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AN INTERVIEW WITH FRED D. VAN AKEN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Holyoak: This begins an interview on July 25, 2000 in Berkeley, California with Mr. Fred D. Van Aken. Mr. Van Aken, I thank you very much for coming this morning. It's a long way from Los Altos to here, at least with the traffic here, and I'd like you to begin by telling me, if you would please, where you were born and when, and then a little about your father and your mother.

Fred D. Van Aken: Yes, I was born in November 1922 in Aachen, Germany, together with my twin brother. And Aachen is right on the border of Holland and Belgium. My father had been born there, and my grandparents lived there, but I only knew my grandmother. She died about when I was four. My mother came from a small town about twenty-five miles from Frankfurt, a town named Alzey, where her father had a department store and a wholesale business. We were a Jewish family, but only by designation because nobody in the family, none of our friends, ever practiced any Judaism. And we just considered ourselves completely assimilated, until Hitler came along and decided that we were Jewish, by designation essentially, because we didn't feel Jewish.

SH: Your grandparents on your father's side, what was their occupation?

FV: My father's father had a wholesale cloth business, but I know very little about that. My father himself founded a textile mill after World War I, about 1920, I believe. It was not a very large factory, but his cloth was very expensive, he always told me. He said he sold the most expensive men's cloth in Germany, in Europe.

SH: Did he have to do a lot of traveling?

FV: He traveled a lot because … he did the selling for his firm. And the interesting part to me was that he would not wear his own cloth. When he had a suit made, he would buy English cloth. He said it was finished better than his. And it would have been gauche to have your own cloth on. In those days you didn't advertise like we do today. [laughter]

SH: Did you have other siblings beside your twin brother?

FV: I had a sister two years older, yeah.

SH: Do you know the story of how your parents met?

FV: No. I never heard that story. I heard, my brother claimed, that they were introduced. This was after World War I, and there was a shortage of men, I guess, and you didn't marry just anybody. It had to be from the right kind of family, I guess. So they were introduced somehow, and that's how it happened.

SH: I just wondered how often your father in his travels had gone to Frankfurt or …

FV: Well, we have a very large family, and I had seen the family tree one time. It goes back to the thirteenth century on my mother's side. On my father's side, I don't have the slightest idea. But according to this family tree, I think we are related to every Jewish family that lived in the

Rhineland. Everybody's name is on there. [laughter] And the roll is like twenty feet long when you roll it out. [laughter]

SH: You had said you were Jewish by designation. Did you have a bar-mitzvah or was there anything like that?

FV: No, nothing at all. … We didn't go to synagogue. We didn't celebrate any Jewish holidays. We celebrated all the Christian holidays, like Christmas, and we'd get the days off at Easter and such. So that was it.

SH: What do you remember growing up in Germany as a young boy?

FV: Well, I was very fortunate that my folks were well to do, probably upper middle class. And we always had servants in the house, at least two people living there with us, and additional ones coming out to help. Our favorite sport was horseback riding, which we did every week, playing tennis on tennis courts that belonged to friends, swimming in pools that belonged to relatives. So for the time, that time, we were well-to-do. This was during the Depression over here [United States], and as a child I didn't know there was a Depression.

SH: What other extended family members were there in Aachen, where you grew up?

FV: Well, there were a lot of distant relatives, uncles and second cousins and cousins of my father. And I had the impression that everyone owned a textile factory. [laughter] Most of them did. My father was a bit of a snob, I presume. He thought only textile manfacturers were worth associating with. When the question came up, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" My brother and I said, "We wanted to be textile manufacturers," and he said we were too dumb. [laughter]

SH: Now what about your mother's family? Did you get to Frankfurt often?

FV: To Alzey. Yeah, we'd go about every year for a short vacation. And my grandmother was a very nice woman, a very good woman. We'd play around the department store. We'd stand behind the cash register. And we had a good time there, and Grandmother spoiled us, yeah.

SH: Who was the disciplinarian in the family?

FV: Well, my mother had been a teacher, so there was a lot of pedagogic theory being applied. And so she watched our development very carefully. And she even kept a diary on how we developed for the first twelve years, or whatever.

SH: Had she gone to university?

FV: No, she, of course, a *gymnasium* degree in Germany was quite important already at that time, and I think she had something like two years beyond that of … maybe a finishing school. I'm not sure. But she taught school during World War I. And after that, they really thought that daughters of rich families should not take jobs away from anybody else. There was such an

atmosphere that she gave it up. But she was always a very thoughtful type of person and was interested in intellectual things. But there was no great, the discipline came from the father, I mean, "You do, you don't." Like all German families, the fathers were very dictatorial, very autocratic.

SH: Did any other members of your family live with you?

FV: No, no. [There were] just the five of us plus servants.

SH: Did you live in the town, or out of the town, or near the factory?

FV: More at the edge of town, more in the country. I can show you some pictures, but they're not very good, but they'll do, yeah.

SH: I wanted to ask you, for the record, your father's name and your mother's name, her maiden name?

FV: Well, my mother's maiden name was Marie Levi. And my father's name was Fritz Goldschmidt, and we changed the name when we left Germany, out of fear mainly, yeah. We lived in Holland after we left Germany, and that was too close to Germany for comfort. And there was a grocery store near us, which was, the name was Van Aken at that one. And of course, the city of Aachen in Dutch is Aken, and the word "Van" just means "from," so the name was very appropriate. So we … changed the name then.

SH: Did you do it just on your records, or was there an official way to do this?

FV: Well, we did it legally when we came to the United States because our passport, of course, was still, or did we have, I can't remember whether we had passports. The Germans took those away from us, I believe, but …

SH: Maybe that's what we should do is back the story up a bit, and tell me about your childhood and then as you became aware of how the political atmosphere and everything changed.

FV: Okay. We were educated in a private school, Montessori School. And …

SH: How new was that when you went to the Montessori School?

FV: It was relatively new because Maria Montessori, I believe, that German school from Montessori School started pretty late. The laws in Germany at the first were such that if you had a private school, you had to admit people who couldn't pay for it, at least half of them. So half the people who were in the school paid for it, and the others, who were there because they were poor, … wanted to be there. Another socialistic ideal, but that's the way they did it. And … that was a good education because you did it at your own speed. You probably know all about the Montessori system.

SH: Well, no. I'd like to hear it from your perspective as it was really beginning at that stage.

FV: Well, the school was in an old mansion, and the front gate was a type where stagecoaches could move in. And none us children could open it, so we had a doorman, who would open the door for us as we came and went. [laughter] Some kids were brought in by chauffeured limousines. But it was a nice environment. You took your shoes off and had slippers in the school. And you had to clean up the classroom yourself. And you never had any pressure to learn anything. You just did what you wanted to do, played all day. And if you played two days, the teacher might come and say, "Everybody knows how to divide already, how about you?" And that was enough stimulation to get you started.

SH: Did your sister also attend the Montessori School?

FV: Yeah, yeah. So we were there for four years, and then we had to transfer to the gymnasium, and that was in Easter, 1933. And by September '33, Hitler had just gotten into power, so he passed a law saying that only those Jewish children could be in class whose father had been a frontline fighter in World War I, and then only one Jewish child per class. So my brother and I were both kicked out of school at that point. So there were some minor incidents. And remember, I didn't really know I was Jewish. So a kid came up to me and said, "You're Jewish, aren't you?" And I was startled. I had to go home and find out what this was all about. And I think maybe he was a little persistent in being nasty, so I enlisted a friend, and we beat him up. [laughter]

SH: Now you were what, nine, ten at this point?

FV: Ten, yeah. Anyway, we were kicked out of school. So, my brother was transferred to another school then, and I had a private teacher and private teachers were hard to keep. They changed every couple of weeks. And then a year later, I was able to go into the same school my brother was in. And we were there until we were fifteen. Yeah, and then the laws changed again. All Jews were kicked out of the school. So then we again had private teachers, one private teacher. And he was a student at the university in Koln, and he had made some statement that it would be a morally good deed to kill Hitler, so he couldn't show his face around there anymore. So he had to make a living teaching on the side. And his parents had a bakery, and we always went to see him in his room above the bakery.

SH: That's where he taught you?

FV: That's where he taught us. But … the only thing we learned then was languages, French, and that was about it really. That's all I can remember. We didn't have any math or physics, no way. Then my parents wanted to send us to the L'ecole International in Geneva, and the German government wouldn't allow us any Swiss money for that purpose. So then we were sent to Berlin and we went to the American School in Berlin, which was run by an American journalist, Ziegler was his name. And it was mostly for the children of the embassy and the consulates around there. Everybody always had to study in English, no matter where they came from. [laughter]

SH: Had you had any English language background before?

FV: Well, we had two years of English, but not enough to follow the instructions.

SH: And you're about fifteen now?

FV: Fifteen, yeah. So we didn't get a hell of a lot out of it.

SH: Did you sister also go?

FV: No, my sister had … been sent to England, and she went to a British school, private school. And she was there one year and graduated valedictorian. And [she] passed the entrance exams for Cambridge and Oxford, but then she never went. She went to nursing school.

SH: In England?

FV: In England, yeah. But what happened there was in 1938, when they had this infamous *Kristallnacht*, when they attacked all the Jewish stores in Berlin and other cities, too. In Dusseldorf, I remember, they went into the apartments of some relatives, sister of my grandmother's, her husband was a judge, and they threw everything from the apartment out into the street, just threw it out the window, even the piano. Yeah. And my uncle's apartment in Alzey was also ransacked. But … my brother and I were in Berlin, and we failed to register our presence there with the police, so nobody knew where we were.

SH: Was this an intentional failure to register?

FV: No, just negligence. But my father was bringing my sister to the boat in Belgium. And when he got to the border, they had his name there. They took him out of the car, arrested him and put him in prison. He managed to get out of prison a day or two later because Mother arranged for the doctor to say he had a weak heart, or whatever. But then they left him out for a day or two, and then they picked him up again and put him in a concentration camp in Oranienburg, near Berlin. The policeman who came to arrest him was wearing a suit my father had given him. [laughter] Ironic, yeah. Well, I remember we were staying with a lady in Berlin, Frau Von Mueller. Her husband had been a famous German submarine captain during World War I. She was British. And she had a very lovely daughter, sixteen years old, who did small roles in movies and such. And there were all kinds of people coming and going in her apartment. I mean, she had friends like General Rommel, who was in North Africa, and Knut Hamsun's son was a film director there at the time, and opera stars. And they all told their tales about Goebbels, especially, being after the opera stars. And this particular lady had to move to Munich to get away from Berlin over that, to get away from him. Anyway, we were in school one day, and the principal, Mr. Ziegler, came and he said that he had a phone call from Frau Von Mueller, and we should not come back. She had been tipped off that the Gestapo was going to raid her apartment. So he put us into the home of a well-to-do lady, whose son had been at school, and her family had gone to the Philippines, a Jewish lady. And we stayed there about a week, and then found another place, with another Jewish lady to stay with. Anyway, by that time it was December, I think, of 1938, and …

SH: Your father's in the concentration camp in Berlin?

FV: Yeah, but we didn't know that. We finally told Mother on the phone, "What's wrong? You're not writing us, what's going on?" So she told us then, but she had activated a lawyer in Berlin that was a good acquaintance of Father's. And I think he managed to bribe the chief of police in Berlin. And one night we got a phone call, we were already in bed, and the lawyer was on the phone. He said, "Why don't you come over to my apartment tonight, right now?" So we got dressed and got on the subway and went over there, and my father was there. I still have the discharge paper from the concentration camp, a copy of it in my file. And he went back to Aachen then, but …

SH: He left you in Berlin then?

FV: Yeah, he left us in Berlin. And we had only two weeks to go until Christmas vacation, or whatever. And then we went back home, and we made full preparation to leave Germany. Mother had a good friend in Holland, and she did everything in her power to get us a visa to get into Holland. These things were very, very difficult in those days. And … the Germans harassed us terribly. I mean, everything was so mean-spirited that it was unreal. Aside from taking all your property, we had a large house, and they said we could only take with us the barest minimum. And then we had to itemize everything, every shoe, every piece of underwear, every piece of kitchenware to be itemized on a list. They had two people in the house watching that we did this right. My brother and I were not involved, but my mother and the servants had to do all these things. And then they'd look at silverware and say, "Is this silver?" And the maid would say, "Of course, it's silver." And he'd say, "Can't take it with you." [laughter] So any pictures that were valuable couldn't go either. And then on top of that, before all this was inventoried and signed off, Father had to go with this official, in a taxi, to the bank and rent a safe deposit box for about three years and pay for it in advance and put all the valuables in there. Of course, it all disappeared. But who cares, it was not important to my parents anyway. So my brother and I, … in the beginning of February 1939, we were going to Holland by ourselves to stay with people we had met on vacation in Amsterdam. And Father took us to the station because the Germans harassed everybody. Whenever a train came with a lot of Jewish people going to Holland, emigrating, they would delay them at the station, so they would miss the train and have to stay there until the next day, until the next train came and for no good reason. It was just harassment. But I think Father talked to these people, maybe paid them off, too. Anyway, they took us right away aside and put us in a room. We didn't have to undress or anything. They just put us right on the train. So we got to Amsterdam and stayed with this family for a couple of months until my parents got out. Then my parents took an apartment in the Hague, and we moved over there. And we enrolled in a trade school in Scheveningen, which was a pretty good idea. In Amsterdam, we didn't know what to do, so we enrolled in a private school for … Spanish classes because we didn't know where we'd wind up. So we thought that we might as well learn a little Spanish. But then, of course, when we got to the Hague, we had an apartment, it was really nice, really, we thought it was, but it didn't have a bathroom. It only had cold water. And it was on the third floor. Only one room could be heated. Bedrooms were unheated. In the wintertime, the ice would be on the inside of the window. In the daytime, the sun would shine on it and the water would melt and drip into our beds. And at night, there would

be a little ice in the bed. [laughter] And we'd go to a public bathhouse to take showers once a week. We stayed there a year.

SH: What did your parents do that year? What occupied their time?

FV: They didn't do anything. They couldn't do anything. They were not allowed to work. My father had nightmares. He would often scream at night. I guess he had bad memories from the concentration camp. But he wasn't very long in the concentration camp, but nevertheless, it must have affected him, yeah.

SH: Before this time, as Hitler was elected and you were still living in Aachen and going to school, what kind of discussions were there within the family? Were they very open in how they felt with you and your brother and sister? Or how did they feel politically?

FV: Well, we knew what the situation was from the antagonism we saw. I mean, even people who might not have been anti-Semitic, it was just easy to stay away from us. You didn't get in trouble by not talking to Jews. I remember my father, who was, I think, a pretty prominent man in town. Everybody knew him. He would lift his head to somebody in the street, and the person would look the other way. And he would say, "That scoundrel, he and his brother came to me all the time and asked for advise, and now, they don't know me anymore." And on the trolley car, as children, we would get up to let a lady sit down, and we found out that the ladies would not take our seat. [There was] this sort of nastiness. But, no, we never discussed it. I think it was just too painful. And I presume, my brother and I, would tell at home what happened in school, if anything happened. But my parents seldom, I don't remember, anyway I just don't remember if we talked about it.

SH: As this became more and more obvious and more incidents happened, did they begin to discuss leaving Germany or did they talk about trying to ride it out? Did they think it would just go away again?

FV: Well, yeah. The younger people had left already, I mean, many people in their twenties. But when all your property is there, and you don't know the rest of the world and don't speak the language necessarily, these are tough choices. And by the time we left, I think, by the time they put special taxes on us, my father may have salvaged six percent of his liquid assets. He was very happy that we were able to live a whole year in Holland for less than a thousand dollars. We really didn't have much. We looked very elegant. We had good clothing. [laughter] And he would say, "Poor, but clean."

SH: Did they discuss World War I and the anti-Semitism? I mean, did they just think this was another cycle of it?

FV: Well, yes. The hope was, in the beginning, that we could outlive Hitler, but that became quite impossible very shortly. I mean this anti-Semitism was not a new phenomenon in German. I just finished reading a biography of Bismarck and his Junker, and my God, the hypocrisy and the arrogance of the aristocracy. The anti-Semitism was just as bad as under Hitler, except [Bismarck] didn't act it out like he did. It was nothing new. I mean, a Jew could not be an

officer in the army in World War I. My uncle was a lieutenant, but that was pretty rare. My parents didn't discuss much. Maybe they tried to shield us, I don't know. But we had enough problems. We knew what was going on.

SH: Being fifteen and going to Berlin and to the house of Frau Von Mueller, were you more apt to be pointed out as being Jewish in Berlin than in Aachen?

FV: No, you couldn't tell by looking at us.

SH: Right, so it was safer to be in Berlin and unknown than in Aachen and known.

FV: Probably, at that moment, yeah. We went to this trade school in Holland, and it was an excellent trade school. Of course, we had bicycles, and it was so different than anything we got into later, for a short time. The discipline was extremely strict. Every kid came to school on a bicycle, and the door would not open until ten minutes to eight. And we had to line up, two abreast, in the gutter, with our bicycles, in front of school. And the janitor would stand there. He was an authoritarian figure. And at ten to eight he would open the door, and we would all rush in and put our bicycles on the racks. We were not allowed to speak to each other during shop. And if we did, we got a knuckle sandwich. [laughter] Three and a half hours of shop work, you know.

SH: What were you studying? What kind of shop?

FV: Well, we got sheet metal work, forging, electrical wiring, machine shop, lathe work, milling machines and bench work. Then we had sketching, mechanical drawing and some instructions on how steel was made. And all that, of course, was in Dutch. And we had to struggle, but Dutch wasn't that difficult to learn for us. After a year, we spoke good Dutch. But then when we came to New York, … in 1940, we enrolled in a vocational school in downtown Manhattan. My mother wanted to enroll us in the Negro school that was in Harlem, and they simply looked at us and said, "We won't take you." They thought it would be an inappropriate environment for a white boy to go to school in Harlem. We didn't think so, but they thought so. They wouldn't even take us. So we went down in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a pretty slummy area. I think we were there three months, and we told our parents, "We can't learn anything there. They don't study. They don't do any homework. It's a waste of time." I have to regress a little. When we were enrolled there, the assistant principal said, "Would you take a job for seven dollars a week?" And we didn't know what the wages were, and we said, "Sure, we'll take a job for seven dollars a week." And he flew into a rage and said, "All the time, immigrants taking jobs away from our children." And we were a bit taken by surprise. That's when we learned what the minimum wage was. [laughter] Yeah, you learn it the hard way. Anyway, by that time I was seventeen, and I said, "It is of no sense going to school. You can't learn anything, and it's a waste of time. I'm going to find myself a job." Well, I needed permission from the Department of Labor. My mother took me down there, and they gave me a test and they said, "Yeah, it's all right. You can do technicians work." And then I went out and got jobs. They were all short time jobs, menial labor. … I wound up in a machine shop. Well, it was tough to get a job in 1940. It was a terrible time. I remember taking the subway down to Sixth Avenue and going into every building and to every shop, every store and asking everybody. [I'd] just go

down the avenue all day long. I never got a job. [laughter] It was pretty discouraging. Finally, I got a job in a machine shop. The man who ran it was a Yugoslavian immigrant, and he'd say, "Me speak seven languages." English obviously wasn't one of them. [laughter] So I did bench work in his shop for a while, and then I found a shop that paid ten cents an hour more, and I quit and took that job. They had a lot of immigrants in that shop from various European countries. And it was an environment that was just amazing to me. I was working between two older men on the bench. I asked one of them, "What is his name?" And he said, "Oh, he's only been here a year, I don't know what his name is." And they were really like out of a different world. Then I was going to night school, and I was trying to become an electrician. And I met someone who knew a man who had an electrical shop, and I went there and got a job from the man. And I was an electrician's helper, and it was down in the slums of New York. But I liked the work. … I had all kinds of jobs. That was the last one before I got in the army. And my parents, we lived with our parents, and we turned our salary, our wages over [to them]. They were anywhere between twelve and sixteen dollars a week in those days. I gave it all to my father every week. I kept enough for subway, and he gave me fifty cents a month for spending money. And then there was a war coming on. These were pretty bad times. I mean, everybody, at least in our family, they were so full of fear about what was going on in the war. And we all knew that America would get involved, we just knew it. Except the Americans didn't know it at that time. … My mother's brother, my uncle … had been running the department store in Alzey after World War I. He decided he had to make a living, and he … had a small factory in New York, and that didn't work too well. So he said, "I'm going to buy a farm in New Jersey, and we're going to raise chickens." So he went down to Vineland and bought a farm. My parents decided, since we were probably going to be drafted, to move with him on the farm.

SH: What was your uncle's name?

FV: His name was Carl Levi, but he changed it to Lenart. And he was a great guy.

SH: Could we back up a little bit and talk about how your family made it from Holland then to this country? And then let's also talk about the extended family in Germany and what happened with them.

FV: Yeah. My grandmother emmigrated to Israel. … A cousin of mine emmigrated to Israel about [in] 1935. And then her mother went there, and then another cousin went there, and her mother went there, and then my grandmother went there.

SH: This is on your mother's side?

FV: Yeah. So we wound up having two cousins, three aunts and my grandmother in Israel. And part of our extended family came to the United States, and some went to Brazil.

SH: Was this before, in the thirties still, when they were doing this?

FV: Yeah, this all happened in '38, '39, that time. So we were all over the place. One of my mother's cousins went to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. And one was a professor at the University of Louisville. One was a professor at Dickinson College. I had a

second cousin. He was in the French Foreign Legion. He came over, and he became a professor at University of Minnesota. And … an uncle of my mother's was a professor at Johns Hopkins. So we all found a place eventually.

SH: Were any of you brought over on special programs because of what was going on in Europe?

FV: I think only the uncle, my mother's uncle, who taught at Johns Hopkins, he was a very famous psychiatrist. He'd been in Switzerland when he heard they were looking for him. And … through some American organization he got out.

SH: The uncle who was at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton, how did he wind up there?

FV: Well, by sheer luck, I guess. He couldn't find a job. He had a law degree, and he was specialized in political science. And he had written some articles while he was, he had fled Switzerland, and he had written some articles there, so he had to get out. And, I know he wrote it in one of his biographies that I read, how he wound up at the Institute of Advanced Studies for a couple of years. Later, he's still living, he's ninety-one, he was a professor of political science at … what's that Negro college in Washington, D.C.?

SH: Howard.

FV: Yeah, Howard University. And Ralph Bunche was head of the department there. And Ralph Bunche took him to the forerunner of the CIA, and later on … he was a professor at CCNY in New York.

SH: Is that how your parents were able to come to the United States?

FV: No, we were sponsored by a very distant relative, a Mrs. Storrs, who lived in the Hotel Pierre in New York, on Fifth Avenue. I think her father may have been related to my grandfather, I don't remember. We were invited one time to meet her, when we came to New York. Poor but clean, we went over there. Hotel Pierre was and still is, probably, the most expensive resident hotel in New York City. And there, we went up to her apartment, which covered a huge floor. And I don't remember much of it, but … every square inch of wall space was hung with paintings by Renoir. And, I mean, you name it. She had originals. And we sat there and were served from gold trays and gold tea servers, and the butler served us. And Mother tried to tell her she had visited Alzey one time, and the lady claimed she couldn't remember it. And then she showed us one of her treasures. It was an autographed picture of Mussolini that she had in the bathroom. And we were a little bit upset about that. [laughter] Gainsborough was on the wall. And then her son-in-law came, and he was the head of the Nam Department store in Brooklyn. And of course, we insinuated we were looking for work, but they were not interested. I went one time with my uncle to Nam's Department store and we talked a little while with the man. And he said that, no, he had to hire all the people he had usually hired, at Christmas, before he could hire from outside and was not interested in hiring us. But we had some newspaper articles that somebody had given us, and Mrs. Storrs had inherited over forty

million dollars when her husband died. He was one of the founders of the Loews Corporation. And then a little later, my uncle approached her to give an affidavit to some relatives who were still in Berlin, a lawyer and his wife. And she advised us through her lawyer that, at this time, she couldn't guarantee additional funds. So after that, forget it, we didn't have anything to do with her.

SH: When you were still in Holland and going to the trade school, was this was after Poland had fallen to Hitler?

FV: Yeah, let's see. The invasion of Poland was in September 1939, yeah, so we were in considerable fear. And there were, at that time already, a lot of articles in the paper about truckloads of Dutch uniforms being smuggled out to Germany. So the handwriting was on the wall. And then they uncovered a case, at the time, where the Germans had put advertising signs all over Holland. And where they advertised a washing powder, Persil, and where the signs were green, the infantry could cross the canal. And where they were red, the tanks could cross, and this sort of stuff. So everybody knew it was coming, but you were trapped.

SH: Can you tell me in more detail, please more detail, how it was then that you got your papers and your passage to this country and what route you took and how you came?

FV: Well, you had to register for immigration, and that had been done in Germany already. And my father and uncle and another relative had gone to Stuttgart to do this at the American Consulate in Stuttgart. They may have bribed somebody. I'm not sure. I never heard anybody say it, but I can't believe that we got that high up on the list because it was pretty late. So when the war started in Poland the Americans transferred all the immigration visas from the countries that were affected to the countries that were not yet affected. So suddenly, we got the news that we could go the United States.

SH: How many of you traveled together?

FV: Well, my sister was in England. So [it was] just the four of us, my parents and my brother and I.

SH: Your uncle didn't come at the same time.

FV: My uncle was already in the United States.

SH: Oh, he had come before.

FV: He had emigrated a year earlier.

SH: Now this was your father's brother or your mother's brother?

FV: My mother's brother, yeah. My father's sister, she and her husband, they had a son in the United States, who came in the twenties already. And their daughter was here, so they also wound up in the States.

SH: Did you sister come later or …

FV: No, my sister came in 1941, I think, from England. And she had some nursing training in England, so she was very lucky. She immediately got a job with another relative, who was married to Emanuel Feuerman, the cellist. And [she went] to California to take care of their child. And then she did that for a year, and then she enrolled in Mt. Sinai Hospital in the nursing school, and she graduated there. She graduated in '48, yeah.

SH: What was it like? You came over on a ship, I assume.

FV: Well, we came over on a Dutch liner *Volendam*. It was mostly refugees on there. And it was an uneventful passage, essentially, except all the refugees from Eastern Europe were telling each other how well off they were. [laughter] They had to establish their territory, you know. [laughter] Their insecurity showed. That was a pretty uneventful trip. We enjoyed it.

SH: Were there any other young people besides yourselves?

FV: There were some. We made some good friends. One of the boys was a good friend for a long time. He was from Austria. His father was a banker there. We stayed in touch for a long time, yeah. Then, of course, when we got to the US, we immediately had to get going on English …

SH: Where did you first land?

FV: New York.

SH: New York Harbor? Ellis Island?

FV: No, no. Ellis Island was out of commission in those days.

SH: That's right.

FV: I've forgotten where we landed in Manhattan. But you had all these dumb fears, I remember. You only had ten cents, you know, and you had to go and eat. And you'd go into a little restaurant, and you'd scan all the sandwiches there, you know, which ones were ten cents. And you couldn't pronounce them. And you'd say, "bologne sandwich," but I didn't know how to pronounce "bologne," so I'd say "bologna." [laughter] And then I was in fear that maybe she'd bring me a fifteen cent sandwich. I couldn't pay for that. [laughter]

SH: When did you get your apartment in Harlem?

FV: We didn't live in Harlem. We lived way up on 207th Street, way up north, last stop on the subway. We had an apartment.

SH: Had you already made arrangements for that before you got here?

FV: No. First, we stayed in a hotel, the Hotel New Orleans. I think it was on 80th Street and Columbus Avenue. One of our relatives was a manager of that hotel, so we had some contact immediately. And we stayed there about a month, and then we moved to that apartment on 207th Street.

SH: You talked about family who had gone to Israel. How much discussion of the Zionist movement had you heard?

FV: None of us, really, was a Zionist, except the first cousin who went over there. But once you have a relative someplace …

SH: I thought maybe there had been some discussion for or against.

FV: No, it was not an appealing idea to the rest of us. I've been three times to Israel, and I wouldn't want to live there. So, now, what else?

SH: Your family moved to Vineland.

FV: Yeah, they moved to Vineland, and my brother and I had to find another place to live. So we looked everywhere. We didn't have much money. I was making sixteen dollars a week. And he was making eighteen.

SH: What was he doing?

FV: He worked in an office. Did a little typing and filing. He was going to night school, trying to get a high school diploma. And I was going to night school learning how to be an electrician. Finally, I got this job as an electrician's helper. That was a big deal. And we were not unionized. The union members would follow us around, intimidate us, threaten to lean on us when we worked on an elevator shaft and such. Finally, the shop decided we might as well unionize. We were getting the same wages, so it wasn't any great incentive. My boss said, "Well, if we unionize, you better go to the union night school." The union had a very good night school for teaching about motors and generators and electrical code and such. But the union was not very reliable. It was the United Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. They classified the shops. So our shop was a D shop, which was sort of a high wage shop, because we had more skills. But then they also had B classification that might be building maintenance. Whatever else I can't remember. One day I got a phone call or letter saying, "You can become a member of the union. Come to see us." So I did. They put their arm on me and said, "We know you don't have any money." It was a hundred dollars initiation fee, and I was making sixteen dollars a week and living on it, so it was just out of the question. [They said], "We know you guys don't have any money. We'll let you in for five dollars." And I thought, "What a deal." [laughter] But they didn't give me a D card. They gave me a B card. And that was to protect the people who were in the service. In case they came back, they would get their D jobs back, and they would throw people like me out. Well, then I went to the union school two times or three times a week. One day this official came, put his arm around me and said, "What are you doing here, Fred? You only have a B card. We don't take B people in the school." And I said, "You'll have

to discuss it with my boss. I work in a D shop and he told me to go." And this would be repeated from time to time. And finally he said, "When are you going in the service?" And I said, "Probably in a month." And he said, "Well, let's forget it then." [He was] a real generous chap. I had paid my union dues. You always paid three months in advance. So I wrote him a letter saying that I wanted two months refunded, which was like six dollars. Well, you know, it took three years to get that money. [laughter] [There were] many letters. [laughter] So when I came out of the service, I wasn't about to go back to that kind of situation. I got a letter about a month after being discharged saying that since I didn't report back to them in a timely manner, I was expelled from the union. [laughter]

SH: As a young man, to back up a bit, as a teenager coming to this country, what was the most vivid memory that you have?

FV: Well, I had such exaggerated ideas about how high the buildings were. And when I actually saw them, I thought they were smaller than what I had anticipated. And I thought, "Is that it?" Well, we had no contact with anybody. First, we didn't speak English for the first year. We did manage to go to camp for underprivileged children for two weeks one time. We learned to curse in English very fluently. [laughter] Every dirty word we learned there. We couldn't use them at home, of course. To get some contact, I joined the youth group at the Society for Ethical Culture. And I went there every week. I enjoyed that. All those kids were college kids, really out of my class at that time. I didn't know what they were talking about.

SH: Did your parents have any English language skills?

FV: My parents? My father did go to classes, but his talent for language was minimal. He spoke French, but not very well. He had been living in France before he got married. My mother had lived in France. She had been a nanny for a French senator's family for a short time. They always spoke French when they didn't want us to know what they were talking about. [laughter] That really spurred us into activity to learn French. But my French is terrible. [laughter] But anyway, it was a bit frustrating to struggle a whole year learning Dutch and then immediately start struggling learning English. But we overcame that.

SH: Did your father or your mother work when they came to this country?

FV: My mother had some odd jobs. My father was in bad health. He did cooking, and he never did anything. Even on the farm, he only cleaned eggs and packed eggs. He couldn't do any physical work. My mother kept the house and helped them on the farm.

SH: Did you go to visit Vineland often?

FV: One time, of course, before I was drafted, I went back there and left all my belongings. I think I had one suitcase. That's all I had, and I left that in Vineland. And then, I went back to New York and was drafted to Camp Upton, which was on Long Island. My brother put in for a deferment because he said he worked for the defense industry. But they didn't allow it, so he was drafted two weeks after I was drafted. It was just as well, so we were separated. I was sent down to Camp Swift, Texas, near Austin, Texas for basic training. You have to have a little luck

in life. When I filled out my army papers, it said, "Education." And I thought, "I'm as smart as anybody. I'll just put down high school." So that was a little lie, but the army didn't know that. When we were in basic training, they came one day and took a bunch of us out of the outfit, marched us into a room and said, "We're going to give you a test. The same test we give for OCS, and we expect twenty-five percent of you to pass it." Well, it didn't scare me because I knew I wouldn't pass it. [laughter] But I did. [laughter]

SH: False sense of security. [laughter]

FV: Well, it was multiple-choice, and you eliminate what is obviously wrong. So after that, they took those survivors and put us before a board of officers for an interview. And they asked for my high school papers. And I said, "They're left in Europe. I don't have them, can't produce them." So that seemed to be okay. And then they sent us to Louisiana State University for a week. And then they sent part of us to Baylor University in Waco. And there we learned that we had to take engineering courses. We didn't know why. Anyway, we got a freshman course in engineering. That was pretty tough because I hadn't learned anything since I was fifteen, and here I had to write English themes, which I had never written before. American history I had no idea of. Chemistry, physics, engineering drawing, mathematics, including calculus, well, that was pretty demanding. There were 300 there, and one hundred flunked out, but I, again, survived. And then they took everybody, all the 200 survivors, and sent them to radar school. But they didn't send me because they said, "You are enemy alien." So I had to go back to troops. The day after they all left, the colonel took me down to Austin, Texas, and I was sworn in as a citizen. You could do that after one year in the army. Actually, we had a choice of whether we wanted to go into the service. We could be termed as "enemy aliens," or we could go into the service. So there wasn't much of a choice. And we knew what an evil Hitler was. We thought that this had to be fought.

SH: Had you ever thought of enlisting before that or did you basically have to wait for the draft?

FV: No. I was pretty sad about being drafted because, I thought, "One or two more years and I'm a journeyman electrician. And here my future is going up in flames." So anyway …

SH: So the colonel took you down to Austin to become a citizen?

FV: Yeah. I was sworn in with a couple hundred Mexicans. And then I was transferred to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and I was put in the 285th Observation Battalion in a topographic surveying group. And again, I had a great deal of luck there. I think nobody liked me very well. They always considered me an enemy alien, anyway. And about half a year later, it was really a strange thing. I got into an argument with the sergeant, and he put me on special duty to clean windows and to do kitchen duty. Clean the windows all day long. And by noon, there were so many people being punished to clean windows that they told me to beat it. And he saw me walking around and put me on some other duty. And then half an hour later, they came, and they said, "Fred, you're transferring to another outfit." And I packed my bag and got on a truck and went to another outfit. And this outfit I had been in, went overseas two days later, and they were all wiped out in the Battle of the Bulge.

SH: Wow.

FV: Yeah. So it was just a strange piece of luck. And it was probably due to the fact that I wasn't very popular. I gave you the name of Ted Flechsig to look up because he had been in my platoon there. Well, he has died in the meantime, I found out, read it somewhere. He was in my platoon. We had arguments about what we'd do if we took German prisoners. And he was very idealistic, and he said, "We'd treat them decently," and all this. And … thinking back about the students I had in my class with me at the *gymnasium*, … I said, "Eighty percent of them would not have made good citizens. I would shoot them all." [laughter] At that time, I felt that way. Anyway, ironically when the 285th got trapped there at the Battle of the Bulge, they got herded into a field, and the Germans all shot them. There were about over a hundred of them. But Flechsig … escaped. And he had shrapnel in his legs and bullet holes, I guess, but he survived that and walked back to American lines. The next time I saw him was when I enlisted at Rutgers, and he was standing in line with me, trying to sign up for classes.

SH: What did they transfer you to then?

FV: They transferred me to another observation battalion, this was a corps unit, 477th Observation, and I went overseas with them, but to the Pacific. We went to Hawaii. We never got any further, and it was just as well. I rose in rank. I was a private, Pfc, T5 and corporal. I was doing a sergeant's job all the time. They would never give me the rank, again, because the lieutenant didn't like me.

SH: Did you ever think that they might use your language skills?

FV: Well, that's a funny thing, because they were always requesting at headquarters for people who spoke European languages, but they never considered me. I think they didn't trust me somehow. To them, I was an enemy alien.

SH: Even though you'd done the ASTP and survived the cut?

FV: Yeah, I really don't know.

SH: What happened with your brother's military career?

FV: Having a background in office work, he wound up in an office job in the Tenth Corps, and he even made staff sergeant. He was in the invasion of the Philippines in Mindanao. Well, first he was in New Guinea. Then he was in the invasion of Mindanao and then Leyte. Then he was among the first troops to land in Japan. He was discharged, I think, two weeks before I was in 1946.

SH: To back up a little bit, then, you had said that you and your family were quite sure the Americans would be in the war, it was just the Americans who didn't know. Do you remember where you were and how you heard the news of Pearl Harbor?

FV: December of '42, '41.

SH: '41.

FV: I was still living with my parents in Manhattan, but I don't have any other memory of that day.

SH: You didn't see any reaction in New York at all or any discussions on the subway?

FV: Well, we listened to the radio every night, and that was frightening enough. It was really a stressful time. It's hard to explain. The whole wartime experience, I mean, for us from 1933 to 1950 was pretty stressful.

SH: Was your family able to communicate with any family still back in Germany?

FV: No, there was no way at that time. The 477th went to Hawaii, and we were there when the war ended. I remember when everybody got drunk. [laughter] When the war in Europe ended, there was a big drunken affair. So when the war in Japan ended, and we heard about the atomic bomb, I locked up my footlocker and put everything away and said, "I'm getting out of here. I'm not going to hang out for this drunken ball that's going to happen today." And I went to the library, and I came back late in the afternoon, and everything was quiet. And I asked, "What the hell is going on?" And the sergeant said, "They're all drunk." [laughter] They were all lying around. The guy in the next bed was sort of a portly fellow, and he was on the lower bunk. He fell out of his bunk that night and broke his leg. [laughter] He was so drunk. But I didn't drink. I didn't have any money to drink. And the pay wasn't all that good. I was a corporal at the time, and I was getting sixty-six dollars a month. And of that, I had to give twenty-two dollars for my parents' support. Since I had supported my parents before the war, I claimed them as dependents when I went into the army. So they subtracted a third of my pay to go to my parents. It didn't leave you much. Life insurance was six fifty a month and for your laundry and some other expenses. Anyway, twenty-two dollars a month was all you had left.

SH: To go from New York to the South, what was that like for you?

FV: It was interesting. I remember sitting on the train all day long, and I think it was in Arkansas or Louisiana, I can't remember, the train would stop and go, stop and go. We'd look out the window and see these miserable shacks there with Negroes in it. Soldiers would throw out pennies for the children. I'd never seen anything like that, but it didn't evoke any real feelings. ASTP at Baylor University that was an experience. Baylor University was a Baptist school. … I don't remember the president of Baylor now, but he gave us a fiery speech when we arrived about, "Generations of soldiers and sailors having trudged the campus." When we left nine months later, he gave the same speech again. [laughter] He looked like Senator Phogbound on Little Abner. He had a little stiff collar and a string tie. And the Baptists were very concerned about morality, so the campus was illuminated, so there'd be no necking anywhere at night. The girls were all confined to their dormitories until noon on Sundays. They couldn't go out. Of course, we were interested in the girls and vice versa. I had a girlfriend there. Her father was the Speaker of the House in the legislature in Texas. Her name was Jeanne Gilmore. She wasn't particularly bright, but she was good company. The girls were not allowed to smoke,

and they were not allowed to go to nightclubs, and they were not allowed to drink … a very restrictive atmosphere. But we'd go to nightclubs, and she'd pay for it because I didn't have any money. She said, "You don't think they'd do anything to daughter of the Speaker of the House." [laughter] And the only girls we met there from the college wouldn't squeal. I dated several girls. There was one kid, and she said, "Let's go to the missionary club." And we went to the missionary club, and there was an advanced missionary student, who gave us a little talk, preached a little. Then he collected ten cents from everybody. And I thought, "What is all this for?" Well, we went into the poor neighborhood next to the campus, a colored neighborhood, and we picked up all kinds of children at various houses. And we marched them to an empty lot, and there were benches. And then, one of the advanced missionary students gave them a sermon, a brief one, with all "gobbledy-goop." It was all nonsense, as far as I was concerned. And then he led them in hymn singing. And then, we took all the children back home. And he had a big bag of candy. That's what the ten cents was for. And he gave each child one or two pieces of candy. That left a lot of candy. And I asked him, "Why don't you give them more candy?" And he said, "Give these nigger kids more than one piece, they always want more." [laughter] And I thought, "Yeah, that's real missionary work." And I dropped that girlfriend. That was not too interesting. [laughter] Baylor was just a terrible school in that respect. One time they had a speaker on campus, and he talked about having just come back from Spain. As he entered New York harbor, there was the Statue of Liberty holding up the flame. And he said, "All I could think of is that the Statue of Liberty should hold up the cross." And later on, I made some disparaging remarks to my girlfriends saying, "What the hell? There are a lot of other people in this country that are not Christians," and I was ostracized for a week or two. It was just that kind of environment there. And they had minstrel shows. White students cavorting around made up like Negroes, … while some colored man is standing there, pulling the curtain up. [laughter] It sounds funny today, but that was the atmosphere at the time.

SH: Did you communicate with your parents often? It must have been very frightening for them to have their two sons in the military.

FV: Well, in '42 when my parents moved to the farm, my mother asked us to write her a letter every week. And I wrote her a letter every week until she died, and she died at ninety. So we stayed in touch, yeah. My father didn't write very often. I think he was never very right. He died in 1950, two months before I graduated.

SH: It's very painful. I think to go on then, after being in Texas, you were sent then by train to …

FV: Fort Sill. Well, I was in Fort Sill. From Fort Sill, … we went to Fort Hood, Texas for maneuvers. And after that, we transferred to Fort Lewis in Seattle, and from there, we got on the boat and went to Hawaii. We went to Schofield Barracks. That was in February of 1945. And the war ended while we were at Schofield Barracks. We were getting ready for the invasion of the Philippines, and we were glad we didn't have to go. Then we transferred to the big island of Hawaii, and we had to clean up military installations, tear them down and such until, it must have been the end of '45 or January of '46. … When the war ended, we were still at Schofield Barracks. They said we could take some courses if we wanted to. So I signed up for a chemistry

course and typing. And the typing course helped a lot. I'm so glad I took the typing course. In thirty days I knew how to type.

SH: Was this course offered on the base?

FV: On the base, yeah, to those who wanted it because we were bored stiff. We didn't have anything to do anymore. Then we were shipped back. I remember when at … Hickam Field on Honolulu, outside of Honolulu, they were going to send us back. We were with all kinds of soldiers we didn't know from other outfits, and the sergeant said, "Here's a list of all the equipment you're supposed to have. If you don't have it, indicate it, and you can borrow it from supply." And then he added, "Don't be stupid." So I said, "Ahhh." So I put down that I needed field jackets and extra pants and shoes and all kinds of stuff. And then the army allowed us to use all the empty boxes that the beer came in, to the PX, for packing all that stuff and mailing it home. So I mailed all kinds of good clothing that I could use on the farm home, extra shoes, underwear for four years. [laughter] So it was very handy when I got home because I didn't have any clothing left, and I wore that stuff all through college after that. When I got home, there was the problem, "What am I going to do?" And I thought, "Well, maybe I'd want to go to college, GI Bill."

SH: When were you aware of the GI Bill?

FV: Oh yeah, we were aware.

SH: Was this a notice? How were you told of the GI Bill?

FV: People talked about it, and the officers told us about it. I don't have any particular memory of how I knew about it. But anyway, I applied to all kinds of colleges, in writing and in person. They all said, "No way, you didn't go to high school. We've got all kinds of good applicants. We won't need you." So I couldn't get into college. So I thought, "Well, I have to get a high school equivalence certificate." And I went to the State Board of Education in Trenton, New Jersey. And they wrote back after a couple of weeks, saying, "Based on your records, we'll give you one year of high school credit." And I thought, "Well, let's try another state." Since I had lived in New York, I sent all my stuff to the New York State Department of Education, and they wrote back saying, "We'll give you two years credit." So I went back to Trenton, and I said, "Obviously you people don't know what you're doing. I should have more credits than you gave me." And they said, "Well, why don't we send it to Washington, DC and let them decide?" So then Washington, DC's Department of Education wrote back, saying that, "Since you already had a year of college, if you make up four years of English, the state should give you a high school equivalency certificate." So I went back to New Jersey, and they agreed to that. Then I had to … pass the test for English, so I signed up for four courses simultaneously in English. I was also working at the time in a chemical factory in Philadelphia.

SH: Where were you taking the English courses then?

FV: At Temple University. And I was about half way through with these four courses in English, when I read in the paper that the State Department of Education was giving the tests for

high school equivalency. So I rushed down there, took the test, and I passed it, but I finished my four courses anyway. And then I sent all this to the New Jersey Department of Education, and they issued me a certificate of high school equivalency. And it was about November of '46 by that time. So it was too late to get into college. They had this college for the overflow of these veterans set up in Philadelphia, Rittenhouse College.

----------END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE----------

SH: This is tape two of an interview with Fred Van Aken on July 25, 2000 in Berkeley, California.

FV: Well, Rittenhouse College was not a very competitive school. The students were left over that couldn't get into any other school. So my grades were good, mostly A's, I think. So I applied to Rutgers because I wanted to get an engineering degree, and Rittenhouse College didn't offer any of that. So I interviewed at Rutgers. I remembered in the application they sent me, there was a question that said, "List your accomplishments." And that embarrassed me terribly because I thought, "What accomplishments do I have? I just got out of the army. I don't have any." I was really upset about that question. I discussed it with my mother, and my mother said, "Well, you could say you were in ASTP, in spite of not having a good background," so I put that in. Anyway, they took me.

SH: Who did you interview with at the campus? Do you remember?

FV: It was in Winants Hall, and I don't remember. Anyway, I was much relieved when they took me. When I started there in the fall of '47, when I signed up, I talked to some dean about it. Anyway, he said that I couldn't be a full member of the sophomore class because I hadn't had … a course in topographic surveying. And I said, "That's what I did in the army, and I should be given credit for it." And he said, "If you can get an A or B on the final, I'll give you credit for it." So came Christmas time, I borrowed somebody's notes and studied them for two weeks and took the final. I had a call from this dean and he said, "What the hell is this? You didn't take the course, and you took the final." And I explained to him that we had had the conversation, and he couldn't remember it. But since I passed the final, he gave me credit for it, so then I was a sophomore. And I don't think I've ever been in a more competitive environment than the student body we had at that time. They were sharp. They were really a bright bunch of people. And I wasn't that sharp. I was not a very good student.

SH: What course of engineering were you taking?

FV: I was signed up for electrical engineering. The fact that I had so little background, I had to work like a dog. And at the end of my junior year …

SH: Where were you housed when you came?

FV: Pardon me.

SH: Where did you live on campus?

FV: Well, first I lived in some army barracks across the river.

SH: Raritan Arsenal.

FV: Raritan, yeah, Raritan Arsenal. That was an incredibly bad environment. I stayed there one semester. If I had stayed there another semester, I would have flunked out. It was just impossible to do any work up there. Then I got a room in … I don't remember the dormitory. I have a picture of it.

SH: Ford Hall?

FV: No, no. The other one, further down. It was sort of a quadrangle.

SH: There's several down there …

FV: I don't remember the name. Anyway, it was nice. And I had a roommate. Of all things, he was of German extraction. His parents had a bakery in New Jersey someplace. And he always kept telling me that he didn't believe there was any such thing as concentration camps, that the Germans wouldn't have done such things. He was a member of the German Bund himself. It was not a good fix to have in my room. He wouldn't believe what I told him. He'd come back Sunday nights from home with a big cake, probably two days old from the bakery, and he'd never offer me any. I fixed him, though, one time. His parents came to visit, and I hung a big picture of a nude over his bed. And then I had … [laughter] So his father and mother came in and looked at this big picture, and he said, "Daddy, that isn't my picture, that isn't my picture!" And then I excused myself and went in the closet, and I said, "I hope you don't mind if I borrow some of your wine." It was my wine bottle. I bought a whole jug. And he said, "Daddy, that isn't my jug!" [laughter] I can't remember the fellow's name. He died a few years after he graduated. Anyway, he was not very pleasant. The next year I had a very nice roommate. He, also, is dead. He went to an insane asylum the year after he graduated, and he died a year or two later after that. He was a good electrical engineer. He was a nice fellow.

SH: Had they both been veterans like you?

FV: The first one, no. He came out of high school. He was not an engineer. The second one, I think he had been in the military, yeah. And what happened at the end of my junior year, there was a very bad job situation. Nobody got any jobs that year. GM and GE came, and they interviewed only one man in the graduating class, the top man. That was it. So a lot of the graduating seniors in the Class of '49 went and took teaching jobs or taught math. It was a bad year for them. So I thought, "I'm in about the middle of my class at that point, why go on in electrical engineering if you can't get a job next year?" And somebody said, "Why don't you switch into agricultural engineering? They only take people who have a farm background, and your folks live on a farm. You've worked the farm. You can get in." So I thought …

SH: Was this a dean who was advising you?

FV: No, fellow students. So I switched to agricultural engineering at the end of my junior year. And then I had to take all these agricultural courses and agricultural engineering courses. And so at the end of my senior year, I was the only one to graduate in agricultural engineering. [laughter] So I immediately got a job with the US Department of Agriculture. So that was, at that time, maybe a good move. And then in '51 when the Korean War started, everyone got jobs again. So … I had a hard time getting an education as you can see …

SH: Let's talk a little bit more about your time at Rutgers and the student body. And tell me what you remember about any of the activities. What you did between the semesters and in the summertime. Did you go to school full-time or did you go back to Vineland and work?

FV: I went back to Vineland, and I had some odd jobs in the summertime. And I worked the farm for my uncle. And then between my junior and senior year, I had to make up a course I had dropped because I knew I would fail it. I had failed one course. And I went to the University of Delaware, and there were quite a number of Rutgers people there that summer. [laughter]

SH: Same course?

FV: Yeah, we all took thermodynamics and DC machinery. [laugher]

SH: Did you get involved in any of the social activities?

FV: Only every weekend at Douglass College. That was it. I didn't have time. I really didn't have time for anything besides studying. They worked us pretty hard.

SH: Did you have to join the ROTC?

FV: No, I didn't. Because I was a veteran, I didn't have to join. And I wanted nothing to do with military anymore, nor with any fraternity. That was completely uninteresting.

SH: Did you join any clubs or any organizations?

FV: The dormitory club. That was about it. No, I tell you most of the veterans didn't want to join anything.

SH: That's what we find. There were some who really did …

FV: We were too old for that kind of stuff.

SH: What kind of interaction did you have, obviously your first roommate was right out of high school …

FV: Yeah.

SH: Can you tell me about the dynamics between an eighteen year old and a twenty-two, twenty-four, twenty-six year old students?

FV: Well, I mean, I discounted that kid immediately. He was a jerk. The last year, my second roommate then Joe Lefski, who died a few years later, he was Jewish. And …[he was] not a practicing Jew either. The last year I was in Ford Hall. There were four of us in the room, and all of us were Jewish. And it only dawned on me, long after I graduated, "Why did they put me in only with Jewish boys?" And there must have been somebody in the administration who felt that maybe we wouldn't be comfortable with somebody else, or the other way around. Who knows?

SH: Who were your roommates? Do you remember their names?

FV: One was Dick Levy. He was also a German, Jewish boy. And one was a real jerk, flunked out. I think his name was Goldberg. I remember him moving in. His mother and father moved his easy chair upstairs. [laughter] And then his mother took my undershirt, which was lying there, and wiped dust. [laughter] And then his father told us to keep an eye on Jerry. Jerry Goldberg, I think was his name. "Keep an eye on Jerry so he would study." And we thought, "What the hell? This is a university, not a kindergarten." [laughter] Anyway, he flunked out. He didn't study. There was another kid in with us. He was a physics major. … He went to teach high school physics. He was a smart, bright boy, very nice. [I] don't remember his name. [laughter] Anyway, that was the campus experience. I always felt that getting a college degree was the high point of my efforts in my life. I mean it really was. You can see how long it took and how many efforts. I just thought I'd never get there.

SH: Now did your brother suffer basically the same sort of …

FV: No, it was much easier for my brother because he got a high school degree certificate when he came out of the army. And he got into Temple University, and he got a degree in business administration from Temple. So it was straightforward for him because he had that high school degree. And my sister had no problems, either.

SH: You had mentioned earlier that your father passed away two months before you graduated? Had he been very ill? Were you able to …

FV: Yeah, he'd been very ill. The year before he had a skin disease, Pemphicus. He was in a hospital in Philadelphia. And the Aureomycin, which Dr. Waxman discovered at Rutgers, saved his life, but then he died a year later. My sister always claimed that he committed suicide, but I don't know that.

SH: And your mother continued to live in Vineland on the farm?

FV: Yeah, my mother and uncle stayed on the farm until my uncle retired in 1957 or eight. And we helped out on the farm whenever we were home and manned the farm when he was wanting to take a vacation, yeah. … Since I was in agricultural engineering, I signed up for a course in poultry husbandry. That was a snap.

SH: Do you remember who your favorite professor was?

FV: I didn't have a favorite professor. I did well in all the courses of economics. And the agricultural courses I did well in. But math, I had two Ds. My average was between B and C. I didn't have a favorite, well, in the agricultural engineering courses, Dr. Read, Professor Read, was easy to get along with. But we had some clunkers in the electrical engineering department. I took one math course. I never knew what this course was about. [His name was] Professor Slade. And I'm sure if you interviewed anybody, they will mention his name. I was completely blank about what that course was about. A week before the final, somebody else, who had a different professor for the course, showed me his notes and that gave me sort of an inkling, and I was very happy to get a C. … One time, I had good luck. I was taking a course on AC circuits and AC machinery, and that was a tough course. The night before the final, one of my friends came in and said, "I found this test in the fraternity files, and why don't we study it?" So we studied it. And the next morning, when we got into the hall where we took the final, the professor, Newton, got up there and said, "Somebody has stolen the test. We don't know how it has disappeared, but we are not going to give the test we intended to give you. We're going to give you another test." And this other test they gave us was very much like the test we had studied the night before. So I nailed it. I got a B in the course, and I'd been fearing I'd get a D or an F. So that was a great break. I didn't have many of those. [laughter]

SH: Did you have a best friend at Rutgers that you hung around with a lot?

FV: Yeah, Ed Wildanger was a good friend of mine. Ed Wildanger lives about two miles from where I live now. We see each other every month. As a matter-of-fact, tomorrow we go out for lunch with our wives. You haven't interviewed him?

SH: No. Did your mother come to your graduation? Did you celebrate this graduation?

FV: Yeah, my mother and my sister and my brother came for the graduation, which was a real dud because it was in the stadium. And the Secretary of the Navy, Vorhees, or the Undersecretary of the Navy … gave a speech. And the speaker system didn't work, and nobody could understand a word. We were sitting in the bleachers and there was this man … [laughter]

SH: Mr. Van Aken just mouthed as if someone were saying something. [laughter]

FV: So that wasn't very impressive. That's all we did, and then we went out to eat and drove back to Vineland.

SH: Had you already secured your position with the US Department of Agriculture at that point?

FV: I don't remember. I can't remember, no. I know … the American Society of Agricultural Engineers had a national meeting in Washington, DC. And I went down there, and I met a lot of the movers and shakers in the field. I may have had an introduction from one of the professors in the agricultural engineering department. And I talked to the manager of the Rural Electrification division in the Department of Agriculture at the meeting there. But I don't know whether I already had an agreement with him that he would take me on for the summer. I think that's the way it was. My professor submitted my name for a summer job, and so I went down there for

that. And then Colonel Hienten, Dr. Hienten, the head of the department gave me a hard time. He said I was dishonest, that he could only give me a summer job if I was a continuing student, if I was going get a master's degree. But since I was graduating with no further intention, he really couldn't do it. But then it somehow happened anyway. He kept me for the summer, and I worked at Beltsville in the agricultural research station. And at the end of the summer, he offered me a job in North Carolina on the tobacco research station that North Carolina State College was running at Oxford. And I so moved down there. I had a job right away. And I knew one of the engineers in Beltsville. … When he heard I was moving down to North Carolina, he said, "Fred, that's a lovely place. Oxford is a beautiful little town. You get down there, and the niggers get off the sidewalk when a white man passes." And I thought, "My God. That must be a lovely place." [laughter] And I bought a car, and I drove down there. Of course, it wasn't like that at all. … Oxford was a little town. Half the people were black, about two thousand black and two thousand white. And they really lived in harmony. It was a paternalistic attitude. … There was still segregation in those days. At the end of the harvest, we'd have a party for all the white researchers on the tobacco farm, who came up back from Raleigh. We'd all eat inside the building, and all the Negroes would be outside the building, eating by themselves. But it was sort of a nice environment. Everybody knew everybody. I met somebody at a horse show out in Collins. We talked for a while. I've forgotten the man's name, of course. Oh, a couple of weeks later, I got a phone call … and some lady invited me for a card party, canasta party, I think it was. And I said, "Yes, I'd be glad to come." And as soon as I hung up, I realized I didn't know where she lived and didn't know her name. My landlady had no idea who it might be. So the afternoon of the party, I drove around town. And I saw the mayor walking by. And I stopped, and I said, "Joe, I'm invited to a canasta party. Do you have any idea of who that might be." And he thought awhile and he said, "Maybe the dentist's wife is giving it." And he steered me to the right house, and it was the right place. That's how small a town it was. [laughter]

SH: Your mother still was living on the farm. Where was your brother working at this point?

FV: He was working for Lever Brothers as a salesman. He was driving around Pennsylvania and New Jersey selling toothpaste. There was chlorophyll in it. What was the slogan at the time? "The goat that stinks on yonder hill, has browsed all day on chlorophyll." [laughter]

SH: Did you continue working with the USDA?

FV: Yes. Well, my particular project was to develope a way of controlling insects in the tobacco fields, so we wouldn't have to spray because we already knew from the British research that cigarettes caused cancer. Now I took the job in 1950 because I didn't mind. Everybody I worked with had smoked when I arrived, and they gave it up in six months because after you look at a few lungs, and this sort of stuff, and see what goes into the tobacco and cigarettes. You know it isn't good for you. So I had to travel a good deal on that, all the way from Florida to Connecticut in a government truck and set up my experiments at various government stations. And then my boss in Washington, Dr. Hienten, got into a fight with the North Carolina state administrators. And he said, "If that's the way you guys are, I'm going to take my money and my people and move to Tennessee." Well, … my boss and I were moved to Tennessee. And the insect problem I was working with didn't exist in Tennessee because I was looking for horn

worms, and in Tennessee, the grasshoppers were eating the tobacco. The project was no longer very good, and I lost interest. My boss in Washington was not very nice, insulting man, so I decided I better start looking for something else. They transferred me to Knoxville, and I was on the campus of the University of Tennessee. And I had good contacts there, and the head of the engineering department offered me a job to teach. So I thought, "Here's my chance. I quit. I don't have to move, and I can get another degree on the side without having to pay tuition." Well, I had already signed up. I was working on a master's degree in agricultural engineering, but I took all my courses in the electrical engineering department because I felt that it was sort of a continuation of what I had been doing. So after I quit the Department of Agriculture, I had been there three years, I took this teaching position and finished up an electrical engineering degree then at Tennessee. I taught for two years. It was a good time. That's where I met my wife.

SH: How did you meet your wife?

FV: Well, I had a date with a girlfriend to take her to a faculty dance and dinner. And she called me the day of the dance and said, "I can't come. I have the flu." So I had to hustle around. I wasn't going to waste that ticket. [laughter] So I called a few girlfriends. They all couldn't go or wouldn't go. They recommended this girl, Anna Smith. I wasn't very eager about a blind date, but they talked me into it. So I called her and we had a date that night. That's how we met.

SH: Was she a student at Tennessee?

FV: She was getting her Master's degree in applied arts. It was good luck. [laughter] You have to have a little luck.

SH: That's right. You've had a little luck.

FV: Yeah, I told her she was the best all purpose wife I could find. [laughter]

SH: Did she take that as a compliment?

FV: Yeah, so that was in February of … 1955. I was teaching engineering drawing and descriptive geometry, not very demanding. And I could do my studies besides. It was pretty good, worked out well.

SH: I have to ask a question which we usually ask. Did you stay in the reserves?

FV: No.

SH: I assumed not, because you said you wanted nothing to do with the military. And the other question is, do you remember where you were when the atom bomb was dropped? Did you have any idea what the implications were? I know you were in Hawaii.

FV: Yeah, I was at Schofield Barracks when we got the news that the atom bomb had been dropped.

SH: Was it that term at that time?

FV: Well, we knew that would probably end the war. It was such a big headline, and then, of course, the surrender was the same week, I guess. I don't have any good memory of that, except that I had locked my footlocker that night to keep any drunkards from getting into it. [laughter]

SH: What was Hawaii like for a young man who had come from Aachen, Germany to New York?

FV: I liked Hawaii. It was a very exotic environment at the time. I've been back, oh, about ten years ago, I've forgotten. Now it's so Americanized. It's lost all its charm. At that time, it was really an exotic place. When I saw *South Pacific on Broadway,* when I got out of the army, I felt, "My God, he really got the feeling of the South Pacific in it." That's what I knew from Hawaii.

SH: What were your duties being in the observing …

FV: Observation. That outfit is normally attached to a corps and provides topographic surveying to all the artillery units, so they would know the coordinates when they are giving coordinates by flash ranges or by sound ranging outfits, which were attached to us. They could zero their guns in on it, so they needed topographic data where they were, coordinates. That's what we supplied. We were surveyors. I was chief computer in the group. I carried a logbook, which had a least ten pages of German introduction in front of it, all printed in Germany.

SH: Really?

FV: Yeah, … we used seven digit log tables. You had to be quick with a logbook. We had to do every job in the topographic outfit, so in case somebody was disabled, we could do it. So you learned how to run a transit and do computing and run a tape measure and all this.

SH: When you were in Hawaii, and it was still this exotic island, did you get to go and interact with any of the natives?

FV: Yeah. I remember one time we were on the big island, on the Kona coast, what a lovely place, about four miles from the Kona Inn. … I would go down every night and swim there and try to find coins in the pool, so I could buy a drink. [laughter] Anyway, one time one of my buddies came and said, "Hey, they're going to have a big church picnic next Sunday at Kealakekua. Let's go there." So I said, "Well, okay." And the church picnic was at the U.S.O. building there, a small hut, and the three of us got there and went to church. The minister made us sit in the front row. We were guests. And then he asked us to sing, and of course, I'd never gone to church. What would I know about singing in church? That was hard work for my supper there. [laughter] We were so embarrassed. We didn't know how to sing, the three of us. Anyway, afterwards, we were invited to partake in the picnic. And we were sitting at this table with a couple of elderly ladies. One of the ladies came up and whispered, real loud, you could hear it all over the place, "Don't let these boys get in the kitchen where all the girls are."

[laughter] Because all these Americans there, they had their servants. And the servants were in the kitchen fixing food. And we were not supposed to go in there. [laughter] So that was the interaction with the natives, except for some dates from time to time.

SH: Where did your career then take you after you got your master's degree at Tennessee?

FV: Well, I got a BS degree there, not a master's.

SH: Oh, okay. In electrical engineering.

FV: Then … one day, the dean of electrical engineering said, "I want some of you guys to go for an interview. GM is here." We said that we weren't interested. We wanted electrical jobs. We weren't interested in General Motors. And he said, "Well, they hire electrical engineers and somebody's got to go. How about the whole first row? You guys go." So I had to go, and I found out from the man I interviewed with they were hiring electrical engineers. And then he said "Agricultural engineers. We're starting up a line of agricultural equipment. We need somebody who's knowledgeable in that." And I said, "Well, I have a degree in agricultural engineering. Would you consider me for that?" And he said, "Yeah." And he made me an offer. And I said, "I have two degrees. You have to pay me more than that." So he made me a better offer. So I took this job in Dayton, Ohio. … He hired me in March, and we didn't get engaged until August sometime, and I thought, "Well, I ought to take a long vacation. I haven't had one." So I took off for Mexico and Guatemala on my own. And when I came back, Anna had got a job teaching at the University of Dayton, and so I took all my belongings, drove up to Dayton and rented an apartment. So that's how we started off. We were lucky. We both had a job, and we made good money. And we were very happy. She taught about three years at the University of Dayton. I wasn't very happy working for Delco Products. I was in material science. I don't know … [in] these big organization you get lost. Nobody ever tells you if you're doing anything right. You have to find it out from somebody else. You don't even know if you're appreciated. It was not an environment I liked very much. Anyway, one day somebody came around, and they said, "AC spark plug division is hiring engineers to go to England on a military project." And they wanted to interview a couple of us young fellows there. So I asked my boss if he minded that I interview. He said, "Go ahead." And I interviewed, and they offered me a job. And I said, "I'll take it." I'll get out of Dayton and go to England, a good deal, more fun. So I told my boss about it and he said, "Gosh, if I had known about it I wouldn't have let you go." [laughter] By then it was too late. We pulled up stakes and moved to Milwaukee, and there we had to cool our heels because we didn't have secret clearance. A couple of us engineers had moved. Finally, I was teaching a night class to the American military, Air Force types, on inertial navigational systems. And one day, I got a notice saying, "Go to So and So's office at five o'clock, quitting time." And I went to his office, and I waited for half an hour. I didn't know the man. And he came, and he said, "You're leaving for England tomorrow." So the next day, with two other guys, we got on a plane. And we had to go through the military. We flew to Philadelphia, and then we had to go to … McGuire Air Force Base. We didn't know where that was. [laughter] We got to McGuire, and they said, "We don't have any planes going to England for another two days." So we sat around, and then we got on a military transport. We had orders to report to the bomber command near London. And the plane landed in Manchester, and we said, "How do we get to London? When is the next plane to London?" And

they said, "Plane? You got to take the train." We went and got the train, and on the train, it was terribly crowded, so we went to first class and paid extra there. And there was a gentleman sitting there, and we said, "We're going to London. We should be there around ten o'clock at night or midnight. What's a good hotel to stay at?" And he said, "Oh, the Dorchester is very nice." It didn't mean anything to us. [laughter] So we get to London and get a cab and went to the Dorchester, and my God, there was the haughtiest doorman we'd ever seen. And we hadn't shaved in two days. These were propeller planes in those days. We were dirty, tired. And they quoted us a price for the hotel rooms in guineas. And whoever heard of a guinea? Well, we learned instead of being twenty pounds, it was twenty-one pounds. No, twenty-one shillings, a pound was twenty shillings at that time. And a guinea was twenty-one shillings. There was no such coin, but all luxury goods were quoted in guineas at that time. So we said, "We'll take it." It was twenty-one guinea for the night, a lot of money in those days, but we didn't care. Silk on the beds, bathtubs so long you could lie fully outstretched in it, towel racks with heaters in them. It was very nice. And my friends kept saying, "I don't feel comfortable in here." And I said, "You'll get used to it." [laughter] Anyway, the next day we went to bomber command to get a briefing, and the colonel was not there, so they said, "Come back tomorrow." So we went sightseeing all over London, went to Greenwich. The next day we came back, same thing. We went sightseeing, again. So the third day, they said, "Oh, the hell with briefing. Go take a train." They told us where to go. … In the meantime, they found out, we ran into somebody from General Motors. And they said, "Where are you staying?" And we said, "At the Dorchester." And they said, "Ahh, nobody can stay at the Dorchester except the president of General Motors. You guys have to stay at cheaper hotels." [laughter] The Dorchester was the most elegant place in London, so we had to move to the Tavistock. And I remember, we went into our room and there was a scale. And we weighed ourselves. And we looked at that scale, and we couldn't tell what we weighed. It was graduated in stones, and a stone is forty-two pounds. So anyway, those were our first impressions of London. We got on a train to go to Lakenheath. We didn't know what for. We didn't know there was an air base up there. And when we got to Lakenheath, we tried to get out of the train, but we couldn't open the doors. There were no handles on the inside of the doors on the train cars. What you had to do in British railroad cars was use that leather strap to lower the window and then reach outside to open the door. So somebody had to show us how to get out. We were quite panicked. We didn't know how to get out of the car. [laughter] So we went to Lakenheath. They put us up in officers' quarters, and they told us we had to go to Feltwell, another base about twenty kilometers away. And we didn't have transportation. They said we had to buy ourselves a car, and so a car wasn't very much in those days. You could buy a car, a Volkswagen, a bug, for 1,200 dollars. But we didn't have that money with us. So I wrote my wife, "Send me the money." She couldn't get the money out of the bank because it was in both our names, and they wouldn't give her the money because I hadn't signed for it. So it took a long time, finally got the money, finally bought a car. So we could get going. It was chaotic, absolutely chaotic.

SH: Now what year was this?

FV: That was '58. … Our job was putting in the first atomic missiles aimed at Russia in various places in England. And that's what we worked on in '58, '59 and '60. I lived in a little village about twenty miles from work. The house should have been torn down a hundred years earlier, but they had only repaired it. It was the worst place I've ever lived in. I mean the Germans lived

in … '58 … much better, already, than the British did. And we had a fireplace this size in the living room, and that was the only fireplace in the whole house. It was three stories high. … We later moved to Lincolnshire, to Gainsborough near Lincoln, stayed there a couple months. And then I went home again in 1960.

SH: Did you do any traveling in Europe while you were stationed in England?

FV: We had a trip to Rome, and we had a trip to Paris, and almost every month, we went to London. And I found some relatives in Cambridge. So we had a little contact. Oh, I had relatives in London, too. Our former neighbors in Germany lived in London at the time. … We had a good time in England, except for the very uncomfortable living conditions.

SH: Had you had any thoughts of going back to look at Aachen at that time?

FV: Did I? Let's see. … We had a trip back to Holland. And we did take a trip to Aachen. I found contact with my old schoolteacher in Aachen. He was a good friend of our family. He introduced us to the Viccars, the cathedral, the dome. He gave us a private tour of his treasure room, the whole cathedral. And I had a distant relative, who was half Jewish. He was still in Aachen and his mother. She was Jewish but she was married to an Aryan, a non-Jew, who was a judge. And they survived. I can't give you any details on it, but …

SH: It must have been very emotional to go back at that point.

FV: I'm not such an emotional type, especially at that time I wasn't. It was nice to be back. But at that time, '58, '59, we were only twenty years away from it, and I had still good memories of it. By now, I was back ten years ago, eight years ago, and a lot of it had faded from my memory already. But, yes, we did travel a bit. We went to Copenhagen, stayed there a while, but we came back home in 1960 to Milwaukee. And I had a very unsatisfactory assignment, but it didn't last long. … I was in field engineering at that time, so I went to Baltimore to Martin Marietta to support the installation of our equipment in cruise missiles. We called it the Mace at that time. That lasted a year. Then I transferred to Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. And we lived in Lompoc, and we worked on the … nuclear shot in the Pacific. We had to prepare the missile in Vandenberg, and then they were flown to Johnston Island for launch. Well, it turned out that they blew up the pad at Johnston Island at the first launch, so then we were ahead of everyone. And we played shuffleboard all day and ping-pong. We were ahead. Our missiles were ready, and they weren't ready to launch. I was there for a year, and then I transferred to Little Rock, Arkansas for installation and checkout of Titan II missiles that came along then. We were there a year. … I was in the quality assurance group there, and I had to sell off every silo at the end of it, together with Martin Marietta. That lasted until December of '63. Then I went back to Milwaukee, and I worked on the Apollo Mission for the moon-lander. And I was in manufacturing and all the inertial navigation systems for the moon-landing program. And I was there three years. Towards the end of that program, I became sort of dissatisfied. I didn't have a nice supervisor, and I didn't get a raise. And I told him, "To do the work I was doing I didn't need two degrees, and I might leave." And they asked me what I wanted to do, and I said, "Well, I've been reading a lot in semiconductors, and I tried to become knowledgeable in this field." So they transferred me to Los Angeles and made me the vendor

contact engineer for all the semiconductor companies in California. So I did that out of the Los Angeles office for three years, and then I was told to come back to Milwaukee. Milwaukee is a cold place, unfit for human habitation. [laughter]

SH: Beer or no beer, right?

FV: Yeah. And I said, "No, I'm used to California now. I'm going to stay out here." So I quit. And I had contacts with all the semiconductor companies, so Teledyne Semiconductor offered me a job in Mountainview, which is very near where I live now. So I moved to Palo Alto. And that job lasted half a year. The big layoffs came and "last man in, first man out." I was supervisor on the transistor manufacturing line, so I got laid off. I was half a year out of work, and I got a job with Beckman Instruments in Palo Alto, and I stayed with them for three years. And I was laid off there, as well. And I took a job with Westinghouse marine division in Sunnyvale, and I thought, "Now I have it made." I was assigned to a project on the launch electronics for the nuclear submarine missiles. And I was there for about a year and a half, and one day I was told I would be laid off. And I said, "Why the hell am I going to be laid off? Nobody else knows what I'm doing and I've been doing a good job." And they said, "You were the last man hired. That's policy." And I was so shocked I didn't even tell my wife that I was laid off. This was on a Friday they told me. And on Monday I went to work, and that afternoon, they said, "You're not being laid off. We're keeping you because somebody has left, and now we have an open slot." So I said, "Well, when is the next layoff? I'm still on top of the list." And he said, "Yeah, probably in three months, or six months, we'll have to layoff again." So I started looking around. Then came the Westinghouse Division in Baltimore, the electronics and space division. And they were looking for engineers to go overseas, to go to Iran. And so I thought, "It's better than getting laid off," and I interviewed with them. And I figured I'd already lived in three countries, one more wouldn't make much difference. I know how these things go. [laughter] So we packed up our household, put it in storage, went to Baltimore, got a week of indoctrination, got in a plane and went to Iran. On the way, I stopped in Israel for two weeks to take advantage of the low cost trip there. [I] saw my relatives, cousins, had a good time, sightseeing all over Israel. Then we got to Iran, and I tell you, Iran was the most difficult place I ever lived. The culture is so different. Everything is different. Everything is happening. I mean you had more things happen to you in a week than you did in a year in other places. It was just incredible. Our job was to set up a factory in Shiraz, which is about 400 miles south of Tehran, near the Zagros Mountains. And Shiraz was a nice place, hot as blazes, desert all around. We were to set up a factory for overhauling military equipment and manufacturing communication gear for the Iranian military. And I mean, I could go on about life in Iran. It was just incredible.

SH: Was your wife able to be with you then?

FV: Yeah. And she's a real trooper. … There were many people who had their wives along. Their wives couldn't take it. They wanted to go home. But my wife … comfort doesn't mean much to her. She always knows how to make herself comfortable anyway. She loves different experiences. She's marvelous in emotional intelligence. She gets along with people, and she was a great help. She was a real trooper. And I could go on about experiences in Iran for days. [laughter] It was just incredible. Anyway, we set up this factory. … I'd signed a two-year

contract, and I was there about a year and half, and they asked me to extend for more than two years. And I said I was willing to do that. The pay was very good. We had to train the Iranians, so we had all these Iranian engineers. And some of them were good and some were not. And we had to make some of them supervisors, and they were unqualified. But you had to be down to the book, by their doing. So this one guy, we made him a supervisor. He put all his work into my in-basket every day. And so I thought, "I'd better talk to him." So I took him in another room and I said, "Monir, you can't do this. You have to do your own work. I'm not going to do it for you." And so we had a serious discussion, and the next day I was told I was going home. So whether it was a coincidence, probably not, the Iranians had their connections. They were manipulative. Almost anybody who had a higher position was on the take. It was a very difficult environment. Anyway, when I was told to go home, I said, "Ann, we're going on vacation first." So we went to India, we went to Nepal, traveled all over. And then we came … came back to Shiraz, and I won't bother you with all the things that happened on these trips. Then I heard that Westinghouse had an operation going on in Tehran, and I thought, "Well, why don't I apply there." So I went up to Tehran, and they were in terrible shape. They were setting up a depot for the Iranian military, and I got a job there. And that was a very, very difficult job. You can't imagine how chaotic Iran is, the society. The city of Tehran, everything is chaos there. And nobody has any discipline. People don't stand in line. It is a very, very tough place to be. Anyway, I was there a year, and one day I got a phone call saying would I like to go to Morocco? And we talked about it on the phone, and the next day, they called me up and said, "No, you're not going to Morocco. We need you in Greece." [laughter] Ann and I took a vacation in Turkey on the way, and then we got to Greece. And that was a very pleasant contract. They had a very nice manager there. We built a big overhaul depot for military and civilian planes in Tanagra, north of Athens. We had a very elegant apartment with marble everything. … What a relief to be out of this mess in Iran. … When you flew into Iran, an hour before you landed, you got drunk so you could get your adrenalin going to survive it. I'll have to relate this one instance to you because it was so typical for everyday happening. We'd been in Russia, in St. Petersburg and in Moscow. We came back on the plane, and an hour before landing in Tehran, everybody gets drunk as usual. And the lady next to us said, "Where do you live?" And I told her where we lived, and she said, "Oh, I live near there. Why don't we take a taxi together when we get there?" We landed, and I said, "I'm going to wait for the luggage to get out. Why don't you go and get the taxi." She comes back. She was terror-stricken, and she said, "There's something going on. Everybody's making private deals for the taxi drivers. The man who's a dispatcher at the airport is sitting there like he's stoned, not doing anything. The taxi drivers are all overcharging." So I said, "Oh, we'll take care of that." Sure enough, the guy was sitting there stoned out of his mind, and the taxi drivers were doubling their fares. But I knew how much it was, approximately, so I negotiated a fare a little bit higher than normal. We get in the taxi cab, and after a couple of miles, and the driver said, "Of course, each of you has to pay me this much. " So I said, "We'll see about that." So we get to where this lady lived, and he starts throwing all our stuff out of the cab, out of the trunk. And the lady said, "I'm going to take your license down and am going to report you to the police." Well, that's very dangerous in those countries. You have to bribe the police, and all this. And he got very excited, and he was rushing towards her. And then her husband, a big American, came out of the house, and he saw this guy rushing towards his wife. He grabbed him by the shirt and smashed him against the wall. And then he got even more excited, and I put all my luggage back in the cab, and then he drove like an idiot, drove us towards our house. And I took my luggage out before I paid him.

And that was sort of a typical event that you had almost daily, such things happening to you. And you had to be prepared for it all the time. If you were in an accident in a taxicab in Tehran, you quickly get out, give the guy a little more than you need to give him, and disappear. Because if you didn't, he would say that a foreigner interfered with his driving, deep pockets. So you became very streetwise. Everything was a potential difficulty. Anyway, we were glad to get to Greece. That was a very good year and a half in Greece, and I was prepared to go home, and they said, "No, you go to Morocco." So we drove to Morocco, and that was another happening.

SH: Wow. You drove to Morocco.

FV: We drove through Europe, and … we got on the ferry, I've forgotten where. Anyway, we were going to Brindisi, in Italy. This was supposed to take one night, overnight. Instead, we landed in Corfu. And we stayed a whole day in Corfu, and nobody told us why. They said the seas were too high, and they were no higher than this. It was another happening, always happens. Well, we got a day late into Brindisi, and my car was the last to get off the boat, and somebody had already warped my fender. And they said, "You can't get off." They said, "Where are your car papers?" … I bought the car in Greece from a German woman. Her husband was German. She was Greek, but they lived in America. They were archeologists. The car papers were made out in German, in German script, no less. … To keep it in Greece, the gopher in the office had to get Greek papers for it. When I got on the ferry, the customs guy takes these papers away from me. And I said, "Look, these are my car papers." And he says, "Look, you don't need them. Nobody can read Greek any place else. What are you going to do with Greek papers." And I said, "I don't have any other papers." And he said, "You don't need them." [He] kept them, wouldn't give them back to me. And he fined me a hundred and thirty dollars because I didn't have an extension on my car papers. And so when I got to Italy, they said, "Where are your car papers?" That's it. They said, "You can't bring it into Italy. Take it back to Greece." So I said, "No." It was midnight, raining. I said, "No, I want to see your manager, your supervisor." And they said, "You can't see him 'till tomorrow." And we stayed in a fleabag by the harbor … worrying about the contents in the car sitting on the dock. They all steal on the dock. We all know that. [laughter] The next morning, I try to find this guy, and I search around for an hour and finally locate an office and explain to him that we are only passing through Italy on our way to North Africa. So he says, "Well, you can't sell the car in Italy. We'll give you a five day permit to drive through Italy, but you have to leave an eight hundred dollar bond." So I had to go cash travelers-checks to pay my money. We were going to go Pompeii. Well, it was Christmas Day, and we knew Pompeii wouldn't be open. We didn't eat anything all day long because every restaurant was closed. So we drove through Italy in apprehension of what would happen, and we got to the Italian, French border. And I showed him my papers, and I said, "I want to get my eight hundred dollars back, the bond I had left." And they said, "Oh, you don't expect the day after Christmas to get your money back. The man who does that is not working today. Come back tomorrow." So I said, "I'll try another border crossing," and I went down to a crossing near Menton. Same story, nobody would give me my money back, but they would let me into France. So I went into France, and I remembered I'd had a Greek friend, who was living with a Swedish girl, and they were visiting her parents in Menton. And so I called him up, and we had a real nice evening together. The next day I went back, and I thought, "I'll just leave my car in France. I'll just walk over to that office." [laughter] And they said, "Where's your car?" And I said, "Over there." And they said, "We

need it. We have to check the license number." By then, they gave me my eight hundred dollars back. We felt very uncomfortable. We thought, "Now we're going to have trouble at the Spanish border." At the Spanish border, there was no trouble at all. They just waved us through. Then we went sightseeing in Barcelona and Granada and stayed in Mirabella for a night or two. I didn't want to get into Morocco until the first of the year because I didn't want to pay taxes in Morocco for the year that just passed. One country is enough, you know, Greece. We took the ferry from Algeciras to Ceuta, which is a Spanish enclave on the North African coast. And there, I had to go through customs. And there were all these guys who offered their services, and I thought, "My God, I have no car papers." I've got only this piece of German paper where it says that the man's name was Dieter Timme, and that's not my name. My passport gives my name. So I put my hand on this name and showed my passport, and then I put my hand on my passport and showed him this paper. [laughter] And they said, "What are you going to do in Morocoo?" I didn't tell them I had a job. I told them I was a tourist. So I got it. Well, that was not the end of this particular problem. When we got to Rabat, a couple of days later, I went to the office gopher and said I needed to register my car, and this is all I had. And he said, "You're not going to get any car papers with what you're showing me here. There's just no way. They're going to say you stole your car and take your car away." Well, that was pretty uncomfortable. [laughter] We thought we'd fix up this piece of German paper I have, and the gopher tried to erase the name and he made a hole this big there. [laughter] And we were up the creek there. So I gave it to Ann and said, "You think of something to do." So she dipped it in a bucket of Clorox and faded the ink a little bit. And then she took a shoe and dipped it in a saucer of coffee and rolled it over that page to sort of obliterate the hole. And then I faked my name where the other name had been. And then … the gopher from the office and I took a carton of cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey and … prepared for any eventuality. And they told us at the motor vehicle station that no, they didn't want to see us. [They said], "Just give us your papers. We'll take care of it." So there was nobody to interface with, and we gave them this crummy piece of paper, fake name and everything, and two weeks later I got my license. [laughter]

SH: How long were you in Morocco?

FV: Three and a half years. And that was a good contract. We built an air defense system, radar stations, all around Morocco. And I had to travel to all of them, and I had to teach the Moroccan military how to do quality assurance work. And that was a good contract because Morocco is a hell of a nice place. We lived in a beach community in a villa right on the beach. The garden ended where the beach began. We had servants, a cook and a gardener. So life was easy and very pleasant. It was enjoyable. I enjoyed that contract a great deal. And we traveled from there. My wife went to Romania and Russia and again, Central Russia. Well, we didn't travel anywhere from there. On the way home, by the time I went home, I traveled all over Morocco for part of the job. We stopped in Spain for three weeks, went to Toledo, Madrid.

SH: What year was this when you were coming back?

FV: It was 1983. [I] went back to Baltimore. There was no end to problems, tax problems, and again lied and chiseled. [laughter] I mean just to be honest you have to. You can't escape it. I don't think I'm a dishonest person, just like on these car papers. You had to help yourself any way you could. Anyway, it was couple months in Baltimore. I really didn't do much except go

to museums in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore and wait for another assignment. And then something came along in Australia, so we went to Australia. That was an easy assignment. I mean after two weeks, we had an apartment. We rented furniture. We had our electricity connected and telephone connected, like home. And Ann said, "Shoot, this place is no challenge." [laughter]

SH: After all these others.

FV: So again, we were on a military contract for the Australia Air Force, building equipment. We had one vacation on the Great Barrier Reef, which was great. What a wonderful place, the Great Barrier Reef. We went to the Blue Mountains. But the contract didn't last very long. And when it ended, for me anyway, we went to New Zealand for a three-week vacation, drove all over the north island. Then, we flew to Tahiti and spent a couple of days there. [It was the] last stop for the vacation. And then I reported in Baltimore. And again I had good luck. You know, if you have a good reputation, they always need you. And that's really all. A lot of people, when they came back, didn't have a job because their reputation had preceded them, and no manager would have them. But I was fortunate in that respect. So I walked into my boss' office and he said, "We have an assignment in California." And it happened to be within five miles of where my house was. So after a month or two, they transferred me to California. I got back … in first quarter of '84. I had notified my tenant to move out of my house, and we moved into our house and spent two months fixing it up again and getting the garden redone. And I had a job representing Westinghouse at National Semiconductor, again a military contract, static random access memory that was very difficult to make. [It] took us a long time to finally get one out. I was on that for about a year, and then I was two years from retirement, and I found a slot with a vendor contact group in California. They happened to be located at the Marine Division where I had worked before. And [it was], again, six miles from home. I got extra pay for being away from the plant. It was very advantageous. I worked there for two years, and then I retired in '87. So that was my career.

SH: How was it to be involved with the military? I mean, obviously, your military career certainly wasn't something you considered positive, but then you were involved with the military throughout your career?

FV: … In Morocco, I would go with military, with my adjutants, on two day trips or three day trips across the Atlas Mountains. I would get thirty-five dollars a day additional pay for doing this, and these poor bastards were getting one dollar a day. For that, you could only buy a bottle of water. So … for lunchtime we'd all eat out of big tajeen dish together, and I'd pay for it myself, but those poor guys. They weren't even treated decently. Officers would yell at the men, send them to jail. [They would] send them on assignments without any backup. It was quite incredible the way they treated each other. In Iran, … the Iranians were so incredibly inept and stupid, lack of education, mainly. Nothing ever got done. If you spent a month and could say you had done something, you were happy. Usually, nothing really got done. Typical routine with dealing with the Iranians would be, I had to do failure analysis in Shiraz, and I said, "I need a Polaroid camera." So they got a Polaroid camera. And I took a few pictures, and the security people came and would say, "You're not allowed to have a camera in the plant." Hell, we bought all our equipment from Motorola, so what was secret about that? That's what we

assembled there. There's nothing secret. It was just playing, playing at it. So they took my camera away. They said, "Anyway, you don't need it. We have a photographer. When you have to take pictures, call him." The first time I sent him a memo saying, "I need him to take pictures for failure analysis." He sent it back saying that he would only come if it was signed by the manager. The general manager of the plant … was never there. So I said, "Forget this, man. I can't deal with anyone like that." So you were stymied at every point. Many people feel that their importance in life depends on being a roadblock to somebody more important. You find that in Asia, in India, and in Iran. In India, I noticed it all the time. You go to a hotel clerk and say, "I want a hotel reservation in Delhi," and he says, "You can't get a hotel reservation in Delhi, they're always taken." I said, "Send a fax anyway." Ten seconds later, it says, "Confirmed." You don't know what the hell they're talking about. [laughter] [It was the] same on airplanes, airplane reservations. "No, we can't get your ticket." You can get a ticket anyway, and the plane is half full. In Iran, you call up the Iranian Airlines and say that you want a ticket to London, and they'd say, "I'm sorry, we can't get you a ticket for three weeks." And you know that's a lie. So you go there in person and say you want a ticket, and you get one right away. When you get on the plane, it's not even full, and you wonder why you were told it was full. The reason is because the girl can say she's doing her job and turns you off, and then she just answers the phone all day and never sells any tickets. They fake it.

SH: In your dealing with all these foreign countries and things, were there any contacts or suggestions of the CIA activities?

FV: As part of the office routine, we had people who were in touch with the embassy on a weekly basis to get security information. … Towards the end of my Iran stay, on the last day of my work, we discussed setting up safe stations and fixing them up with kerosene and food and blankets in case there was trouble. And I thought that it was a good time to leave. There was trouble. Let's see, I left the first of July in '78, and by Christmas, Westinghouse and all the other companies took everybody out. They chartered a 747, told everybody to take the most essential things and go home for Christmas. They didn't tell them they were going home for good. They left all their belongings, except their papers, and moved out.

SH: I'm going to suggest now that we put the tape on pause and look at the photographs that you have, with the option of turning this back on. I want to say thank you for showing me the album. There are a lot of photographs of your family. From the photographs taken in Germany as a young man, I see you and your brother clowning around, and you seem to have kept that up from about two on up through when you were in your military uniforms. I wanted to ask because you came through such political times, when you came to this country as a young man, and in the military and your education, have you ever held any political offices? Have you ever been interested in politics?

FV: I'm interested in politics, but, no, I would never have considered taking a political office. My education was so limited. And after you get out of Rutgers, I felt really cheated. I said, "Here I am, supposedly an educated student now, finished with college, and I never learned anything about politics, about religion, about the rest of the world. No sex." And I felt, "I'm incomplete." I've always enjoyed reading, but then I just studied a lot of technical material. I read technical magazines all my life because there was always something I could use on the job.

I belong to all the technical societies, American Society for Agricultural Engineers, Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, the American Society for Quality Assurance. And I got my certificates, and I became a professional engineer. All this took work. I find that the education I really wanted I never got until I retired when I could read all day long. So that's what I enjoy about retirement. Besides, we travel all the time, at least once a year. Since I retired, we've been to Thailand, Burma, Indonesia, Japan. Of course, we've been to Australia, New Zealand. We've been to the Galapagos Islands. We'd been to Peru earlier. We've been to Panama, the San Blas Islands, Costa Rica, Canada, a few times, Alert Bay, up there. And we'd been back to Europe, traveled through England, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg again. So we've been busy. It's been enjoyable. But when it comes to politics, I can only paraphrase Pogo. "We've seen the enemy and it's the Republicans." [laughter]

SH: Had you been involved in any organization other than your professional ones?

FV: No, really not. … I've been in activities. Some of them I can't even remember the names of. [When] we lived in Dayton, Ohio, I used to go folk dancing all the time. In England, we'd go horseback riding all the time. It's hard to hang onto friends when every time you move you get a whole new group of people to associate with.

SH: I thank you very much for taking time to do this interview. I'm sorry that we weren't able to connect over Reunion Weekend at Rutgers, just a little delay here.

FV: Yeah. Well, I think we've covered it pretty well.

SH: Great.

FV: I could entertain you for hours talking to you about the various things that have happened. Oh, I have to show you one thing.

SH: I'm going to pause the tape. Mr. Van Aken brought some articles that he shared with me, and there's another story we'd like to put on tape about his youth in Germany.

FV: A good friend of my family's was our early Montessori School teacher, who was a wonderful man. He invited Carl and me and another friend of ours to go on a bicycle trip in the mountains for a couple of days because we didn't participate in any other activities otherwise. So we were up in the mountains near the Belgian border, and we ran into a border guard. And he stopped us and said, "What are you doing here?" And we said, "We're hiking." We had left our bicycles in another village, and we were hiking at the time. And then he checked our names, and he began, "How come you are hiking with these Jewish children?" to the teacher. And then he made us open our packs up and spread everything on the road, looked at it, and of course, didn't do anything. It was just harassment. He inquired where we were going to stay that night, and we told him …

----------END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO----------

SH: This continues an interview with Mr. Fred Van Aken on July 25, 2000 in Berkeley, California. Mr. Van Aken, you were telling a story that you had encountered.

FV: When we got to the village, … we didn't stay at the local guesthouse because we figured the man had already spread the news that a teacher was coming with three Jewish children. You never knew. Probably nothing would have happened, but you were scared. We went to a farmhouse and asked if we could stay in the barn. We paid the farmer a little bit, and we just put down a lot of straw and slept in there. But then we were sort of worried. And a couple of weeks later, after we got home, we all got notices to come to the Gestapo offices for an interview, not together, everybody separately. My brother and I … went together. I remember sitting in that bare room with the desk there, with an attendant, waiting. While we were waiting, a man comes in and says, "You investigated Mr. So and So some time ago, and you let him off because he told you his remark didn't mean what you implied it to mean, but I know he meant it, and I have this evidence, blah, blah, blah." All this right in front of us. And then, we were called in, Carl and I, one at a time. Now I remember my interview, this guy said, "Now where did you go? And when did you go?" As if all this were important. And he wrote all this down, and he wrote all this down wrong. I didn't seem to matter at all, obviously. I could see what he wrote down. And then came a question, "And when you stayed in the barn, was it very cold? Did you snuggle up close to each other?" And I smelled a rat. I said, "No, no. We had lots of straw. We were very comfortable." So they were trying to pin some homosexuality on the teacher, I guess. But anyway, it's the kind of stuff that makes you very nervous.

SH: How old were you?

FV: Fifteen, maybe fourteen. I don't remember now. But every time we saw an officer on a motorcycle pass us, we looked at him, "Is that him?" So we had our many, many unpleasant moments. That was just one of them.

SH: In one of the newspaper articles that you've shown me here, there was a Jewish Soccer Club. Did you have to form your own soccer club to participate?

FV: Oh, yeah. I mean the Jewish community had to manage everything itself. When after all these laws came out, we only gave our business to Jewish merchants, if we could, Jewish shoemakers, or whatever.

SH: How many Jews would that have been, what percentage of the population in Aachen was Jewish at that point?

FV: I have no idea. Not many, not many. There were laws like, a Jew could not hire a servant girl unless she was over forty-five. So we had to let our servants go and hire an elderly woman. I remember the place where I used to go horseback riding was a ten-minute walk from home. And it was a large, indoor hall that we used in the wintertime. And one of my friends was riding and the mayor's wife, the mayor was a Nazi and had just taken office, and the mayor's wife came in, and I don't know how she knew that my friend there was Jewish. Anyway, she made a big ruckus, saying that she wouldn't ride in any place with a Jew. They told him to go ride

outside in the snow. You had all kinds of dumb little rejections like that. It's just a cumulative burden.

SH: When you took the train and went into Holland, your parents were still in Aachen?

FV: Yeah, we were on our own.

SH: How long were you on your own in Holland before they could come?

FV: We lived with a family that we knew, that we had met some years earlier in Amsterdam. My parents came maybe two or three months later.

SH: How much contact were you able to have with them in that two or three months?

FV: I don't remember. Probably none. No, I just don't remember.

SH: Well, I thank you very much. If this interview has triggered any other memories, I encourage you to add them to the transcript.

FV: Somehow all the memories have problems or were problems. You had to overcome all of them. And it makes me think, people always talk about stress today. We never even knew that word.

SH: You certainly lived it, though.

FV: Yeah, yeah, but that was not part of our vocabulary in those days. You … were concerned all the time. You certainly were nervous at times. One of my classmates was a very decent chap. His father was a schoolteacher. He said one time, "Let's go on a bicycle ride some place." And we were on the outskirts of town. And a Nazi youth leader came by and recognized him, and we must have been known for some reason, even though I never knew any of these people personally. They knew who was Jewish. They pointed us out to each other, I guess. Anyway, he stopped his motorcycle and questioned our friend, "What are you doing with Jewish friends here?" That gave my brother and me a chance to flee into the woods. We suspected some more problems. But my friend told this party member that it was none of his business, "Go, beat it." But he was intimidated. That's the last time we rode together.

SH: That's what I wanted to ask. In being fourteen, fifteen, at this age, do you remember anyone in the community standing up, saying that this isn't right, or anyone who opposed Hitler, in any fashion?

FV: Well, the schoolteacher, who we made that trip with, he was definitely anti-Nazi. There were other people, but, publicly, nobody would take a stand. It was too dangerous. They could only show their friendship in private deeds. I remember the schoolteacher gave me his typewriter before we left. He said, "Take it with you." That was probably the only possession he had. He visited us after the war when we lived in Wisconsin. It's hard to convey this atmosphere of constant fear. And I think that's what most people who went through that time

probably hurt the most. They became neurotic. They suffered post-traumatic stress. Most of my mother's old acquaintances, after they retired, they went off the rocker. And they were living with all these suppressed memories. I don't know how much it affected my father. I know he was angry about the way his old acquaintances treated him in Germany. He never talked about it, but he was bitter and angry. He had established this textile firm in about 1920. Because he needed a technically competent manager, he hired a man who was competent but not educated. And he ran the factory, while Father traveled a lot, selling. And, in 1934, right after Hitler got into power, this man went to the party and said, "I don't feel right about being a partner with a Jew." My father had made him a partner. This man had put no money into it. He [Father] made him a partner to keep him there. And my father was very ill at the time, and I don't know with what anymore, maybe a heart condition. Anyway, he was in bed for quite a long while. He had to appoint a man to represent his judicial affairs with this partner. And they gave this partner the whole factory, the whole business, and my father was compensated with roughly a year's salary. And he was very bitter about that, yeah. We should have left Germany at that point, but, instead, we waited around Germany for a couple of years and didn't know what to do.

SH: Did he think he would get it back?

FV: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. But he was only in his early fifties then, and that house you see in that picture there, we only built that in 1935. And we lived there for three years. He had enough money to retire. He was a very good businessman, I guess. He made a lot of money.

SH: When your mother and father came to this country, were they involved in any organizations here in this country?

FV: No, my father certainly not. My mother may have joined in Vineland, New Jersey a Jewish welfare organization that she did some volunteer work with, but that was it. But in Germany, Father belonged to quite a number of organizations. He was the sales type. But we were not involved in it. I remember the F.B.I. came to the house to check my parents out before they became citizens. And they came to our house, and they said, "We are from the F.B.I.," or whatever agency it was at the time. [They said], "We'd like to question you about one of your neighbors, Mrs. Van Aken." [laughter] So mother told them she was Mrs. Van Aken, and they went to the house next door. [laughter]

SH: Missed it by one house, right. [laughter]

FV: I'm very weary of all these security organizations. They make too many mistakes, and … that's really it. You really have to be very careful with them. I had two cousins. They were completely apolitical girls. They were twins. And … they lived in Baltimore for a while and then Philadelphia. One of them was in Washington, DC … In the forties, early fifties maybe, she went to a bookstore. Unbeknownst to her, it was a communist bookstore. And she ordered a book and left her name. And after, she got on their mailing list and got communist literature. When she applied for citizenship, she was always given the runaround. She never became a citizen. And she died without ever becoming a citizen. Her twin sister became a citizen, had no

trouble. But security outfits, I had some personal friends who had some trouble with them, too. Luckily, I never did.

SH: Well, again, I thank you very much.

FV: Yeah, okay.

SH: This ends the interview.

---------- END OF INTERVIEW----------

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