

# Art Jacobs World War II Oral History Interview

An Interview Conducted April 12, 2010, by William McWhorter as part of the *Here and There: Recollections of Texas in World War II* Oral History Training Workshop series. This interview was possible due to the generous support of the Houston Endowment and the Summerlee Foundation.

This is a transcript of a recorded interview carried out by the Texas Historical Commission. The recordings and transcript of this interview are held by the Military Sites Program of the Texas Historical Commission, 105 W. 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Austin, Texas, 78701 (thc.texas.gov/military).

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This material should be cited in the following manner:

Bibliographies:

Jacobs, Art. "World War II Oral History Interview." Interviewed by William McWhorter on April 12, 2010, by telephone. Texas Historical Commission, Austin, Texas.

Notes (footnotes or endnotes):

Jacobs, Art. "World War II Oral History Interview." Interviewed by William McWhorter on April 12, 2010, by telephone. (Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 2010), page #.

## **ABSTRACT**

Arthur “Art” Jacobs was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1933 to German immigrants. After a first arrest and parole in March 1944, his father was arrested a second time the following November and removed to Ellis Island. Art, his older brother, and mother voluntarily joined him there in February 1945. Two months later the Jacobs family was sent by train to Crystal City (Family) Internment Camp in Crystal City, Texas. They remained interned there until December 1945, after which they returned to Ellis Island. Weeks later, the family was removed to Germany as part of the U.S. Government’s exchange program and spent a brief time imprisoned at Hohenasperg by U.S. authorities before being released. Art Jacobs and his brother then spent nearly two years in post-war Germany before securing the sponsorship of American strangers and returning to the United States.

In his interview Jacobs discusses his early life in New York City and parents’ occupations; his father’s arrest and detention at Ellis Island; the trip down to Crystal City (Family) Internment Camp; various locations within the camp and wider area; leisure time and food at the camp; the family’s expatriation to Germany in January 1946 and temporary incarceration at Hohenasperg; his and his brother’s eventual return to the United States; and his current reflections on World War II internment and past and ongoing recognition efforts.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

Interviewee: Art Jacobs  
Date: April 12, 2010  
Place: By telephone  
Interviewer: William McWhorter

McWhorter: This is William McWhorter with the Texas Historical Commission. It is 10 a.m. Central Standard Time in Austin, Texas. I'm conducting a Texas in World War II Initiative, *Here and There Oral History Training Workshop* interview with Mr. Art Jacobs. The focus of this interview is his World War II experiences including Crystal City Family Internment Camp in Zavala County [Texas]. And today is Monday, April 12, 2010.

Mr. Jacobs, thank you very much for taking my phone call today and allowing me to conduct an interview with you over the phone. For the transcriber, if you don't mind, would you please state your name and then spell it for me?

Jacobs: Okay. I'm Arthur D. Jacobs. That's A-r-t-h-u-r, D. middle initial, and last name is Jacobs, J-a-c-o-b-s.

McWhorter: Thank you very much. For the purpose of the interview, may I refer to you to as Arthur, or do you prefer Mr. Jacobs?

Jacobs: Art will be fine.

McWhorter: Art will be fine, well, thank you very much. I passed forward a questionnaire of proposed questions that you were nice enough to review and fill out and send back to me. And I'm going to start with that, but occasionally I'll move away from it and ask more developed questions as the conversation moves forward.

Jacobs: Okay. And I'm okay if you want me to stop—when you ask me a question after I've gone on for too long, just tell me to stop.

McWhorter: [laughs] Well, thank you. I appreciate that.

Jacobs: Alright.

McWhorter: Let's begin with where you were born.

Jacobs: I was born in 1933 in Brooklyn, New York, King's County in Wyckoff Heights Hospital.

McWhorter: Born in the city of Brooklyn, New York.

Jacobs: That's correct.

McWhorter: What was it like growing up in Brooklyn during the 1930s?

Jacobs: Well, I can tell you from about the time that I was five it was really wonderful. We lived in some different neighborhoods and our last neighborhood was really a mixed neighborhood. We had Irish, Italian, Chinese, Germans, you name it, we were completely mixed, and our neighborhood was a neighborhood of what they called the brownstone flats. They were six stories—I mean, three stories with six flats in each unit.

McWhorter: Well, that is definitely a different neighborhood than I grew up on the Texas border with Mexico. So it's the 1930s, you're growing up in Brooklyn, New York.

Jacobs: Right-o.

McWhorter: Is it obvious to you, as you're getting a little bit older—let's say four, almost five years old—that the country is dealing with the Great Depression? Did you ever hear your parents talking about that?

Jacobs: Yes. I knew my parents went through the Great Depression, but neither of us children were bothered too much with that. My dad was a worker and he became a superintendent of an apartment house that we lived in, in the basement and that's about all that I knew about the Great Depression. But I don't recall us ever going hungry.

McWhorter: You also mentioned in the questionnaire that your father worked for the General Diaper Service in New York.

Jacobs: That's correct. Uh huh. He was there—he worked for the General Diaper Service where he was a mechanic and he also kept the big furnaces running that they needed for their hot water and steam and so forth.

McWhorter: Is the General Diaper Service exactly that? Is it a child diaper company?

Jacobs: It's exactly that. People back then rather than having these paper diapers that you throw away, they actually used real cloth diapers and this diaper service picked up dirty diapers and brought clean diapers, just like they do uniforms for major companies. And so they cleaned all the dirty diapers. You can imagine—and that's where my father worked.

McWhorter: Well, much like the General Diaper Service, the local sanitation service in a city such as Brooklyn was probably a company that people absolutely had to have living in that close a proximity to each other. They needed their diapers—soiled diapers, that is—and their garbage picked up and returned back to them in the case of the diapers because of how close you lived with other people around you.

Jacobs: Right-o.

McWhorter: You also mentioned that your mother worked in a knitting mill.

Jacobs: Yes, it was like a small "store"—in Brooklyn where we lived, there were many small knitting mills. They were, like, in storefronts and places like that, and that's where my mother worked. What she was making, I have no idea but that's where she worked, and there were several of those in our neighborhood. They were pretty popular at that time. I think they called—they used to call those, like, sweatshops, but I don't recall my mother talking about where she worked as a sweatshop.

McWhorter: Okay. From the questionnaire that you were nice enough to provide to me ahead of time, it sounds that by the time you were born both your parents had established a home for themselves and their children.

Jacobs: Yes.

McWhorter: Both had jobs, but that your parents came to the United States just a few years earlier. When did they arrive in the United States?

Jacobs: My parents both arrived—separately not together—they met and married here. They arrived about 1928. That's when they arrived in New York.

McWhorter: And did they come to New York like most people do, looking for a new life in the United States?

Jacobs: That's correct. My father looked for a new life as well as my mother, and they probably both had about five dollars to their name, but they managed to make it in this great country.

McWhorter: I'm glad to hear that. By the time your parents arrived or emigrated to the United States, were they able to speak English or did they learn English when they got here?

Jacobs: They both had some English in school. My father learned his English watching cowboy movies, like Gene Autry and those [by] Hopalong Cassidy. That's how he picked up his English, and my mother was what you call a housekeeper [or] nanny for a Jewish family, and she learned her English working for them.

McWhorter: Forgive me, I forgot. You already mentioned it before, but what year were you born in again?

Jacobs: Nineteen thirty-three.

McWhorter: Nineteen thirty-three. So by December of 1941, you're eight years old, is that correct?

Jacobs: That's correct, uh huh.

McWhorter: Okay. Is it just you and your parents, or do you have siblings?

Jacobs: I have a brother, and he's eighteen months older than I am.

McWhorter: He's eighteen months older, okay. So by December of 1941, you're eight years old, and I remember at eight I was very much a child but I still have memories of being eight years old. Do you have memories of hearing about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Jacobs: Yes. Of course, it took place on Sunday and on Monday the headlines of the newspapers read about the Jap[anese] attack [on] Pearl Harbor. I recall on the *Daily News*, the front page had a big headline, "Japs Bomb Pearl Harbor," and I recall—and then in the schools they asked for donations for food cans, to buy war bonds—or saving stamps is what we bought as children, and you could bring a dime a week and buy a savings stamp and put it in your book until you fill[ed] up a book. Then you could get, like, a twenty-five-dollar war bond.

McWhorter: And how did it make you feel to participate in a program like that?

Jacobs: Very good. Very good. My brother and I collected newspapers as scrap for the war effort. In fact, I have an award that I received for collecting, like, three tons of scrap in newspapers.

McWhorter: Very impressive.

Jacobs: Right, um hmm. I have that award here someplace, but I don't know where it's at, but it's in my files.

McWhorter: You mentioned scrap driving and you mentioned war bonds—war stamps.

Jacobs: Um hmm.

McWhorter: Was this part of your practices as a Cub Scout and your brother as a Boy Scout or is this something you did independently?

Jacobs: Yes, that's what it was, and as Americans, and our parents encouraged it. They never discouraged us from helping the war effort.

McWhorter: Well, it sounds like your parents identified themselves as Americans at this time.

Jacobs: They did. Um hmm. Both of them did.

McWhorter: I'm not sure how old your parents were—and I knew they had two children—

Jacobs: Well, my father was born in 1908, and my mother was born in 1906. So my dad was about thirty-three years old when the war started, right? That's about right, right, '41?

McWhorter: Um hmm.

Jacobs: Thirty-three and eight is forty-one.

McWhorter: That's right.

Jacobs: And my mother was about thirty-five.

McWhorter: I was going to say with two children at home, I'm not sure how old they were but did they put any consideration into joining the service themselves or do you think they were—

Jacobs: My father was registered for the draft and signed up and was classified—I forget what his classification was—but he was classified according to how many children



he had and how old he was, but he was eligible for the draft but he was never drafted.

McWhorter: Okay. Well, for America the war started in December of 1941.

Jacobs: That's correct.

McWhorter: And a couple of years went by, the war plays itself out both in the European Theater of Operations and the Pacific Theater of Operations. And in 1944 an event happened for your family that no one I've spoken with before has had happen to them, and this is the crux of our interview is that in 1944 the FBI placed a visit to your family.

Jacobs: That's correct, um hmm.

McWhorter: I don't want to get out of order because you know this story far better than I do, but did anything lead up to this or did it happen out of the blue?

Jacobs: It happened—well, first of all, my father was arrested in November of '44 in, like, [November] 1 or 4 or something like that. But prior to that, like in March of '44 he was arrested and ordered to appear before a hearing board on St. Patrick's Day of March of '44. So you can say that the arrest came out of the blue, but it began in March '44.

McWhorter: Well, with the arrest in March of '44 of your father followed by the November arrest, does your father—

Jacobs: In March '44, he was arrested briefly, put on parole, which they called—and then he was ordered to appear before a hearing board on March 17. Now, at the hearing board—you have to understand—you're not entitled to a lawyer. Lawyers are forbidden, but you are entitled to three witnesses, and my father had three witnesses. One was my mother; one was a Russian Jew named Dan Lipinski, very good friend of ours; and another was our aunt through marriage who was an American citizen. But those were my father's three witnesses. And of course, three of them said that he doesn't deserve to be interned, he has no Nazi tendencies, et cetera, et cetera. So from that hearing they released him and he was on parole.

So now, let me take you to November of '44 and give you what I might call some reasons for his arrest in November of '44. Is that okay?

McWhorter: Yes, it is.

Jacobs: Okay. In November of '44, they went to his work and arrested him unbeknownst to my mother or any of us. They took him away from his work and took him out to Ellis Island. Now, why did that arrest take place? You know, the war is almost over, but what we were looking for—we the United States were looking for—what I call—and have called—exchange bait. We had expatriated and repatriated and deported several German Americans to Europe. And so the [U.S.] government was running low of people to exchange. So they said, “Oh, well, let’s go get Jacobs.” So they went and had gotten my father and they arrested him, and unbeknownst to my mother or my brother or I, he was picked up on, like, a Friday at his work, arrested in front of God and everybody, and taken away to Ellis Island. And that’s how it all started and really was the destruction of our family as we knew it and our family life.

McWhorter: Mr. Jacobs, if you can hold one second, my phone appears to be providing a lot of static. I’m going to try and adjust the speaker. Bear with me one second if you don’t mind.

Jacobs: Okay. [Recording paused]

McWhorter: All right, can you still hear me, sir?

Jacobs: Yes, I can. Is it clear now?

McWhorter: It seems to be clear now, yes, sir.

Jacobs: Okay. So we were at where they arrested my father, no one knew it, so they took my father to Ellis Island. When they took my father to Ellis Island, he said, “Hey, you need to go see my wife. She’s at home. She only has about two dollars and she has two growing boys to feed,” and so on and so forth. They ignored that until Monday when someone came to our house and told my mother that my father was arrested. But for that whole weekend my mother—which is common in the Brooklyn area where people lean out the windows and look—just sat and

watch[ed], and she watched for my dad day and night for him to come home. She had no idea what happened to him.

McWhorter: How did that make you feel observing your mother like that?

Jacobs: Oh, well, it was serious. I'd try to get my mother to keep from crying and that sort of thing but to no avail. But anyhow, on Monday she found out where my father was. So then we went and visited him at Ellis Island a week or two later and—  
[Recording stopped].

McWhorter: And then the following Monday, you were about to say the events that took place?

Jacobs: On the following Monday an official from the Justice Department came or the local people—social welfare worker came and told where my father was. So then my mother knew and so she made arrangements, so eventually we visited my father at Ellis Island. And those visitations took place until about February—actually until February—the end of February, when we went to Ellis Island together as a family, my mother, my brother, and I, and my mother decided she had enough of this and she just decided to pack up our belongings, give our stuff away to relatives hopefully to hold for us for the future, and took some suitcases and the clothes on our back and went to Ellis Island. When we got there, the officials were stunned, and then they decided, "Okay, we'll lock them up here." So my mother was locked up upstairs in the great hall, and my brother and I were downstairs in a big open bay with men and my father.

McWhorter: So this is February of 1945, is that correct?

Jacobs: February of '45, Yes, that's correct, uh huh.

McWhorter: And your mom after dealing with three months of your father being detained for no good reason—

Jacobs: Right.

McWhorter: —is pulling you and your brother out of school—

Jacobs: Right.

McWhorter: —asking relatives to do their best to hold on to your belongings—

Jacobs: Right-o.

McWhorter: —packing your lives up into a couple of suitcases—

Jacobs: Right.

McWhorter: —and voluntarily going out to Ellis Island to join your father?

Jacobs: That's correct. That's what we did.

McWhorter: Well, it sounds to me like your mother really loved your father.

Jacobs: She did. In fact, we can move ahead a little bit here, and I'll just tell you a story. I never understood why my mother wanted to go with my father. He was eventually—well, let me see how I explain this—he voluntarily repatriated to Germany, but that was under the pressure from President Truman who said, "Everybody who is going to be interned will be deported." So let me describe this to you. My mother went with him and took us, and I couldn't understand this. Eleven years after we went to Germany, I was in the [United States] Air Force and went and finally seen my mother and my father again, and I asked my mother, I said, "Mom, why did you go with Pop?" She said, "Because he said that if you don't go with me, you'll never see me again." I said, "No, Mom, Pop wouldn't have done that." So now, let me take you to the official record. On the official record that my father signed to be repatriated, it asks him, "If your family decides not to go, do you still want to go?" He said, "No." So as a child I knew what my father was like and he wouldn't desert my mother.

McWhorter: Right.

Jacobs: But he just sort of threatened her because he knew she would probably go with him. I mean, I don't know why anybody would want to go to that God-forsaken country. It was bombed. People were starving to death, everything else like that, but anyhow, that's what happened.

But long before that in April of—like at the end of April of '45—we headed to Crystal City aboard a train with chaperones, actually guards, but they were nice guards and we took the train from New York to St. Louis, from St. Louis to San Antone [San Antonio] and to Uvalde, Texas, which is forty miles north of Crystal

City from Uvalde, Texas, on a bus down to Crystal City, and we arrived there on May Day [May 1].

McWhorter: Can I ask you a few questions?

Jacobs: Yes.

McWhorter: Had you ever been to Texas before this trip?

Jacobs: I had not been outside of Brooklyn, New York.

McWhorter: And that was going to be my follow-up question.

Jacobs: Yes, I'd been to, like, New Jersey and Ellis Island and Staten Island, Statue of Liberty, and places like that, but no place out of New York. I thought New York was the world.

McWhorter: With a city of that large, I can see how an eight-year-old might.

Jacobs: Right.

McWhorter: You said the guards on the train were nice. Did anything stick out over the past six decades to remind you of their niceness? Did they do a gesture or something?

Jacobs: Oh, I don't remember any of that, but I can tell you that the first thing that they did when we got on the train, after the train took off, they said to my parents, "We're going to treat you like, you know, ordinary civilians, and you can eat as a family, and stuff like that. We won't bother you. Just come back every time from the dining car to here," and so on and so forth. But up until the train took off, they were pretty protective of us, you know, guarding us. I don't know as they used handcuffs, but they were very protective. But after that, we were just like ordinary people on the train. If you were a passenger, you wouldn't know that we were under arrest. You know what I'm saying?

McWhorter: I do.

Jacobs: We ate as a family. You know, we had these cars that had tablecloths and silverware. You know, back then they used all kinds of fancy dining room equipment. So I remember that real well, and I remember we—my mother and I and my brother, not my dad—at St. Louis got to go out of the train station because we had to wait, but they kept my father inside. And I remember that very well

because I remember seeing the movie, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and I said, "Oh, here we are in St. Louis." The first time I'd been there too at the train station.

McWhorter: Let's see. You're arriving via train and you have the guards there. Are they Army guards, or are they FBI?

Jacobs: Well, they're INS, Immigration and Naturalization Service guards. They're a male and a female.

McWhorter: Did they have any kind of uniform?

Jacobs: I don't recall. I don't think so. I think they were in civilian clothes.

McWhorter: Okay.

Jacobs: But they had badges that they could show if they had to.

McWhorter: The last place the train took you to was Uvalde?

Jacobs: Uvalde, Texas, um hmm.

McWhorter: I was born in Uvalde.

Jacobs: You were? Well, I've been there.

McWhorter: I bet.

Jacobs: I've been there twice. In fact, I was just down there with this German production company, and I went to where the train used to stop, which was to me seemed like south of town. And I picked up some railroad spikes and painted those for my kids, but there used to be a little hotel right there too, which burnt down or they moved or something. But I went to where the train actually stopped when we were there.

McWhorter: Do you remember where in town that was?

Jacobs: Yes, I can tell you roughly. I don't know my directions there still, but it seems to me it was south of town, and there's old remnants of a platform there where the train stopped and it's out in the middle of nowhere really.

McWhorter: Are there railroad tracks there still?

Jacobs: Oh yes. The train still goes through there.

McWhorter: Okay. I'll have to look that up.

Jacobs: It doesn't stop there. If you go back there, I can tell you almost how you get there. Where we went south there's like—it wasn't a Circle K there, but it's like a Circle K store on the corner, and you turn right if you're going west, I guess, and I'm almost certain it's south—no, excuse me—it's north of town, north of Uvalde.

McWhorter: Okay.

Jacobs: Excuse me. It's north of Uvalde. I'm thinking about here. It's north of Uvalde, and we were right there. I mean, I described to them how this station was.

McWhorter: Is there a football stadium or an overpass nearby?

Jacobs: No, there is nothing there. It's wide open. It's wide open spaces. The only thing that's there on the other side of the tracks, there's a maintenance yard for the train station because a guy came over there and said, "What are you doing here?" I told him I was reliving 1945, so he said, "Okay." [McWhorter laughs] And I picked up three spikes and I painted them gold and marked, "Crystal City," on there for my kids.

McWhorter: That was very nice of you.

Jacobs: Um hmm.

McWhorter: I do believe I know where that is, so next time I'm in Uvalde, I'll take a photo of the spot.

Jacobs: Do that. That's where we—it's nowhere in town. It's out of town.

McWhorter: Yes. And from that point on, you were put on buses, is that correct?

Jacobs: That's right. And listen—and if you go there and you want to do this research, while you're at it, you will find that there used to be a hotel there, some sort of hotel that either burnt down or was moved. The man who described it for me didn't know whether it burnt down or they moved it.

McWhorter: Well, you were placed on buses at that point.

Jacobs: That's correct.

McWhorter: Were they school buses or were they like Greyhounds?

Jacobs: I have no idea. They were probably like school buses.

McWhorter: And you were sent from there to Crystal City.

Jacobs: That's correct. We got to Crystal City and through the gate, and then they took us to our quarters, and there we were.

McWhorter: Was the main gate—did it have a sign on it?

Jacobs: I can't tell you. I don't think so.

McWhorter: Do you remember what direction, north, west, south, or east it faced?

Jacobs: No, but I can tell you this, that when you go to Crystal City, you'll see foundations that are—they're all outside the camp. Those are where officials lived. The foundations are there outside the camp, and if you go up a little bit, then that's where the gate was.

McWhorter: Okay.

Jacobs: And I wrote you what my quarters were, but I don't have the official map of the quarters. You have my quarters, what they were, in the questionnaire that you sent?

McWhorter: Yes, sir. I've got an Army Corps of Engineers map of the camp, at least a photo of one.

Jacobs: Yes. Do you have the quarters?

McWhorter: It's got building numbers on it. I don't have it handy—

Jacobs: Okay.

McWhorter: —but I'll be happy to send the photo to you—

Jacobs: Yes. It had, like, QB1, 2, 3, 4. That's where we lived, but let me explain this to you because one of the questions you asked: Were there any attempted escapes?

McWhorter: Um hmm.

Jacobs: When they redid those houses on the camp, they used the existing foundations. Have you been to Crystal City?

McWhorter: Many times.

Jacobs: Okay. So you know where they built the new houses?

McWhorter: Yes.

Jacobs: You know where the swimming pool is at?

McWhorter: Yes. New houses are to the north and west.



Jacobs: And there's houses to the west of that or wherever that is, I don't know which it is. There are houses there. Those are built on the former foundations of Crystal City of where we lived.

McWhorter: Got you.

Jacobs: So that's where you should find my quarters.

McWhorter: Okay.

Jacobs: Secondly, is that the guy who did the construction located the tunnels, but the guy who worked for him was driving his truck and wrecked it, and his engineering notes were lost.

McWhorter: No!

Jacobs: So I'm just telling you the facts.

McWhorter: Well, thank you.

Jacobs: There were tunnels underneath the place, and why they were there, I have no idea. Were they going out to see señoritas? Were they going to get some booze? Doubtful, they made their own booze, whatever. So who knows why the tunnels were there. Your guess is as good as anybody's.

McWhorter: Okay. I'm looking at the map right now, and it looks like Q24B—

Jacobs: Yes.

McWhorter: —is on the north side, something called North Road is near it.

Jacobs: Um hmm.

McWhorter: And it looks like just to the south of it and a little over to the east, but very close, were the kitchen—

Jacobs: Yes. That's where my father worked, right across the street.

McWhorter: Okay. Well, good. Now I have an idea of where you were in this camp during—

Jacobs: And do you know if the other houses are in that area or not?

McWhorter: Yes, they're quite a few houses labeled on this map.

Jacobs: I mean still there?

McWhorter: Oh, you mean—

Jacobs: The rebuilt ones.

McWhorter: No. No, unfortunately, most of it is school property now and a housing district to the north that's built on the ground but not the foundations of the old houses. It's kind of got curved streets.

Jacobs: Some of them were built on the foundations of the old houses. I'm telling you that's what the construction guy told me. Okay.

McWhorter: Well, you've arrived at the camp—

Jacobs: Hang on, the German school is still there, you know.

McWhorter: The L-shaped building?

Jacobs: Yes. Right. It's still there. I've been there. Okay, go ahead.

McWhorter: You've arrived at the camp, and it obviously looks a lot different than Brooklyn does.

Jacobs: Right-o.

McWhorter: How did you and your family—your brother, mom, and dad—how did you guys go about working yourselves into the camp, you know, making it a home, if you could?

Jacobs: Okay. The first thing that my dad did—my mother went in to our quarters—and they were tarpaper shacks, you know, roughly. I mean, they were tarpapered on the outside and there was no finishing on the inside. So my dad got some sort of wallboard—I don't know where he got it from—and then he painted the inside of our house, and he had all kinds of techniques that he used, rags to roll colors down to make it look like what have you. So he made our quarters look like real quarters, you know what I'm saying?

McWhorter: Yes.

Jacobs: He spruced them right up. And of course, we were latecomers. You have to understand most people had been there when we got there had been there for, like, they got there in December of '42—I think that's right. Yes—December of '42, so they'd been there two years, and they had, you know, castor bean trees growing and morning glories and that sort of thing. So we were what you call late-bloomers, so we finally put out castor bean trees and got them to grow fast, that

sort of thing. Little did we know that they were poisonous and made our home look like a home, and we lived—we didn't eat at home because we had no facilities. We had no bathroom or cooking facilities, so we ate in the dining room, and my dad was the cook and the baker, so it was pretty convenient for us. And my mother kind of liked it and she sewed. I don't know whether she just sewed for us or she sewed for the camp as well.

We had movies at the camp. You had to watch where you put your chair down because of the ant holes. You know how the ant holes are down there?

McWhorter: Yes.

Jacobs: They're all over the place, and I loved to swim. I loved the pool. I have fond memories of that pool.

McWhorter: I was going to ask you some questions about that pool. May I do so now?

Jacobs: Yes, sure.

McWhorter: It looks like half of it was the deep end—

Jacobs: That's correct.

McWhorter: —and you might've had a diving board based on that video that you've put on YouTube.

Jacobs: We did. I dove from the top board of that—I learned how to dive at Crystal City.

McWhorter: Excellent. Were you allowed to visit the swimming pool whenever you wanted or were there specific hours?

Jacobs: Anytime. I mean, from daylight to dark.

McWhorter: Daylight to dark.

Jacobs: I was down there as soon as I could walk from my house down to the pool when it was daylight.

McWhorter: So you weren't given a specific job that you had to do at the camp. You were more like—

Jacobs: I was a student. I didn't work.

McWhorter: Okay.

Jacobs: Children didn't work.

McWhorter: Um hmm. Well, at the swimming pool, according to the map, it looks like there are separate bathhouses, one for Germans and one for Japanese. Do you remember that?

Jacobs: I don't recall there being a bathhouse at all. All I recall is the artesian pipe well coming out of there and water flowing in there and sitting there at many times, but I don't recall any bathhouses. I don't—I know nothing about that.

McWhorter: Were you able to swim with the children of Japanese descent and Italian descent?

Jacobs: Yes, they were on our side as well. The bigger kids came over there, and there was no segregation in the camp that I know of. I mean, I watched them play basketball and watched them do sumo wrestling and whatever else, karate, and all that stuff.

McWhorter: Did you make any friends?

Jacobs: I don't recall—I had one of my—I don't know if you'd call him my best friend, but he was about fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old and taught me how to make a six-sided kite, and I never flew a kite so high since.

McWhorter: Oh, excellent.

Jacobs: Not before either, I mean. So anyhow, I—and then we used to have, like, Japanese cuisine on certain nights and then German cuisine on other nights in the mess hall. I never did like sushi and still don't like it.

McWhorter: [laughs] Do you remember your friend's name who taught you how to make the kite?

Jacobs: No, I don't know. I have no idea. I could guess but that would be a bad guess.

McWhorter: Just south of the swimming pool—

Jacobs: Yes.

McWhorter: —is on the map an orchard. Do you remember seeing an orchard just south of the pool?

Jacobs: Yes, there was an orchard there but I don't recall it being—Yes—I know where you're talking about. Yes, that was always there. I think it was mostly grapefruits.

McWhorter: Do you know who maintained it? Was it people that lived in the camp?

Jacobs: Yes. The camp people did everything. They had supervisors, a veterinarian, and people who knew about agriculture that helped us maintain the farm. You know we raised pigs and that sort of thing. The video talks about how the Japanese did this or did that, but everybody did their fair share. The Crystal City High School is over there on the right-hand side. I don't know what map you've got, but you can see in the map I have the Crystal City High School, the real high school on the map.

McWhorter: I'm looking at a 1945 Army Corps of Engineer map, and it shows the L-shaped school. It shows the federal school over by the orchard.

Jacobs: Yes.

McWhorter: And it also shows those—the six-pack of cottages outside the fence wall, where the people that worked at the camp lived.

Jacobs: That's right. Um hmm.

McWhorter: Now, you and your family are Americans. They're probably Americans. What was the dynamic like with people that worked at the camp that weren't detained there? Were they nice to you?

Jacobs: That's interesting because the kids who were of the officials used to look inside the camp and wanted to come in because it looked like it was much nicer inside than it was outside. And they would go swimming once in a while in the pool. But the kids used to say, "Oh, why can't we go in there? It's so much nicer there." It was a nice place, except you were fenced in. But as a child you really don't recognize that. You know what I mean?

McWhorter: Um hmm.

Jacobs: You don't sense that. I mean, some other people can tell you, "Oh Yes, I was locked up and I was fenced in," but that's nonsense, I'm telling you. When you're a child at my age, you have no idea about being fenced in at Crystal City. You're playing, you're doing stuff just like you would anyplace else. I don't recall even thinking about Brooklyn, New York, then.

But if you go up from—well, you know, if you up to the edge of the camp and if you keep going south on the right-hand side, you'll see the school that belongs to Crystal City. It's outside the camp.

McWhorter: Okay. Were you ever given any instructions about the fence line, the barbed wire fence line?

Jacobs: No. In fact, as children we had the run of the fence and you're calling that—let's see—if that's south, then this is—wait a minute—south—this would be east, if I have this right. Let's see, south, north, east, and west. Just a minute.

McWhorter: No problem.

Jacobs: Go west. If I have it right, you go to the pool and go west. We could go all the way down to the Nueces River.

McWhorter: Oh, really?

Jacobs: Yes. I'm talking about kids.

McWhorter: Um hmm.

Jacobs: No one ever bothered us going down there. In fact, I want to tell you—I shouldn't tell you this story, but I'll tell you the story. [McWhorter laughs] When we were going down there—and I think when we were coming back—I noticed these little clumps. They happened to be cow piles and they were dry and hard, and I would tell these kids, "Look what I found. What is this?" I had no idea what it was. [McWhorter laughs] But I do now. That was my first introduction to a cow pile.

McWhorter: Very nice.

Jacobs: Go all the way to the Nueces River.

McWhorter: All the way to the Nueces River.

Jacobs: Yes. I could try to be Tarzan and swing across there. I thought about that.

McWhorter: Well, the river certainly lies outside the camp fence.

Jacobs: Yes, it does. Uh huh. But we could go all the way down there.

McWhorter: Did your parents ever express any bad feelings about being in the camp?

Jacobs: No. My parents' attitude was like this—and I remember officials—immigration officials—telling my parents the same thing. My parents would say, "This is how it

goes in war. If you are of the nationality of the enemy, you get locked up.” And that’s how it is in war. And so my parents took it in that light although many people have tried to change that attitude since then, you know. One of the sad things that happened is this: You see Japanese and Germans were together in this camp. They were in there for the same reason. They were of the ethnicity of the enemy. Japanese weren’t in there because of their race and the Germans weren’t in there because of their race or ethnicity. They were of the race of the enemy or the ethnicity of the enemy. And what happened was when the Japanese started fighting for their bill, Public Law 100-383, they started to say, oh, the Germans were interned for cause and we were interned because of our race. Neither of those statements are true. Both nationalities were interned because they were of the nationality of the enemy. That’s the facts, no other purpose.

McWhorter: I have to agree with you there.

Jacobs: Bravo Sierra, BS.

McWhorter: [laughs] Did you ever see Italians at the camp?

Jacobs: There was one Italian family in our camp, and I don’t recall necessarily seeing them, but they were there.

McWhorter: Okay. Well, how long did your family stay at Crystal City?

Jacobs: We left on December 1, 1945.

McWhorter: Okay. So well after the war—

Jacobs: So we got there May 1, and we left December 1 going back to Ellis Island.

McWhorter: And how long was your family detained, incarcerated, at Ellis Island?

Jacobs: Oh, we were there from December to January 17, 1946 when we boarded a ship and were shipped over to Germany.

McWhorter: And this is what you alluded to earlier about your father volunteering to repatriate to Germany?

Jacobs: That’s correct, uh huh.

McWhorter: Is he giving up his United States citizenship to do this?

Jacobs: He didn’t have his citizenship. He was not a citizen.

McWhorter: Okay. You and your brother, were you able to retain your citizenship?

Jacobs: Oh, yeah. We never gave up anything.

McWhorter: Okay.

Jacobs: But it took us a while to get our passports over in Germany. I don't know why it took so long. We got there roughly in—were released, like, in March after we got to Germany and then I applied for our passports in December of '46 and we never got our passports until we came back in October of '47.

McWhorter: So you spent a year in Germany?

Jacobs: Twenty-two months.

McWhorter: Twenty-two months.

Jacobs: Right.

McWhorter: What were some of the experiences like in war-torn devastated Germany?

Jacobs: Okay. But the first thing, we arrived in Bremerhaven, Germany, on January 26, 1946. It was cold. I mean, cold. And we were greeted as we got off the ship by machine guns, rifles, pistols, told to—spoken to in German, like “Mach schnell” which means hurry up, and down the gangplank under armed guard, put into two and half ton trucks called six bys, the Army with no cover in the back, transported fifty miles from Bremerhaven, Germany, to Bremen, Germany. Got out there—I mean, it was cold—got out there, was thrown into boxcars. The boxcars were shut and sealed, no facilities, no heat, no nothing, and taken to Ludwigsburg, Germany. My mom went one place and my dad and I and my brother went to this prison called Hohenasperg.

McWhorter: Is this the American Army that's guarding you?

Jacobs: Yep, it is. It's all the time the American—we were under the control of the U. S. Army and were under the control of the U. S. Army at that prison and it's like the thirteenth-century citadel that's got a moat, two walls, machine guns, electrified everything, they kept us in there. I mean, we were really dangerous hombres. [laughs] And they finally realized that my brother and I didn't belong in there, so after we were there four or five days, they released us.



McWhorter: How did they realize that you weren't supposed to be there?

Jacobs: I don't know. I kept telling them, "I'm an American," the guy would say, "Shut up! If you—see that hangman's tree down there, if you're not good, we'll hang you from it. If that doesn't work, we'll shoot you." So that was my greetings by my fellow Americans. I don't hold that against them. They were just following orders. And we ate standing up, we walked with our hands on our head. It's a miserable place. I went there and visited there in September of 2004. I had a tour of the prison by the director.

McWhorter: Oh, wow.

Jacobs: So those are bad memories, but they're behind me.

McWhorter: It sounds like the worst part was not knowing where your father was that first weekend—

Jacobs: Yes.

McWhorter: —and the repatriation—or the forced repatriation to Germany after the war.

Jacobs: Right-o. Those were bad because when you're a young kid, now, I can tell you, in the back of the truck that took us to the boxcars, all I seen was shells of buildings, just everything was demolished. Seen little old ladies picking up bricks—there were no men to speak of—and everything was demolished. I mean, the roads were demolished, the buildings, there were nothing standing, just all shells.

McWhorter: Was the Army feeding you or were you having to take care of yourself?

Jacobs: Oh, no. When we got there—I don't know anything about being fed in the boxcar. I don't recall getting any food there, but when we got to Ludwigsburg, the German Red Cross had these—they're like milk cans, but they're big thermoses, and they had soup, which was mostly water. And that was our food. I mean, really my brother and I and our family when we got to where we were going to my grandparents' house we were fortunate. There were kids living in the city that starved to death. "I cried because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet." So I still was blessed.

McWhorter: How long were you incarcerated by the Army before you were able to go to your grandparents' home?

Jacobs: My brother and I were held four or five days. My father was held until March 15, so he was there from, like, January 26, say, until March 15.

McWhorter: And after your father was released, was your mother released as well?

Jacobs: Oh, yes. She was released as well and we boarded a train and like nothing ever happened. [laughs]

McWhorter: And this was on the way to your grandparents' house?

Jacobs: Yes, right.

McWhorter: And this is in Germany?

Jacobs: This is in Germany, yes.

McWhorter: Well, I'm glad to hear that they were able to survive that war.

Jacobs: Yes. They did. They lived out in the country, so to speak.

McWhorter: So what did you do for the next nineteen-to-twenty months living with your grandparents?

Jacobs: Well, the first thing we had to do was either went to school or you had to go to work to get your food. You had a little card you had to have stamped, so I tried school. That didn't work, so I told my dad I was going to work, and so both my brother and I went to work for the United States Army. My dad worked in what they called torf [peat] fields, that's like digging that side of the ground that burns and you make them into little squares like bricks. And it's called torf [peat]. I forget the American name for that. I can find out for you.

McWhorter: Well, thank you.

Jacobs: Just a minute. I knew that at one time. I'll look.

McWhorter: Well, if you can't find it right away, you can always tell me in an email.

Jacobs: Okay. Did I answer your question of what did we do? And my parents were taken care of fairly well. My dad worked for the [U.S.] Army eventually, and he worked for the Army and actually when he retired he retired from the [U.S.] Army civil

services as a German. And he drew his Social Security—U.S. Social Security. I mean, it's quite a story.

McWhorter: Well, while the family is living in Germany, and you're staying with your grandparents, who is leading the effort, your parents or you and your brother, to come back?

Jacobs: I'm leading the effort.

McWhorter: So you're leading the effort, "I want to get back to the United States."

Jacobs: That's right. I tried to stow away on ships. I always looked too young every time I tried to get on a ship, but I finally met this captain's wife, named Mary Simmons, and she took care of all the arrangements.

McWhorter: And what did that entail? Bringing you back to the United States?

Jacobs: Yes. Finding someone that would sponsor us—someone who would sponsor us and that was a farmer in Kansas, Art and Mildred Dreyer. They had to put up, like, the ship fare and six hundred dollars and that sort of thing.

McWhorter: These are total strangers to you and your family?

Jacobs: They—never met 'em in our life.

McWhorter: But they wanted to help somebody get out of Germany?

Jacobs: That's right, and torf is peat.

McWhorter: Peat, okay.

Jacobs: That's how my father started working when he got there. Anyhow, Mary Simmons arranged for my brother and I to come back to the United States.

McWhorter: And did your parents stay in Germany?

Jacobs: Yes, they stayed in Germany. They were supposed to come back. My brother had made arrangements for them to return here in 1953, and my mother tells this story. My father and mother went down to the U. S. Consulate to pick up their passports to come back here, and the German national—a German national—a Germ [sic] on the counter, says to my father in German—now, I'll tell you in English—he said, "When you get back to the United States, will you do it differently this time?" [McWhorter laughs] And my father went in[to] a rage, and

he threw the passport back to him and said, "Keep your G-D passport," and walked out and my mom was in tears.

McWhorter: Wow. So it was probably—

Jacobs: That's how people who know nothing try to accuse my father of something. My father did nothing wrong.

McWhorter: It sounds like the time in Germany after the war—the effort being led by you, and you and your brother getting sponsored to come back and later sending for your parents—it sounds to me like your parents having been born in Germany and going back to Germany, it wasn't that tough for them to want to stay.

Jacobs: Um hmm.

McWhorter: Especially once the country got on its feet, but I'm sure that took years to do.

Jacobs: Yes. Well, it did take years for them to get back on their feet, but my parents were ready to come back here in '53 even though things were better then. We left in '47—my brother and I did—October of '47, and by November or something of '51 or something like that, things were getting better. But my parents still wanted to come back here.

McWhorter: Well, you and your brother were both teenagers in 1947. Were you living with this Kansas family? Did they take care of you until you were adults?

Jacobs: Yes. We went to their farm in Kansas. They also had property in Florida, and so we got there in, like, November of '47 and almost immediately we went to Florida with them and they had a big house there and that sort of thing. My brother contracted poison ivy with a severe infection from Levi's [jeans], and so he ended up in the hospital and Dr. Sessions took a liking to my brother, so my brother stayed with Dr. Sessions and didn't stay with the Dreyer family. And I stayed with the Dreyer family throughout high school.

McWhorter: Sounds like the Dreyer family was very special to you.

Jacobs: Oh, yes, so much so that we have a lot of farm property.

McWhorter: Well, if you're a born American citizen—

Jacobs: Right.

McWhorter: —you are—and your family voluntarily join your father who has been incarcerated simply because he's German descent living in the United States, forced to go to Crystal City, forced to repatriate back to Germany—

Jacobs: Um hmm.

McWhorter: —if all of this has happened to you, what was it or what things were there that made you decide that you still loved the United States so much that you wanted to join the military and eventually rise to the rank of major?

Jacobs: My parents raised a patriot.

McWhorter: Ah.

Jacobs: Let's just remember that. That's it in a nutshell. There's nothing else I can tell you.

McWhorter: Well, that's fine. Sometimes less is more.

Jacobs: Um hmm.

McWhorter: Well, I do have one more question before I have my final question.

Jacobs: Okay.

McWhorter: And it's a little out of order. I apologize for not asking this earlier in the interview. But you mentioned in the questionnaire that you filled out for me ahead of time, that in addition to your support for the war effort in Brooklyn, you also supported the war effort while you were in Crystal City with newspaper and scrap iron drives. Is that correct?

Jacobs: Oh, no. That scrap iron drive and stuff was in Brooklyn. That was all in Brooklyn.

McWhorter: Okay. I wasn't sure if you participated in some sort of scrap drive while you were in Crystal City.

Jacobs: No, there was no such thing down there.

McWhorter: Okay. Very good. Well, I always end every interview with this question, and it is: Is there anything that you wanted to talk about today that we haven't discussed?

Jacobs: Well, I think you've got it all. I would want everybody to remember that Germans, Italians, and Japanese were arrested and interned because they were of the ethnicity of the enemy. That was their only "crime." [Interviewee is saying, "Quote, unquote."] And that's what a country probably has to do during wartime

although we don't do it now. But that's what happened. Anything else is not true. I mean, I know that people who committed crimes weren't interned. They were arrested and jailed. All these people that were interned were innocent victims, and that's war. That's the way it goes. And you know what's so hard about all of this?

McWhorter: What is that?

Jacobs: You can search and you can search and you can search and not one official has written about this episode of our history, save one fellow—and I can't think of his name right now—but he was a minor player, but no major player talked about this or wrote about it. And that's sad because—and I say this because they know what the truth was—the reason they arrested all the people, they needed exchange bait. That's all they needed. You know what's interesting about this? I'll just tell you this in passing since you're from that area.

McWhorter: Um hmm.

Jacobs: The publisher of the Crystal City paper or the *Zavala County Tribune* or whatever it was—I can't think of his name right now, but he was the publisher for a long time—he was in World War II, he was wounded, and he came back in part of the exchange. A German who had been interned in Crystal City was sent over there and he came back. Pretty interesting, huh?

McWhorter: Um hmm, it is. It is.

Jacobs: Small world.

McWhorter: I had the opportunity to do an interview with a Merchant Marine man who talked about one of these exchange trips that he was on the ship taking over people from the United States to Northern France and this is after D-Day.

Jacobs: Yes?

McWhorter: So the Red Cross is facilitating safe passage between the lines—the front, if you will—back toward the French coast, so this exchange can take place. Who knows, maybe he was on that ship.

Jacobs: Um hmm. Yes. Anyhow, I appreciate the opportunity.

McWhorter: Well, Art, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you. I want to thank you not only for taking the time to speak with me, fill[ing] out my questionnaire, and then do[ing] this interview—

Jacobs: Um hmm.

McWhorter: —but I'd also like to thank you for your service to your country after World War II when you were a member of the United States Air Force.

Jacobs: Excellent. And if you have any other questions, don't hesitate to write me.

McWhorter: Well, I appreciate that.

[End of interview]

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