and the identification card said whether you were Jewish or not. And that's one reason why I feel we should never come to that, that in our country you have to carry an ID card. I mean, they knew exactly who was who. And so when we went to get our money out of the bank, we were told, in no uncertain terms, "You are Jewish, and your account is closed."

The Monday after Hitler marched in, for instance, I went to work. I had already been working at that time. And on the way to work -- I lived near a park -- the park benches were already marked "No Jews allowed." When I came to work on that following Monday, a former employee of that company came in with Hitler --

with people in uniforms, in Hitler uniforms, and took over the business and fired every Jewish person except three of us. I remained. People that I worked with in that company -- I started there as an apprentice -- that I thought were my friends, they came into work on Monday in Nazi uniforms. I'm saying all this so that people can understand really what it was like, what did it look like.

We could not believe that this would last. We could not believe that the world would stand by and let this happen, that you can confiscate somebody's apartment. People were thrown out of their apartment. Their business was taken away. Neighbor turned against neighbor. And yet the world was silent. I have always said that the world does not hear tears. Tears are silent. The world hears cannons and guns. But silent tears, they do not hear.

>> Interviewer: Even after the Anschluss, you and your family, you were still convinced that, somehow or other, the outside world was not going to allow it, even though it already seemed to be a fait accompli somewhat?

>> Heller: Right, right.

>> Interviewer: When, when --

>> Heller: And yet I must say -- excuse me for interrupting you.

>> Interviewer: Sure, sure.

>> Heller: The day after -- in fact, the day it happened -- well, that night. It was on a Friday night, and we went home, and we lit the Sabbath candles, and we had our regular Sabbath meal as if nothing had happened, except that there were tears and we wondered, where do we go from here? I said then, "There's only one place for us, and that's America." And if I tell you

the story of how I came here -- which is a miracle in itself. And so as far as I'm concerned and my family were concerned, America was the place for us to be because I felt that Europe has had it. But I'll let you ask me what, what --

>> Interviewer: Sure, sure. Well, following along those lines, did you see the huge lines in front of embassies and places in Vienna?

>> Heller: Oh, yeah, my God. It's also interesting -- you should know that the Nazis cleaned out all the grocery stores and moved -- 'cause they -- in Austria, evidently, there was more food available than in Germany there was.

what had happened with me was that the year before Hitler came in, in 1937, I met an Ameri -- I met my current -- my wife. I fell in love with her the day I met her. I know she's gonna watch this tape, so I want her to hear that. She knows it. But I also met a group of American girls in a restaurant, obviously with a chaperone. And there was one there that I found very attractive, and I was with a boyfriend of mine in that restaurant, and they had dancing, and I said, "Ah, God, I'd love to meet this girl." And I went up, and I asked her to dance with me. I couldn't speak English, and she couldn't speak German, but the chaperone spoke German, and she gave permission for me to dance with her.

And we did dance until the place closed, and then I asked permission could I meet her the next day and take her for a walk and show her Vienna, and the chaperone agreed. And I went out and I bought a little dictionary, and I picked up this young lady, and we walked for about two hours, and we made conversation through that dictionary. When I left, I said, "Please give me your name and address, and I will write to you as soon as I learn how to speak English." I had taken Latin in

school, by the way. And I kept that address, and that was in August of 1937.

The day Hitler marched in, I had it in my back pocket in my wallet, and I said to my parents, "You remember this girl I met from America. I'm going to write to her." And her name was Mary Mills, and she lived on Mills Avenue, Greenville, South Carolina. And I wrote to her, and I said in the letter -- and I have a copy of it somewhere. I could not say too much because you were afraid of the censorship. But I said, "I must get out of here. Please help me. I hope you remember me." And I said, "I will never be a burden to you."

And when I said that to people, that I had written this girl I met only one time, they said, "Oh, she'll never remember." But a miracle occurred, and weeks afterwards, I did receive a letter from her saying, "I have not forgotten you. I have gone to see somebody here in Greenville, a Jewish man" -- and by the way, Mary Mills was not Jewish, and there's a wonderful lesson there, because the man who did send me the letter -- his name was Shepherd Saltzman -- said in his letter, "Mary Mills came to see me today. How can I, a Jew, not help you when she, a Christian, wants to help?" I mean, to me, that is true...true religion, Judeo-Christian, whatever you might be. And this is how I came. He sent the papers for me. And things got very rough in Vienna.

>> Interviewer: Are we still in '38 now?

>> Heller: It was 1938. This was March of 1938, and of course April and so on. And people were taken into concentration -- people disappeared...simply disappeared. A neighbor would come in who had liked your apartment for years and say, "I want this apartment," and things like that happened.

>> Interviewer: Had you heard -- Dachau was in operation for about five years. Had you heard about Dachau, or did any of that filter to Vienna?

>> Heller: No.

>> Interviewer: You didn't know, so that wasn't reported in the general press or anything?

>> Heller: No.

>> Interviewer: When did you first hear about camps?

>> Heller: Just as -- I would say probably in June. It was several months after. And some of our friends were actually taken away, and then we were told they were sent to camps. We didn't know the names. The cruelty was unbelievable. We had a friend -- my parents had a friend who was taken away in a truck. His family was told to say good-bye to him, and they took him -- he didn't know where. He was blindfolded. But they took him, and obviously it was a basement and -- where they took the blindfold off. And they said, "Say your last prayers" -- in Hebrew, that's the Shema: Hear, O Israel, our Lord our God, is one -- "because you're going to be killed," and he heard the shooting. And they did it in alphabetical order. When his name was called, they took him out in the courtyard. They shot in the air, they undressed him, and they kicked him out. And that man just about lost his mind. I mean, those are the kind of things that -- my sister had a close call.

So just to make this a little bit shorter, fortunately this man did send the papers. He was willing to include my sister in the affidavit, and so both of us were able to come to the United States. Our parents were left behind. My parents were a Polish quota. In those days, there was a quota. I was an Austrian quota because I was born in Austria.

>> Interviewer: So your family had come from Poland to Vienna?

>> Heller: My family was originally born in Poland, yes. One thing I have to say that we need to realize how times have changed. Today, God forbid, if a Holocaust were to happen again -- or let's just go back to what happened in Cuba. We thought nothing of opening up our doors and let in 200,000 Cubans. When there was a big problem in violence in Hungary, for instance, and the Russians were attacking Hungarian citizens, we opened the doors. The world opened the doors. What happened when it happened in Germany and in Austria? The quotas were still in existence. I mean, thank God for America. America at least allowed some people to come in. But you couldn't go in anywhere else. There was no place to go. So is there a lesson? We have to learn a lesson from all of this. We must never let this happen again. Well...

>> Interviewer: Just backtracking just once again --

>> Heller: Yeah, I'm sorry.

>> Interviewer: No, that's perfectly all right. Do you remember Kristallnacht? Where --

>> Heller: No, I was gone already.

>> Interviewer: You were gone by then, okay.

>> Heller: Yes.

>> Interviewer: So the visa -- the papers came through, then, in the summer?

>> Heller: My papers came through at the end of July 1938, and I came to America the first week in August. I was allowed \$8.

>> Interviewer: Eight dollars.

>> Heller: Twenty shillings, which was the equivalent of \$8.

>> Interviewer: What ship did you --

>> Heller: I came on a French boat.

>> Interviewer: Out of?

>> Heller: The "Ile de France" out of Le Havre.

>> Interviewer: Oh, on the "Ile de France"?

>> Heller: Yeah, yeah.

>> Interviewer: Do you remember much about that, the sailing?
What was it like?

>> Heller: It was wonderful, the sailing!

>> Interviewer: Had you been abroad?

>> Heller: No, I had never been on a ship. There was a great deal of sadness when I said good-bye to my parents. I'll never forget the scene because we were leaving by train and my parents were standing on the platform, and I was already in the car, and we were holding hands. The window was open, and we held hands as long as we could, and the train started moving. And my parents ran with us holding hands, and then they had to let go. And what I remember more than anything else is looking back. They were smaller and smaller and smaller. These are tragedies that you have to live through to understand. Humans became so inhuman and caused that kind of tragedy as happened with us. But we were lucky. I mean, thank God we were able to get out.

>> Interviewer: So you and your sister, you got on the ship.

>> Heller: We got on the ship with \$8, and because I'm a big tipper, by the time I came to New York, I had \$1.60 left!
[laughing]

>> Interviewer: Which, even then, couldn't have gotten you very far.

>> Heller: No!

>> Interviewer: What were your first impressions? You and your sister, what did you feel when you were coming into New York Harbor?

>> Heller: Well, of course, we saw the statue. I got up 5:00 in the morning. I wanted to see the Statue of Liberty. We had read about it. It was wonderful, and in fact, I wrote a little poem about it years later. It was unbelievable, in a way, because what happens to you after you live under the kind of cruelty and police control -- because don't forget, the government sponsored the anti-Semitism. The government sponsored the violence. The government allowed it. They turned their back. So you live there a few months, you change. You change. I often think that we became like cows knowing we would go to be slaughtered. I mean, you just -- you become a different person.

My first impression was -- and this is interesting because, when I got off the boat, I saw police officers, and I saw how friendly they were with people and the contrast between the police officer in Vienna -- and there was that fear that you had of a uniform -- and here, this friendliness. That was the first sign of freedom. That was the first thing that I remember, and it's something -- it's a lesson, and I hope it always stays that

way, that our people -- that police officers are here to protect us, to help us, to be our friends.

well, anyhow, I had a job in Greenville, South Carolina, and I was able to go there. We found an aunt, by the way, my mother's sister, and they gave me the money to come to Greenville, and a sandwich.

>> Interviewer: Money and a sandwich. Where did your aunt live?

>> Heller: In Newark, New Jersey.

>> Interviewer: In Newark.

>> Heller: Uh-huh. They had been there for 50 years or so. They came -- not 50, but maybe 35, 40 years.

>> Interviewer: Did they put you on the train then?

>> Heller: They put me on the train and -- I smoked in those days -- and gave me a pack of cigarettes, a sandwich, and I came to Greenville. I still had that \$1.60 in my pocket.

>> Interviewer: What were your first impressions then of South Carolina?

>> Heller: Well, South Carolina was so different. It looked great because it was freedom. I would have slept on the streets, and I would have gladly scrubbed floors. It was a feeling -- it's hard to explain because it was the first time away from home. The language, I could not -- although I had taken -- I had a friend who could speak English, and for a few weeks before I left, I began to learn some words. So I could say "hello," "good-bye," and "thank you" and those kind of things.

I was picked up on the train by Mary Mills, who had become -- everybody thought there was a romantic relationship. There wasn't. It was a wonderful relationship between two human beings. She already was engaged when she picked me up at the station, and also the man who brought me here picked me up at the station. And an hour after I got here, I started to work.

>> Interviewer: An hour? [laughing]

>> Heller: Right.

>> Interviewer: Were you still with your sister?

>> Heller: No, my sister stayed in Newark until I could make sure she could get a job in Greenville.

>> Interviewer: And so she did follow then?

>> Heller: Ultimately, she came.

>> Interviewer: Okay, so an hour later, you were working.

>> Heller: I went to work.

>> Interviewer: Were you working at the trade that you were apprenticed to back in Vienna, or was it something different?

>> Heller: No, I worked in a shirt factory. The man who brought me over here owned a shirt factory, and I started off in the shipping department because that was the first floor, that was near his office, and he wanted to keep an eye on me. My first job was sweeping floors, which was my first job in Vienna as an apprentice! So by that time, I already knew how to sweep floors. The people were absolutely wonderful. Everybody -- I was sort of an oddity. The newspaper had written some stories and so on.

I have to tell you one other thing that's, I think, very touching, but also tells you my own feeling. The day after I came to Greenville -- and I stayed with a family -- somebody called me from the front office and said, "There is a Judge Plyler here to see you." And the first thing that came to my mind: My God, they're gonna send me back. I cannot tell you the fear I had. Well, it turned out that this tall, handsome, gray-haired man, Judge Plyler, came to say, "Welcome to Greenville. We're happy you are here. I will be president of Furman University this fall, and I would love for you to come and participate in any courses and meet the students." I don't think people realize what that visit meant to me. And there's a lesson in that too. You know, a kind word, a warm welcome, it changes your whole life. It makes a big difference.

Well, anyhow, I started working in the shirt factory. I made \$10 a week the first week I was there. You worked seven days a week, and you worked as long as you had to. You would come to work at 8, and you leave whenever the work is done. And I was grateful for that. I saved \$3 the first week, because I paid \$7 room and board. And life has been good to me. My sister came afterwards. Fortunately, my parents were able to come later. That was another miracle.

>> Interviewer: Oh, tell us about that, if you don't mind. I was gonna ask were you in communication with your parents all this time?

>> Heller: Yes, we wrote, and of course they -- we sent telegrams.

>> Interviewer: So you could still write.

>> Heller: Yes.

>> Interviewer: The mail wasn't intercepted.

>> Heller: No, the mail was not intercepted, but the mail was censored. But you were very careful what you wrote. I came with my clothes on my back. I mean, that's what I had. And I must say this, that you learn quickly that what matters is not what's on you; what matters is what's in you, because what I brought with me in me was the thing that sustained me here. It wasn't whether I had ten suits or one suit. That wasn't it. You learn from those experiences.

My parents, which were Polish quota, my mother took me to the American consulate to get my papers, and you had to stand in line for 24 hours a day. We stood in line in front of all kinds of government offices. We don't have time for all the minor miracles to tell you, but there was a lady sitting there that was going to examine my papers to make sure -- and I had to have a health examine, and I had to have papers that showed that I was morally okay, that I had not committed any crime. She had a very wonderful face, and I immediately liked her.

And when she examined my papers, she looked up, and she said, "Is this your mother." And I said, "Yes." And she says, "Are they coming with you?" And I don't know what made me say it. I said, "They cannot come now. They have to wait until their affairs are straightened out." And this woman gets up, and she takes my papers in a folder and puts in a file. That's all I know.

Several months later, when my parents wired me that they were coming and then when they came here -- I didn't have the money to go and meet them at the boat, but we did telephone, and I said, "How did you come here?" They had a call from the American consulate. This woman had put my papers into a preferred file because my sister and I were minors and gave my parents a preferred quota to follow us. And that's -- you know, you've got

to have luck. I've learned to believe in miracles, but I don't depend on them, you know.

>> Interviewer: Did they come to Greenville?

>> Heller: Ultimately. The man who brought me here and gave my sister a job gave my father a job. My mother was ill at the time. In fact, my father really could not work for long. It took a toll on them that was far greater than on me. My father was 50. So he didn't work for very long. But this man who brought me here gave me a wonderful opportunity, and I made progress in my work. Ironically, when my father came here, he came to work in the shipping department, and I became his boss, which he accepted. You know, those things became relatively unimportant.

>> Interviewer: Now let's just go back -- you mentioned meeting your future wife, and tell us how she came and where you, in fact, were married?

>> Heller: Well, I met Trude -- my wife's name is Trude -- I met her in 1937. The day I met her, I told her I would marry her. I was 17 already. I kept my word. She could not get out when I did. We did stay in touch through the mail over the years. She knew where I was. She -- and she ought to tell you her own story. She ultimately came to America with her mother. Her father was not able to come at that particular time. He was put in a camp.

And then we were married in Greenville, South Carolina. She came to Greenville, and we were married in 1942, so we've been married 49 years. Have a wonderful family. I have three children, ten grandchildren.

>> Interviewer: Are they all in Greenville, or are they scattered around?

>> Heller: No, no, they're scattered, as life is.

>> Interviewer: Before I ask you what your life was like after the war, later on in Greenville, I'd just like to know did you find that, once your English got better and you were able to speak English and understand English, how much curiosity or how much interest or how much knowledge did you find with the people that you worked with and lived with of what was going on in Europe?

>> Heller: Not much. In fact, the newspapers would write very small articles. It was not headlines. Very little. Once I was able to speak some English -- and it didn't take that long because you learn quickly if you have to.

>> Interviewer: The immersion method.

>> Heller: Yeah! I made a number of talks in churches and at the YMCA and YWCA and so on. I'll never forget one man at a church, when I spoke about what freedom means to me and the difference, freedom here and the lack of freedom in Austria, this man, during the question-and-answer period, got up and says, "It's not as free as you think it is here." And I said to him, "The fact that you can get up and say this without fear of being put in jail proves to me that there is freedom, and you have to understand what it was like." No, people did not.

>> Interviewer: Was that frustrating for you?

>> Heller: I mean people did not -- they *could* not, could not understand the cruelty of what was happening.

>> Interviewer: Was that frustrating, the fact that people did not seem to -- did you interpret it as lack of comprehension or lack of interest or --

>> Heller: Not lack of interest, and really, the media did not report it. We didn't have television, and not even everybody had a radio. You didn't have car radios, as many as you have today, so communication was totally different.

And then the other thing, too, in 1938, things were still pretty tough in this country. There was still a lot of unemployment, and I don't think people -- it wasn't a priority to think about what's happening somewhere else.

>> Interviewer: Once you arrived, did you find any evidence of anti-Semitism?

>> Heller: Very little. Very little. I had one big disappointment, which shocked me. When my wife and I were engaged, we went to look for apartments, and we found one apartment we liked very much. And I waited weeks and weeks to hear, and finally, the real estate agent said to me, he says, "Max, I don't know how to tell you this. It breaks my heart. But the owner of this apartment building does not want to have any Jews living there."

By contrast, what happened after that, Trude and I went looking for another apartment and met this wonderful lady that showed us an apartment within her house. And I said, "You know we are Jewish?" And she said, "That's wonderful. Why not? I would love to have you." And she wanted \$60 a month rent, and I said, "Gee, we simply can't afford to pay that much." And she said to me, she says, "I like you two. You're a nice couple. I will give it to you for less." And I said, "No, no, no. I don't want a bargain. It's worth that much. I simply can't afford it." So here was a good deed that offset this bad experience I had with the other people. So it's -- you know, I live on the good memories because, if you live on the bad memories, you can't survive. So, yes, there was some, but it was -- you can't

compare that to -- it certainly wasn't -- there was nothing organized about it.

>> Interviewer: Do you remember how you felt when -- I assume you followed the war news with great interest, and do you remember the end of the war and how you felt when the war was actually over?

>> Heller: Oh, yes, yeah, yeah.

>> Interviewer: Were there big celebrations in Greenville?

>> Heller: There were, yes. It was tremendous, tremendous. Let me say this about the United States. If it had not been for America, Hitler may have been the one who survived in Europe. It was the American population, it was the American leadership, it was the American genius and, more than anything else, people willing to bleed, to give their lives in blood, to go over there and fight a war that was thousands of miles away -- you know, in those days, you couldn't jet to Europe in six hours. It was even more removed in our own mind because it took a week by boat or so. And here is this great country of ours, willing to do this. And that's not the first time. It had happened before.

I get very offended when America is criticized unjustly. I'm not saying that we can't express ourselves, but let's just remember what this country did. Let's remember, it was the American soldier who liberated the camps. And it was American money that helped to rebuild Europe. You know, my God, what a people we are.

>> Interviewer: When do you remember -- and this might be a hard thing for you to remember exactly, but I'm curious, when did you remember feeling American?

>> Heller: When I started dreaming in English and counting. It's an interesting question, but it's the truth.

>> Interviewer: And when did that happen?

>> Heller: I was here just a few months. I loved it from the moment I came here. When I was a youngster in Vienna, I used to go to all these American movies, and Gary Cooper -- what is it, "Mr. Deeds Goes to Washington" or something like that? I would walk out of the movie, and I would imitate -- I couldn't speak English of course, but I would make it sound like I could speak English. I was in love with America and Americans. So this was -- oh, it was -- it wasn't hard for me!

>> Interviewer: It wasn't hard at all.

>> Heller: No.

>> Interviewer: So after the war ended, if you could just tell us a bit about your life and then your public life.

>> Heller: Well, we were married in 1942, and after the war ended -- I had worked for this man -- it was a shirt factory -- for seven years. And I had made -- well, I shouldn't say I had made. I should say that he gave me a number of wonderful opportunities, and, in fact, I became general manager of that company and a vice president. But I had always been ambitious about going in business for myself, and I had told him that the day I came. I said, "I'll never leave you, but there's one thing I want to do" -- remember, I was already 18. I said, "One day, I would like to go in business for myself."

well, anyhow, I did. We had saved up some money. My wife and I, we were both working, and we saved enough money. I found a man who became a partner with me, and I went into business, a shirt business. Not in Greenville because I didn't want to compete,

but in a small town called Williamston. And I found wonderful people there, and I did well in that business. It started in 1946, and then ultimately, my partner and I split, and I started another company in Greenville, also in the shirt business, making children's wear.

And during that time, I already became very much involved in the community. I felt that I wanted to be -- I wanted to do something. My first involvement was with, of all people -- the Christian women had an organization that concerned itself about youthful offenders, first and youthful offenders. That was my first involvement in the community, and I was active in that. And so I always became active.

I sold my business in 1962, and that was a philosophical decision. I had seen too many people get hung up on money. And Trude, my wife, was wonderful about that when I said to her, "I think I want to sell the business and devote my life to the public," and there was no question that that was her decision as well as mine.

So I became even more interested in public life, and I was asked to run for mayor, and I said, "No, I'm gonna start on the bottom. I'll run for city council." And I did, and I served two years with city council, and I became mayor in 1971, and I served for eight years. That was a wonderful experience. I mean, that was really -- one day, I'm gonna write a book about that. And then in 1979 when Governor Riley took office, he asked me to chair the State Development Board, and I became chairman of that, and I served for over four years.

And this has been my life. It's been a wonderful life. The community has responded. I feel we still have a lot to do. Today especially, I think the needs of people are greater than ever. And if you were to ask me, "what is it that bothers you today," what bothers me today is that, unfortunately, socially our lives

have changed, so our society has changed. It's almost tearing itself apart. The family as a unit has changed. Children have changed. Our morals have changed. I think we need to pull together again. And the only way that can be done is not by government. I mean, that's just sheer nonsense, sheer nonsense. It's only by people that need to wake up and say we've got to really understand what is the importance of life. It's not this -- you know, for the last 10, 15 years, it has been -- the desire to make money, that's been such a priority, and look what it has brought us. I mean, the scandals not only on Wall Street, but even look what happened in Columbia, South Carolina, and look what's happening in other states, in Washington, for that matter.

So what I would say, today has to be a call back to the basics: what's in you, not what's on you...that we are all human beings, that we really need to help each other because we are -- we're going. I didn't mean to preach! I think people need to become more involved to help those who cannot help themselves and give a hand to people instead of a handout, because that's the only way our society can improve, and it needs some improving at the moment. There's just no question about it.

>> Interviewer: In your sort of half -- well, it's almost 50 -- over 50 years now in South Carolina --

>> Heller: Fifty-three years.

>> Interviewer: Fifty-three years. You've seen, obviously, great changes in this state.

>> Heller: Yes.

>> Interviewer: Have most of them been positive, do you think?

>> Heller: Oh, yes, no question about it. Wonderful. I mean, just think about...I worked in a plant. When I first started, I was making \$10 a week. Had I been black, I probably would have made \$7 a week. When I first saw a water cooler that had a sign that said "Colored," I thought the water was going to be pink. [interviewer laughing] No, I'm serious.

Of course it's changed. It's wonderful, the change, and what is so wonderful is that the change took place without any violence and that so many people were relieved. I'm not speaking only about those that were discriminated against. But I do know -- for instance, when I became mayor, we integrated all commissions, and the people that were on those commissions, the white community, said, "Thank God we're doing this." And it was a pleasure to see a bricklayer next to a banker, both working for the good of Greenville. So our society, without a doubt, has made tremendous -- I'm very proud of the progress that has been made. Sure, there's still spots here and there. You know, you'll find that. But take as a whole, South Carolina can be very proud.

>> Interviewer: I'd just like to ask you something following up on your shock about segregation when you discovered it. Do you think that -- you know, there's been so much lately with antagonism between blacks and Jews.

>> Heller: Mm-hmm.

>> Interviewer: Do you think that there is some -- I'm not going to say a lesson that can be learned -- some bond or some way that a rapprochement can take place between the black and Jewish communities? Do you have any ideas about that?

>> Heller: Well, I think we need to look for positive leadership in both, and we must talk. It is tragic, and it is really tragic that there should be those kind of problems. But look what

happens. Look at some of the leadership that has created that. It's almost like somebody wants to put oil on the fire instead of trying to dampen it, instead of trying to cool it. So it's a question of leadership, and it's a question of communication. And people must learn not to listen to lies. I mean, people have to ask questions. I saw in the paper not long ago, there's a professor who made a -- a black -- in New York City, I think. I've forgotten the name of --

>> Interviewer: Jeffries.

>> Heller: Jeffries. Who made a statement that AIDS is chemically produced and this is a plot by the white community. Now, why would any student believe that? I mean, people have to think. So those kind -- whenever somebody says those things, somebody else must speak up and tell the truth. We get along very well.

I mean, when you, when you -- I'll never forget when Clemson was integrated, a reporter for a national -- I won't mention his name -- came down here to see what was happening. And Clemson integrated. There was no -- there were maybe a few people carrying placards. And I happened to sit next to him in a restaurant, and he started to talk to me, and he says, "well, there's nothing for me to do here." And I said, "You took pictures only of those handful that were carrying the placards." He says, "well, you've got to do something."

>> Interviewer: Is there anything else that you'd just like to add or anything else that you'd like to say?

>> Heller: Well, I think we all need to examine ourselves. I think I've said enough about that. I want to say this about freedom. Freedom is not free. Freedom is not given. Freedom is earned, and you have to work at it. The rest of the world is changing. To me, it is remarkable what has happened without

hardly any bloodshed in Russia or Eastern Europe. It's absolutely remarkable. But the people in Russia still think that because they say today, "I want democracy, and I have freedom," that the next day they're gonna find gold in the streets. You have to work at it. And it comes with pain. It's almost like you don't give birth to a child -- there's nothing more wonderful than to give life, but even that, you do with pain.

And people have to understand that. In our own country, people have to understand that freedom, you have to deserve it. It's not something that you own. You don't own it, and it's an ongoing thing. All in all, I am very optimistic about the future, despite all of these problems we have, because somehow we always respond. We always respond, and we will again. And of course you are a professor, and you work with young people. They are the ones, they are the ones that are gonna have to carry the banner. You know, it's like a relay race. I hand it to a young person, and you hand it to another person, and it's got to go on like that, so.

>> Interviewer: Thank you very much, Mr. Heller. I appreciate it.

>> Heller: Thank you.

00:50:55