

>> Interviewer: How old were you when the war ended?

>> Becker: Let's see. I was born in September 1929, so by the end of the war in 1945, I was 14 1/2.

>> Interviewer: So with the war ending and the Russians were --

>> Becker: Actually, I was 15 1/2.

>> Interviewer: Fifteen. The Russians were moving in. What happened with your family?

>> Becker: The Russians were moving in. It took a week for them to occupy Potsdam because there was German resistance, and so there was fighting in the streets. We spent one week down in the basement, where we always had gone for air raids, and waited until all the fighting was over. On one occasion -- we made periodic trips to the house -- it was a four-story apartment house in which we lived. And on one occasion, I was looking out the window -- we were making trips to make sure that everything was all right and that nothing was burning, for example. And on one occasion, a Russian shell exploded, and I became injured and thought, well, you know, if things turn out right, then I'm going to get the German equivalent of the -- what is it called -- the Purple Heart. But, of course, that was not done.

So anyway, after a week of fighting, the Russians were there for good, and we emerged from our basements again into the daylight and saw the destruction that had been wrought, in addition to the bombing that had occurred earlier. But the street fighting had resulted in destruction of a few more houses. So then there were the Russians, and...

>> Interviewer: How did they treat you? I mean, what was --

>> Becker: The Russians treated -- well, aside from the first few days of raping and looting -- and in the house in which I lived, among the female population, I would say that half of them were raped by the Russians, on one occasion or another, until the Russian military command reimposed order on the troops, and then they behaved. But aside from that, we had very little contact with them. They did their thing. They were the occupying troops. They lived their own lives, and we lived ours. They just were there, but we had no direct contact with them, nor did they make life difficult for us.

Until one day when -- the janitor in our house turned out to be a card-carrying Communist, and he went -- and what the Russians did was to have so-called liaison persons in every house, especially apartment houses, to be a liaison between the community that lived in the house and the police precinct. It was, of course, a way of keeping track of people. And the liaison person in our building happened to be the janitor, who also, as I learned, was a card-carrying Communist, had been a Communist all his life, and simply had been very careful about hiding this and had survived under Hitler, but once the Russians came in, his day had come.

And so he went to the police and denounced me as having been a very strong Nazi and having played a great role in Hitler's Reich. And, indeed, I was a Nazi. I mean, I think it must be clear by now that -- later on, I was asking myself what kind of a Nazi was I, and I think I was 150% Nazi. That's how strongly I believed in the system and in what Hitler was doing. But I had never played any significant role. As I say, at the age of 14, 15, what can you possibly do?

So I was picked up by the Russians and interrogated, and when they realized that I was really quite harmless, I was released

again. And then a few weeks later, I was picked up once more and was again taken to prison and stayed this time -- the first time, it was about two weeks. The second time, it was about a week. And again was interrogated. I was never quite told why I was arrested and taken to prison. And then, again, at the end of the week, I was released, and that's when we decided to leave, because things were becoming very uncertain.

>> Interviewer: When the war was over and the Russians were there and, obviously, the Third Reich was no more, how did you feel, I mean, as a 150% Nazi?

>> Becker: On one hand, I felt very relieved. The war was over, the danger to our lives was over, and we could now start something new. On the other hand, I felt crushed. I felt that Germany, just like after the First World War, had to start all over again, under occupation and so on. And that's when this relearning, this reeducation process began on my own side, the one that, as I said, lasted about two years. Then when we had moved to Bremen, I also became a member of a Bremen boys' club, as it was called, an organization that was founded by American soldiers as part of an American government program to get the German youth off the streets and into some kind of activity that was a little bit more channeled, and it was also designed to introduce us to democracy and to make little democrats out of us, which it succeeded very well in doing.

>> Interviewer: Was that program also to sort of desensitize you from the Nazi way of thinking?

>> Becker: You mean to, to, to...to make -- to transform little Nazis into little democrats?

>> Interviewer: Yeah.

>> Becker: Yes, that was clearly one of the objectives. Except that, in my case, I think the indoctrination, as a little Nazi, was much stronger than in most of the other cases. I noticed this when I left the school and became a civilian in 1943, that, at that time, the involvement of my fellow schoolmates with party matters, even with the Hitler Youth, was much less than my experience had been. I had sort of imbibed it from morning till night. I had drunk it. I had ate it. I had eaten it. It was part of my life. When I went out of the school, most of my life was concerned with normal things that civilians do, and the party itself was only effective when I went to my Hitler Youth meetings.

>> Interviewer: Do you think after a two-year process -- I mean, you talk about coming to the realization of what the Nazis had done. Did it only take you two years to work through that?

>> Becker: It took me two years to accept that Germans had killed Jews, that Germans had committed atrocities. It took me much longer to come to terms with the rest of it, and I don't think I have come to terms with it yet. You asked me earlier whether I had children, and my answer is no. And one of the reasons that I never wanted children was because I did not want to create children in a world which was capable of doing such -- which was capable of such brutalities as those which I had learned about. I had lived, grown up in an environment in which I missed love, the love of mother and child and so on, and that was another experience which I did not want to see repeated, because clearly my mother did not have -- my parents did not have their children for them to end up in a boarding school. But circumstances had brought this about, and I was smart enough to realize that, if I had children, I could not control their fate. I could not even control my own. Consequently, that's why I didn't want to have any children, and the same is true for my two brothers, except that in one case he has children. But the

other one doesn't. So, again, there's, I think, a similarity in the experience.

In that sense -- and, of course, not only on the personal level with respect to children, but...I think that's why I became a historian. I wanted to understand what had happened to Germany and what had happened to me, and it has helped me to understand. It has not made me accept things. I still don't -- in other words, there is a difference between understanding something in the sense of comprehending it intellectually and the other of simply saying, "Well, that's too bad; that's the way it was." To me, to this day, it is painful to think about some of these things and to recall them and to be aware of how frail civilization is, how weak human beings are, and how human beings are capable of doing great things and beautiful things at the same time that they are capable of committing enormous atrocities. It's part of the human experience, I guess.

But again here, I think that the juxtaposition or the contrast between growing up in a very idealized situation -- because we were filled with Nazi ideology, but from the way we saw it, it was good; it was nothing bad. That it was also bad was something that we only learned later. So growing up in an almost idealized version of life, I think it was very difficult for me to separate that, to divorce that, to divorce myself from that and to become aware of the reality of life, which is, very many times, quite ugly.

>> Interviewer: You and your family moved to Bremen, and then how did you come to the United States?

>> Becker: I think as a result of my activity in the Bremen boys' club and my membership. The leaders of the Bremen boys' club were American soldiers, ultimately a lieutenant. And when he was recalled to return to the United States, there was a brief time when there was no leadership. And in the meantime,

the club had connections with several Americans over here and one family, in particular, living in Rochester, New York, which, as soon as it learned about this club, had written and had said, "We are willing to help; what can you use?" And the American officer in charge wrote back, "We can use anything you can send: food, clothing, money," not necessarily in that order. And so this family, through membership in various charitable organizations, had collected food and clothing and had sent this over for distribution among the members, as well as families and other needy people.

And when the American officer was rotated home, there was no one who could maintain contact with this family. I happened to speak the best English in the club, and so I was asked to take over the correspondence on behalf of the club. And after corresponding with this family for about two years, slowly personal elements crept into the initially purely business arrangements or correspondence, and ultimately, I asked this family whether it would be willing to sponsor me to come to this country. And they were willing to do that, and so I ended up here.

And I think one of the reasons was that I wanted to get out of Germany. You know, you asked me about my experiences or my reaction, and I think I wanted to get away from Germany. I wanted to get away from a country and a people that was capable of doing what the Germans had done during the war. It was not until later that I realized, I think, that -- I was a very slow learner -- that other people, other populations, other countries are capable of doing precisely the same things, not necessarily to the same people but in their own way, that life can indeed be very ugly, and that the Germans happened to be the ones who did it between 1939 and 1945. But that was one of the reasons why I wanted to get out Germany, to go to a different part of the world.

>> Interviewer: Were you running away from your past? Were you denying your past?

>> Becker: No, it was not that I was denying my past. I was trying to separate myself from it. I was not running away from it. In fact, as I said, that's why I became a historian. I wanted to find out what was going on, what had gone on, what had gone wrong. So I wanted to deal with it in order to understand it. But my idea about leaving Germany, I think, was primarily motivated by the fact that I wanted to get away from that part of my life.

>> Interviewer: As a historian or as someone who also went through this experience, how did this happen?

>> Becker: God, people are still arguing that.

>> Interviewer: Well, give me Dr. Peter Becker's perspective of how this happened.

>> Becker: A number of circumstances. Clearly, the lost First world war was a great ingredient, a strong ingredient. Followed by the Versailles Treaty, which most Germans, in fact, if not all Germans, regarded as totally unjust. Then you had a period of chaos in the Weimar Republic; that is, chaos in the beginning, the first two years, revolutionary uprisings by Communists as well as by Rightists. Finally, you had a reasonable, orderly, democratic form of government. And what most people don't realize is that, between 1925 and 1929, life was getting very, very much better in Germany so that by 1929 the standard of living, for example, had essentially reached that which had existed in 1913, 1914.

But then came the Depression, and then came Hitler. And I think it was the Depression together with Hitler, because Hitler had been around in Germany, first making his great appearance in

1923 when he attempted his putsch, which was beaten down by the Bavarian police, and he ended up in jail. And then he came out again after serving only a very brief period of time in prison, but his party was really nothing and did not revive until 1929, 1930, as a result of the Depression because then all of the dissatisfactions, the discontent that had been present in Germany in 1918, 1919, 1920, which had then become subdued over time, now all of a sudden came to the fore again. And if it had not been for Hitler -- and this is where he comes in as a particular element -- if there had not been a Hitler, if there had only been the other political parties, it is very questionable whether Germany would have become a Nazi dictatorship.

What would have happened in Germany is the same as happened in all the other European countries, who also, in their own way, were affected by the Depression and bad times. They ultimately adjusted and came out of them. Of course, Hitler and Germany had the example of Mussolini and the Italians. Mussolini had come to power in Italy in 1922. But the Germans always tended to look down upon the Italians, and even though Hitler later on claimed that he took some lessons from Mussolini and that he regarded him as his great mentor, in fact he also looked down upon Mussolini and regarded him as a nothing.

And so, in that sense, it was Hitler himself who, I think, made the difference. It was Hitler's ability to mobilize people, to influence them, Hitler's enormous oratorical abilities, his ability to address himself to different groups in the population and to speak to them as though he were speaking only to them and, at the same time, to claim that he was the one who had the recipe for getting Germany out of its difficulties, for overcoming the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, for making Germany economically strong again, for making Germany respected again. I think that is what helped him to become the Chancellor of Germany in 1933.



And even then, as powerful as he was, as convincing as he was, because he had this charisma about him that most people felt -- there were very few who were immune to it. The French ambassador to Germany, François-Poncet, in his memoirs describes how he was amazed how people were taken in when he went to party rallies where Hitler spoke, how mesmerized people were and how they listened to every word that came out of Hitler's mouth and how they seemed to have lost all of their critical faculties. He was one of the few -- and maybe it required to be a Frenchman or to be an outsider from a different system -- to see this. But most Germans were taken in hook, line, and sinker by the message that they heard.

Even at that, though, Hitler was elected with only 42% of the Nazi vote; that is, of the German vote that was given to the Nazis. The other 8%, 9% was another party, which formed a coalition with the Nazis, and, therefore, Hitler was able to form a government. Then, of course, once Hitler was in power, he utilized the government's power that he had to make sure that his party was the only one that survived, and then he gradually established his control over Germany. Whether it was totally totalitarian, historians debate, but those are the fine points, and essentially, it was a totalitarian dictatorship.

Does that answer your question?

>> Interviewer: Yes. Is there -- well, do you as a historian, do you see -- would you be aware if this were happening again? Can these same type of things come together, or events come together, where another Hitler could come to power and the same thing could happen? I mean, how do we prevent that?

>> Becker: I can give you one guarantee: a Hitler would never come to power again in Germany. In other words, I think when you have lived through such an environment, when you have

experienced it, when you have seen the devastating results -- and this is, I think, what is the difference between the end of world war II and the end of world war I in Germany. In Germany, after world war I, Germans were convinced that they had lost the war, but that it had been under very peculiar circumstances and they had not really lost it and they didn't really deserve the fate that was meted out to them. And therefore, you had the possibility for the reactionaries, for the Rightists to continue to wield influence.

After 1945, it was totally different. If any German wanted to know what Hitler had brought to Germany, all he had to do was go outside and look, and he could see it: the destruction of Germany, the destruction of the economy, an occupied country where the occupiers drove home every day that they were the ones who were now governing Germany. So I think that -- well, maybe I shouldn't say forever because such memories last only as long as the people who have experienced them. Maybe another generation or two, someone could come along. But I think that the knowledge in Germany is now part of the, of the...general psyche, of the general knowledge. I think that a Hitler in Germany would be impossible.

>> Interviewer: Well, Hitler aside, let's say in 100 or 200 years. What can we do now to perpetuate, in our children and their children and their children, that this should never happen again?

>> Becker: There is a little saying on one of the statues on the pillars on the National Archives in Washington, which says, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." And I'm not sure who said it. I've forgotten. I should know, but I don't. I think vigilance is the order of the day. I think that you have people like Hitler under different guises, even religious ones, who would like to establish themselves in full power. You have people who will follow such movements, such blandishments,

without questioning too much because whatever convinces them is so strong that they don't see anything else. You have people who wish to control others, under various guises.

And I think the only thing that prevents you from falling into that trap is eternal vigilance: that is, making sure that everyone knows everything, that there are no secrets, that you have a viable and strong press, which, even though it may go to extremes occasionally, is one of the absolute safeguards of a political system which prides itself and which needs openness and which needs popular participation. I think that what individuals have to realize is that, in any society, they have to become politically active, not necessarily in the sense of joining a party, but contributing their share to society, not letting *some* people do it.

In Germany, until -- well, to some extent, even today, but I think less so after 1945 than before, we grew up with the idea, politics is dirty and decent people don't become involved in politics, and we learned this even under Hitler. No more political system, you know, existed at the time. Yet somehow that was not political. That was national. That was on a different plane from the normal, dirty party politics and looking for personal advantage and greed and so on.

So consequently, if people retain their awareness that society is imperfect, that people are imperfect, and that you have people who are willing to sell out because somehow promises are made that their life will be easier and that, at the same time, you have people who are perfectly willing to take advantage of such circumstances to gain power for themselves, if you have that, I think you can prevent it.

>> Interviewer: You told me earlier that, at the University of South Carolina, you teach modern German history. Do you teach these things to your students?

>> Becker: Yes.

>> Interviewer: Do you tell them about your past?

>> Becker: I have to be careful. I don't want to go on a soapbox, and I don't want to be someone who broadcasts a personal message. But I use my experience in order to illuminate what was going on in Germany during Hitler's time and afterwards, and I use my conviction that it requires active participation as a citizen in order to keep society open and strong. Yes, I use that. I do that.

>> Interviewer: Do you feel like you've personally worked your way through this experience, or how do you feel about it today when you look back and you know the atrocities that the Germans committed -- and you were a part of that machine, maybe not from the sense that you did any of the committing, but you were probably on your way to participating had it lasted.

>> Becker: That is a thought which frightens me to this very day. The knowledge that, had Germany won the war or had I been only two or three years older, had I been drafted, had I become possibly a member of the SS -- which was a very great likelihood because we were being recruited by the SS all the time, and I had no objections to the SS. I thought the SS was a great organization. Had I become a member of the SS, had I been forced -- had I been, let's say, detached as a guard or in some capacity to a concentration camp, had I been assigned to a unit, a police unit like the Einsatzgruppen in 1940 in Lithuania and in other areas and in Russia in 1941, which did nothing but shoot people, Jews particularly, what would I have done? I don't know.

I, I...I would hope that I would have had enough sense to realize that what I was being asked to do was a great crime, but

I don't know whether I would have had that internal strength or that knowledge, or whether I would have been swept up in the events and whether I would have become as mindless a follower of Hitler as all the others were who did not speak out, who committed crimes, and who did not even blink an eye. That's a frightening thought, and it's something to which I still, to this day, I don't know the answer. And I think I'm very fortunate in the sense that I never had to answer that question.

>> Interviewer: But you've had to ask yourself that question.

>> Becker: Yes, yes.

>> Interviewer: And you really don't think you know the answer?

>> Becker: What I know now is quite different from what I knew then. Now I don't think I would be able to do it. But at the age of 17 or 18, having been in an environment which completely indoctrinated me to believe that Hitler was right and good and great and that the Jews were...insects, were parasites, were like cockroaches, I don't know whether my inborn humanity would have been strong enough, because my question then is, what happened to the humanity of the other people who were guards in concentration camps and who were members of the Einsatzgruppen? Where was their humanity? Where was their training as decent people, as Christians? So if they were not able to counteract it, why should I have been able to do it, especially since I had had the benefit of such intensive -- as I said, subtle, but nevertheless intensive indoctrination?

>> Interviewer: Did you ever come into contact with any of the Hitler Youth as they were going along who refused to participate in the Hitler Youth activities --

>> Becker: No.

>> Interviewer: -- or, once they were drafted as soldiers, who wouldn't participate in the shooting?

>> Becker: No, I, I -- by that time, the soldiers no longer did the shooting. That was only in the beginning stages before the camps had been set up to operate for -- you know, as SS -- the "Final Solution" operation, because that did not happen until 1942. So in the initial stages, when the German troops marched into the Baltic states and into Poland and into Russia, the initial activities were done by special police units, which were incorporated with SS units, the Einsatzgruppen, and these were essentially firing squads on a large level, and they sent in their reports of how many tens and hundreds of thousands of Jews they had killed.

And the camps really did not become extermination camps until they had been set up and had become operative. And here again, the extermination camps were in Poland, not in Germany. Yes, of course people were killed in Dachau and in Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen and all the other camps, but it was sort of as a side affair. It was a marginal activity. It was not the main activity. Whereas in the extermination camps -- Auschwitz, which also happened to be a labor camp -- but in the extermination camps -- Sobibor, Treblinka, and so on -- whose sole purpose was to kill people, that didn't happen until 1942.

>> Interviewer: The young men that you were associated with, none of them ever questioned any of this philosophy.

>> Becker: No, none.

>> Interviewer: None of them ever said, I don't want to participate in this; this is not good; this is evil; this is bad. I mean, so their humanity -- where was their humanity?

>> Becker: Well, again here, until the end of the war, we did not know. Oh, I knew that concentration camps existed. As I told you earlier, I had learned from my grandfather that there was a camp quite nearby where he lived, and Sachsenhausen was on the outskirts of Oranienburg. I never saw the camp. As a little boy, I was not taken there. And I knew that concentration camps existed. I had heard about other concentration camps, but only in a very...vague way, not with the name of any particular camp, but simply of the fact that people did talk about concentration camps, so at least I had heard about them. And I regarded them merely as camps in which people were incarcerated who were enemies of the Germans during the war who needed to be kept away from being able to do harm.

So again here, it was not until after the war that I realized what the concentration camps really denoted, what they really were. And so there would have been no -- and the other boys and girls with whom I grew up had as little experience or as little knowledge. In other words, none of us knew, ultimately, what might happen to us or what we might be called upon to do. Being in the Hitler Youth was fun. Once I was out of the institution, out of the Napolá school, I enjoyed life and being a member of the Hitler Youth. It was -- we were not faced with reality. We were not asked to do anything that was dastardly, criminal, wicked, or anything.

>> Interviewer: Were you looking forward to going into the military? Was that your plan at 14 1/2 or 15?

>> Becker: No. At that time, I was thinking, as I said, of the navy -- and, yeah, that would be military. I had not given great thought to what I was ultimately going to do, the fact that I might go to college or university and graduate school. All these were thoughts which really had not occurred to me at that time. We were so engrossed and so enmeshed in surviving the war, winning or otherwise.

And until the very last minute, I thought we were winning because I was also a full believer in the propaganda which said that the Germans were working on "wonder weapons" -- and the V-1, of course, when they began to be fired, was one of those -- and that Germany clearly was going to make a turnaround of its fortunes at the last minute. We were told, for example -- and here, Frederick the Great comes in again in the historical part -- we were told that what had happened to Frederick the Great in 19 -- I'm sorry, in 17 -- when was it? 1756, at the end of the Seven Years War -- no, sorry, that's when it started. It must have been in 1762. In 1762, when the Russian Empress Elizabeth died unexpectedly, which broke up the coalition arranged against Prussia at that time, and her son Peter III came to the throne, who was a great admirer of Frederick and immediately made peace with him and, thereby, saved Prussia from total extinction, that this event was quite similar to Roosevelt's death in 1945, that that meant that internal difficulties in America would come to the fore, that America would leave the coalition against Germany, that the next president would not be as much of a hater of Germans, which Roosevelt was described to us, and so America would leave the coalition, and Germany would still be able to deal with the English and the French and the Russians, but that once America was out of the war, all things, Germany's fate would turn around.

So it was virtually until the day that the Russians showed up on the outskirts of Potsdam and began to shell it and began street fighting that I was convinced that Germany would win the war. It shows you how strong indoctrination and propaganda can be and how easily people can be misled.

>> Interviewer: That's scary. What do think the modern-day German feeling is about the atrocities that took place in world war II? Is there a collective guilt?



>> Becker: No, I don't think there is collective guilt, and there should not be. I've always thought that the notion of collective guilt is a wrong one. That is, it's too easy. It is individuals who commit crimes, not society. Granted, there may be circumstances and there may be forces at work in society which drive the individual to commit wrongs. But ultimately, it's the individual himself, although there is a gray area.

But primarily, Germans today feel that, yes, there was Hitler, and there was the extermination of the Jews, and there were concentration camps and everything else that was associated with the Second World War, but that it is over. And I think people regard it as something that is part of their past, but not something of which they want to be reminded every day. And the argument that I have heard, in my trips to Germany, is that, after all, more than half of the people now living in Germany, more than half, was born after 1945, had no contact, no responsibility, no involvement at all in what happened under the Nazis and that the other half is aging and dying off very quickly and, therefore, that it is unjust -- that it is perfectly acceptable and perfectly all right to have this as part of history being taught in German schools and being part of the German consciousness in the sense of having been part of the German past, but not as something that should be held over the Germans as a club and for which they should feel guilty and for which they should pay out money.

>> Interviewer: Why would the Germans in modern-day time do something like sell poison gas to a country like Iraq?

>> Becker: I find that hard to understand, impossible to understand.

>> Interviewer: And these are probably people born after 1945 that are doing this.

>> Becker: Yes. I think you have people who -- well, in any society, you have people who are so self-centered and so without conscience that the only thing that counts is to make their mark in society, to rise to the top with whatever circumstances -- under whatever circumstances, to make money, to become important. And of course the capitalistic ethic has taken a strong hold in Germany, after the war, which in some cases is good; in some others, it is bad. But you have a free economy, and you have people who want to make money and who are faced with competition. And so someone comes along and says, "You are a chemical company; I want you to" -- like the Imhausen plant which sold equipment and know-how to Gaddafi in Libya and others who have sold equipment to Iraq, who say, "well, we are not using this; we are merely selling it," and who might even have been able to delude themselves into thinking that what they were doing really was not wrong, that, after all, they were merely selling equipment or selling recipes for chemical formulas, that they were not going to apply them, and, therefore, they divorced themselves from what actually was going to happen. This is, I think, a very facile explanation, and it doesn't, of course, hold water under scrutiny. But something like that, I think, must have gone through these people's minds.

>> Interviewer: After you came to America, tell me how you ended up in South Carolina.

>> Becker: I lived in Rochester for a year and worked for Eastman Kodak. Then I was drafted into the American army, which gave me a choice. It called me down to the draft board and said -- I knew that I had to register with the draft board because that was a law on the books that, if you were within the draftable age of 18 1/2 and 26, you had to register with the draft board within six months after arrival, even if you were an alien. So since I didn't relish the idea -- I was 22 when I came -- I did not relish the idea of joining any military after my experiences during the preceding several years, so I waited five

months and 29 days, and then I went down to the draft board and registered and was assured that I would have nothing to fear, that America was not drafting aliens at the time, and so I could go home assured, and I did. Until a short while later, the Congress apparently passed a different law, which allowed aliens to be drafted under certain circumstances, and this was the time of the Korean War.

So I was asked to come down to the draft board, and I was given two slips of paper. On one of them, if I had signed it, I would have acknowledged that, as an alien, I could not be drafted into the United States Armed Forces against my will, but that if I refused to be drafted, I also would lose my right to citizenship forever. The other simply stated, "I have no objections to serving in the United States Armed Forces." And since by that time, half a year later after my arrival, I decided, yes, I definitely wanted to stay here, that's the one I signed. And so a short time after that, I ended up being a defender of the new fatherland.

And I thought that was very bad, and I hated the idea, but then I discovered that one of the benefits of being a GI in those days was that you were entitled to the GI Bill. So when I got out, I decided to go to college, and that's what I did. And so I first went to the University of Chicago for two years. Then I ended up at the University of North Texas for two years, for reasons which I really don't think are germane in this particular circumstance, and then went to graduate school at Stanford.

And when I was ready to look for a job, I went to a convention of the American Historical Association in San Francisco, interviewed with a great number of people who were looking for German historians of one type or another, and ultimately also talked to the head of the department, Dr. Oaks, of the Department of History in the University of South Carolina and

decided, ultimately, that that is where I was going to go; in particular, because the history department here, until my arrival in '66, had had no German history. It was a very small department. It consisted of 14 people, and I was one of seven who was being added in 1966. And I was going to be *the* German historian, and I had an unlimited book-buying budget to beef up the library, and that was something that no other university was offering me, and so I accepted it and came here.

>> Interviewer: And been here since.

>> Becker: And I've been here ever since. And it was strange when I was first introduced to people and I was told, "well, this one has been here 8 years, and this one has been here 11 years." And I said to myself, in my youthful ignorance and naiveté, How can anyone stay in one place for such a long time? And 25 years later, I discovered it's very easy.

>> Interviewer: Dr. Becker, we're gonna bring this to a close, and in conclusion, are there any last comments you would like to make? Is there anything else that you would like to add, anything?

>> Becker: No, except maybe to come back to one question which you asked: Have I come to terms with my past? And the answer is no.

>> Interviewer: Thank you, Dr. Becker.

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