



Transcript

JAMES: It's unbelievable that people say that it never happened. Surely, they were not anywhere near there.

WE REMEMBER

CORY: We wanted to make this movie to help record the stories of some of the citizens of the south, and, in particular, their stories of their experiences of World War II. But not just life during the war; we wanted to focus on life before, during, and after the war as well. And, in this movie, we have Jim Philpot: who is a retired American army veteran, and Hilmar von Campe: who is a retired German army veteran.

VICTORIA: We also interviewed Hilmar's sister Sibylle, who will provide the perspective of being a German citizen during the war; Violet Hirsch, who was an American citizen during the war; Roland Fry, a lifelong citizen of Mobile, Alabama; and Agnes Tennenbaum, a survivor of the Holocaust.

VICTORIA: When and where were you born?

AGNES: I was born in a big, industrial city, in Miskolc, Hungary, 1922.

HILMAR: On the 11th of April, 1925, in a small city in Germany called Halle.

JAMES: I was born in a little town: Martin, Tennessee. Population of about 3,000.

ROLAND: I was born in Mobile, Alabama, October, 1921.

VIOLET: I was born in Atlanta, Georgia on March the 23rd, 1922.

VICTORIA: What was life like growing up? Did your family have a car; telephones; a radio?

AGNES: Hardly anyone had cars. We had a fantastic transportation; we had street cars and busses. We did have a telephone and a radio.

HILMAR: My father had a car, from his office, and we had our private car.

VIOLET: My mother was the first Jewish woman in Atlanta to drive a car.

ROLAND: We had radio, and we would listen religiously to President Roosevelt. He was quite a personality on the radio.

CORY: When most people think of those involved in World War II, or victims of the Holocaust, they tend to forget that these people had lives before and after the war as well.

VICTORIA: Because of this, we wanted to highlight what these people's lives were like while they were growing up. We wanted to mention activities they participated in as children and whatever sort of technology they had in their homes.

HILMAR: It was very difficult for parents to talk with their children about what was happening in Germany, because the Nazis tried always to get from their children the news of what their parents are doing. My father had, at night, he looked at the German language news and there were two at the time, one was in London: the BBC; the other one was in Switzerland: Beromunster, and he listened at about ten o'clock to the Beromunster, news in German language. And if you caught, you were killed.

SIBYLLE: In school, they tried to find out what parents were doing at home. Any news in Germany, and we only- my father only knew, I think he was 36 or 37. When he'd listen in the evening to Beromunster, my brother

mentioned, "I can still see him," I got up at one point, I don't know. He always did it when everybody was in bed. For one reason or another, I got up, and he turned pale. I still see him sitting, his ear on the radio, very low, and I suddenly stood in the door and he turned pale.

JAMES: I grew up in the really depth of the depression. We were very poor, but we didn't know we were because everybody else was.

HILMAR: My father was a government servant; he was responsible for a certain area, which here would be a supervisor. And, at that time, in Germany, we had an inflation. Then, my father was paid every day. My mother was there with a suitcase, it was filled with- it was all paper. And she went to downtown, not to buy what you wanted, but to see what you could buy. Because, next day, it would be one million dollar or one million mark more that you'd have to pay.

SYBILLE: I remember one day, my mother came back with a basket full of toilet paper. "For heaven's sake!" he said, well, she said, "That is all I could get for the money." That should give you an idea. Another thing I remember from the time: my mother went in the evening shopping there was the so-called Jewish Street. But, you could only go in the evening, you should not be seen. And, there, she got the best food. She always did her shopping in the evening in the dark in the Jewish Street. That was always where she got our food and there you could get anything for a good price. And, when we went to church, there was always somebody standing from the Nazis to write down everyone who was going to church.

VIOLET: My father had been very successful as quite an entrepreneur in the restaurant and delicatessen business. He had a \$100,000 paid-up life insurance. At that time, it was quite a bit of money for a young man his age to have accumulated. I can remember him coming home, that's when people were jumping out of windows and committing suicides because everything was gone, and he said, "Kathrine, if I still had my insurance, I guess I would jump out of a window too." And I remember my mother saying, "Well, I thank God that you don't have it anymore. You'll be okay." I'm sorry. It still hurts. And he did make it back and did do well.

CORY: We know that you were in the Hitler Youth, but what exactly is the Hitler Youth?

HILMAR: Hitler had, in the first year, eliminated every organization. And youth organization was one sector; trade union was another one; the party was another one. Hitler made all illegitimate, and the only youth organization which remained was the Hitler Youth.

CORY: Were you forced to, or was it more of a voluntary thing?

HILMAR: There was a law that said, if you are ten years, you had to enter the Hitler Youth. But my parents couldn't just not deliver us; they had to give us to the state. You couldn't say no; it would be the end of you. And the Hitler Youth then, in itself, was like any other youth organization. I can't even remember that we were indoctrinated, that was done in the schools.

SYBILLE: I became also part of the Hitler Youth, it was quite different, and you had a choice, and I chose housework and house cooking and baking.

VICTORIA: What did you know about America or the rest of the world before the war? Did you do any international traveling?

AGNES: I knew a lot about America because my father was born in New York City. And, although he grew up in Hungary, he came back with the parents to Hungary, but we had a big family in New York, so I had some idea of how life is.

JAMES: Very little. My father had been in World War I, and I learned some things from him, but my experience was very different.

CORY: So, you never traveled outside the country?

JAMES: No.

VICTORIA: A subject that was particularly on our minds was how Jews were treated during this time.

VIOLET: There were some little boys, I guess I must have been about four or five, possibly younger, and they- I don't even recall why, but they would look at me and say, "Jew baby! Jew baby!" And, for some reason, I found it very insulting at that age and I would start crying and run in and tell my parents about it. But my family assured me it was good to be a Jew.

ROLAND: Yes, in Mobile, there was some anti-Semitism, particularly when you got to high school age.

AGNES: Well, anti-Semitism was always in Hungary; that was nothing new.

VICTORIA: Did you have a lot of Jewish friends? I mean, you said you went to a Jewish school, so there must have been a lot.

AGNES: Yes, I had a lot of Jewish friends and I had a lot of non-Jewish friends.

CORY: Did you have any Jewish friends growing up?

JAMES: Oh, yes, I had Jewish friends growing up. They had their own school, so we didn't see them in school, but there were some Jewish kids in our neighborhood.

HILMAR: They took them in 1938, but they were already tremendously persecuted. We lived opposite the synagogue in our city and, one morning, very early, a friend of mine, knocked at the window, that, "You have to see the synagogue." Burned. But, for us children, that was a real experience. And we had not the slightest idea what was happening. Nearly nobody knew about the Holocaust, but everybody knew that the way the Jews were robbed of their rights.

CORY: Did your parents or any family members ever support Hitler at any point?

HILMAR: No, they did not. In our family, that means, in our bigger family, we had the Nazis and the non-Nazis and, at the end, we didn't talk to each other anymore. It was- my father was in charge, was kind of, meaning the non-Nazis, and the Nazis were- They're both, one was a highly decorated general after the war, the other was a colonel. They were Nazis. There were no criminals, they were just dumb. They thought that the National Socialists- the Nazis stand for National Socialists. They thought that was the best we can get. My father was not that way.

ROOSEVELT: Yesterday, December 7th, 1921, a date which will live in infamy. The United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the empire of Japan.

VIOLET: I was having lunch with some friends in a Chinese restaurant in China Town and we heard the news coming over the radio that Japan had attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor and of course we just couldn't even eat anything, we just left. We just never thought it would happen because the Japanese ambassador was talking to Roosevelt at the time. He was supposed to be trying to make peace and here they just turned around and attacked us and that was pretty bad.

ROLAND: I was in college, we'd talk about it and get news on the radio, at that point, and nobody really realized how serious it was and what it meant to go to war.

CORY: What was your home like when you got the letter in the mail that said that you had been drafted?

JAMES: I wasn't drafted, I volunteered. I was afraid the war would be over before I got in. I was 17-years-old at the time of Pearl Harbor, I was a high school senior. You couldn't get into the armed services at 17 if your parents wouldn't sign the permission slip. My father had been in World War I as an aerial gunner and he didn't want his only child to get in at that tender age of seventeen, and I thank God he didn't because I was really too young to have been involved in that.

ROLAND: My mother didn't like it too much. I know my mother cried when I left. I was drafted approximately 1943, I don't remember exactly, but I was so lucky because they put me in a special unit, there was only six or eight of us that went into intelligence work.

CORY: Did you serve in the Wehrmacht?

HILMAR: Yes, but, from the school, I knew about World War I, and I realized, like millions of others, that these were the same enemies we had had in World War I, and we said this we cannot allow, that they'll do the same thing they had done last time, and that this is not a Nazi war, that's what we said, this is a German war. We first have to win the war and then we can deal with the Nazis. And, so, I thought I'd fight for my country. In reality, Hitler manipulated all of us.

CORY: What was the prevailing attitude in America during the war?

JAMES: Everybody was gung-ho about the war in Europe. We knew we had to fight. We knew we had to win if we wanted to continue our way of life. Everybody had a part to do. People save scrap metal; they saved paper; they saved wood.

VIOLET: We did everything. We worked in hospitals and they were so short-handed. I slung bed pans and I would eat a sandwich in one hand and sling a bed pan, if you pardon the expression, in the other. And it was just terrible how sick those people were. And I remember the wounded soldiers especially; some had gangrene and the odor that came from these wounds was just absolutely devastating. We had to be rationed. You had to have food stamps for food; food stamps for gasoline; food stamps for- if you wanted a pair of shoes, you could only buy one pair of shoes a year per person. Everything was rationed, but we did it gladly.

CORY: At what point in the war did you go to Europe, was it in the beginning or towards the end of the war?

JAMES: Well, it was after the Normandy Invasion, we came in from the south, between Marseille and Toulon. So, I would say, I think we were there about September.

CORY: How did you get there?

JAMES: We went on a Italian liner that was captured in an allied port. It was built and designed to carry 700 passengers. We had 5,000 troops on board. One of the problems with how many people we had on board was there was no space for food. Every square inch of that ship was used for supplies. One of the things we did on the catwalks, we had cases of food, solid on the catwalks and plywood on top of that, so we could walk on them. So, in effect, we ate our way down to the deck. We were jam-packed in there; we had five rows of bunks and just enough room in the aisles to squeeze past each other.

CORY: And how long did it take to get there?

JAMES: About ten days. We hit a one hellacious storm, a North Atlantic storm. A whole bunch of the people were seasick; they couldn't even hold water down, some of them. I was never seasick. We were given two meals a day and they were pretty skimpy meals. But I found a way to get around through the ship so I could go through the line more than once. And I didn't feel bad about it because others were so sick, they couldn't eat anyway, so I just helped them. About the third day out, on the metal trays they had to serve us on, they put a fresh tomato, right out of the refrigerator, nice and cold, and we had salt to go on it. It was the best thing I ever tasted, I still remember that tomato.

CORY: What were some of the conversations like on the boat; what did ya'll talk about on the way over there?

JAMES: Well, we talked about the thing GIs usually talk about: girls; when we'd have the next beer.

CORY: What were any of your personal thoughts on the way to Europe? Were you nervous, or scared, or excited?

JAMES: To some extent, yeah. Everybody thinks their mother loves them too much or they're too handsome or something-or-another to get wounded, you never think it's you that's going to be the next one hit. You always think it's somebody else. I think you'd have to do that to be able to function.

CORY: Initially, how did you feel about the war? Did you feel more patriotic or did you feel guilty joining?

HILMAR: I had always, from the first to the last- nearly the last day, saw it as defending my country. And it was a really terrible awakening when I got back into Germany in '45. When you realize the atrocities which had been begun and I am sitting here because I was so ashamed of what happened through German government. My analysis as a person is: Germany went down because of Godlessness.

CORY: While you were in the Wehrmacht, what battles did you fight in?

HILMAR: I was a gunner in a tank. We were sent to Yugoslavia and it was all retreat already 1944. The most striking matter was the city battle at the capital of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

CORY: How long did you serve in the army?

JAMES: Three years, one month, twelve days, three hours and fifteen minutes.

HILMAR: I was drafted, 1943. So I had two years in the army before the end of the war.

CORY: Were you ever seriously injured during the war?

JAMES: Oh, no, I'm very fortunate in that respect.

CORY: That's good.

VICTORIA: Did you ever live in a ghetto prior to being deported to Auschwitz, Birkenau?

AGNES: Yes. I lived in a ghetto after the Germans occupied Hungary.

VICTORIA: Was your whole family deported the same time, or were they broken up and sent at different times?

AGNES: I believe that my father was the first to be sent to Auschwitz. My brother, probably just a few days after my mother and I. My sister was on the way to the capital to celebrate her birthday and she was taken off the train. It was on the same day, March 19th, when the occupation happened. And then, I lost touch with my sister until long after the war.

THE END OF LIFE AS WE KNEW IT

AGNES: It was a drizzly day.

The soldiers forced us to get into the cattle cars. With only- I can't remember, one small window or two small windows for air. They pushed as many people as possible into the cattle train. There was no bathroom facilities and there was no food and nothing to drink. We were about two to two-and-a-half days on that train. I remember being terribly thirsty and I was concerned about my mother, who seemed to be fading. She was only in her 50s, but it was just too much for her.

Then I heard screaming. And, slowly, I realized that somebody in another corner, a bit further from me, a woman just gave birth. What happened to her and the baby, I don't know. And then people started to faint and people started to die.

So, finally, we arrived at place. I tried to squeeze close to the window to see where we were. And I saw written: Auschwitz. I had no idea what Auschwitz was. But I saw there were male and female German soldiers dressed in their sort-of grayish uniform. They were all getting a whip and dogs. Big, German Shepherd dogs. I wasn't sure what was about to come: Are they going to let us live?

And then the door opened. I remember, as if it were yesterday. I took a deep breath after being locked up with such little oxygen. And then men, in striped uniforms, they came and dragged us out of the cattle car. I remember, I held onto my mother's hand and I came face-to-face to a German officer. He was whistling a happy tune and he directed traffic. Middle-aged, older, old people, young women with babies and children were sent to the left side; young people on the right side. One minute, I had my mother's hand in my hand. The next minute, she was gone. And I was directed to go to the right side. So, I did.

And I discovered that one of my cousins from many of my cousins was there, my cousin Edith, and my youngest aunt, Anna also. We looked at each other and my aunt said, "Whatever happens, we should try to stay together and help each other as much as we can."

Five abreast, we had to go to take a shower, but the shower was full of soldiers and we had to strip. Then a woman came, shaved my long, blonde hair, and then we went for a shower, yes. And then they told us to pick up any piece of clothing on the way. Put on some clothing and five abreast, march out of the shower room. Meanwhile, the German soldiers had a field day, laughing, joking and talking the dirtiest possible words.

We went out, walked about a half a mile, a little bit more. And then we stopped in front of a new barrack. A Czechoslovakian girl greeted us, and, in broken Hungarian, explained that soon we were going to have something to drink and eat. "But, meanwhile, turn your head to the left side. Look at this big, red building and look up to the chimneys. Do you see? How the smoke comes out of the chimneys? That is your family." I couldn't possibly understand the whole thing, it was too fast. In a short time ago, I had my mother's hand in my hand. Is it possible? That's what happened to her and that's what happened to my father and the rest of my family.

And then, into a barrack, thousand women into long barracks. It was very hard, even to move.

VICTORIA: While you were in the camps, where there any escape opportunities?

AGNES: There was no such a thing as escape from Auschwitz, no way, because of the electrified fences. There was just no way to escape.

VICTORIA: At Auschwitz, did you ever see anyone murdered on the spot?

AGNES: I haven't seen on the spot. I saw them naked on a cart or a bus, daily taken to the gas chamber and crematorium.

CORY: What kind of things were rationed?

JAMES: Everything, really: food, automobile parts, building materials, rationing on everything. The main thing that affected everyone was food rationing. You were given so many points and each item had a corresponding number of points you use, so you could blow most of your month's rationing points on a good steak, but, on the other hand, you could get how many grits for practically nothing.

VICTORIA: What kinds of foods and rations were served in the camps?

AGNES: We usually had a piece of bread which tasted like sawdust, very heavy and very black, and a piece of moldy cheese or a slice of salami, or something like that. And, midday, we had nothing. In the afternoon, we usually had soup, a vegetable kind of thing, only I had problem eating that, because it was full sand and it was very hard to swallow, although my aunt was with me and kept on telling me "If you want to survive, you'd better eat it." And I tried to eat, but I just vomited, I couldn't take it. In no time, I lost about twenty pounds.

VICTORIA: Did people stick together for companionship and camaraderie while in the camps?

AGNES: Of course, we had our favorite people to talk to. I had a lady in her forties who spoke English and, because I started to study English at the age of twelve, we used to have discussions, because I didn't want to forget English and she wanted to keep up with it too. And I made friends, as a matter of fact, the thing was, five people usually ate from a pot. That's why my book's name is *A Girl Named Rose*. She was one of the girls that ate with me. And, as it turned out, later, when I was already in the working camp, that she had tuberculosis and they didn't have proper medications for her and she knew that she was going to die. And she was the one who asked me to write the story of what happened to us. Because she was sure that she wouldn't have a chance to survival and she thought that I was in good shape and I will survive.

VICTORIA: Are you still in touch with anyone that you met in the camps?

AGNES: Most of the people are dead already. It's a miracle I'm still here.

VICTORIA: Did you ever see any Nazis who felt sympathy towards the prisoners?

AGNES: The first kindness I experienced, when the war was nearly over in December and Christmas came and a commander of the working camp came into our room and said that, "Don't lose heart, because you will have a chance to meet your family very soon." That was the first kindness. And the second kindness was, when we were on the way, marching out of the camp, that he said, "The Americans are close by." And I thought it was very kind of him because I decided to ask him. But that was from the working camp, not Auschwitz.

CORY: What was combat like for you?

JAMES: I think the best answer I've heard, and I wish I could give the person credit for who said it, "Combat is hours and hours of boredom, punctuated by moments of sheer terror."

CORY: How did you get your Bronze Star?

JAMES: We ran into one situation where they had dug fox holes and other revertments, because they knew we were coming on this particular hill, and they were loaded for bear, we were really pinned down, we had a number of casualties within the first ten or fifteen minutes. To sort of scatter the Germans out, I had a bazooka. A bazooka is a rocket-propelled grenade. There's three different types of grenades a bazooka will handle: it'll handle high-explosive, it'll handle armor piercing and I had white phosphorus. I fired one- well, actually, I fired two in different sections of the woods, this heavily wooded territory. White phosphorous rained down into the fox holes that they were in. White phosphorous can't be put out by water; it continues to burn. And I put one round in that area and another round in that area and it forced the Germans to pull back.

CORY: How did you feel about the German soldiers? Did you ever encounter any or talk to any of them?

JAMES: They were darn good soldiers, I'll tell you that.

CORY: What was your specific job in the army? What did you do?

JAMES: My specific job was to flank the anti-tank guns, so that a tank would not come in from the side. That was the primary job of a bazooka gunner. I had something of an advantage, because I never got put on-point. When I say on-point, that means that I was leading the company as a scout. Because I had two weapons, I made more noise than anybody else did.

CORY: Did you write letters to anybody while you were away?

JAMES: Oh, yes, they had a method of sending letters where they took photographs- micro-photographs of a letter, a one-page letter, and then they would blow it up again when it got overseas, so it took up very little room.

ROLAND: They didn't want anybody to know that- where I was going. I had to get there without an official order. I would find some pilot that was trying to keep up his experience, so he had to fly so many hours. Nobody knew my rank.

AGNES: We were taken to Allendorf, to the munitions factory. I made bombs, mines, grenades. I started really with packing bombs and how to drill bombs and make it ready for a detonator. Then I worked on mines, filling up mines. They were huge, much taller than I am; I had to use a ladder to go up. And I learned to climb to the top and had to remove the excess fluid and I worked with very dangerous chemicals. In Auschwitz, they shaved my head, I had long, blonde hair and, when I worked in the munitions factory, my hair was about that long, and my blonde hair turned fire red from the chemicals. My skin on my face was green. My hands were yellow. It wasn't an easy job and the smell of those chemicals, every day, six o'clock in the morning, like two-and-a-half miles or three miles away, I can't tell you exactly, but it was a long walk every morning and, winter time, the snow stuck to my shoes, my wooden shoes, and it was that much higher with the snow sticking to it.

And it wasn't easy working in the munitions factory while the planes- American planes were flying over us very often and the Germans had to run into the bomb shelter very often because the bombing was so close by and they left us with just one guard. And when they came back from the bomb shelter, usually they were singing. And they said, "How can you sing with the bombs falling not far from us?" And we said, "Well, one way or the other, you want to kill us, or the bombs will kill us, it doesn't matter anymore."

I have to tell you that the female guards were much more cruel than the male guards. They find many ways to make our life miserable. What we found out, it was March, and we had less and less material coming into the factory, that the Americans were coming closer too and none of the bombs and mines was revealed. Nothing exploded. They thought it was a sabotage and they said they're going to take us to another concentration camp and we're going to be killed. And, so, we left, on another march, on another drizzly day, we left the munitions factory, and the camp, we were marching. And after two days of marching, when the commander told us that "the Americans are close by."

LIBERATION

CORY: What are you most proud of from your time in the service?

JAMES: Liberating Dachau is the thing I'm most proud of.

CORY: How did you find them?

JAMES: We stumbled upon them.

CORY: How far out in the country were the camps? I mean, were they really far away from the cities or were they close by?

JAMES: They were located away from the cities. And, of course, the Germans there had never heard of a concentration camp; they had no idea that such a thing was going on in their area.

CORY: What was the first thing you saw when you arrived at Dachau?

JAMES: The first thing I saw was the smell. It was absolutely horrible. The incinerators were running day and night. Of course, the guards had all run away by that time. But these people were so starved, that you could see virtually every bone in their body through their skin. One of the things we were really instructed on, and might even say threatened on, is: "Don't give those people anything to eat!" Because they've been so long without solid food, that it would kill them. So, of course, this was a very difficult thing to do; there were people crawling- literally, crawling on their hands and knees begging for something to eat. We did have concentrated milk and sugar and powdered eggs and made sort of a milkshake out of this and they were fed

every three hours, twenty-four hours a day and they got a small cup of this mixture until they could have solid food.

By the time we found Dachau, some of the British troops had found other concentration camps, so we had some warning that there were concentration camps like we're talking about. One of the things that the concentration camp people wanted to do, they wanted to get out. We couldn't allow that to happen because there was virtually every kind of communicable disease you could find in a medical directory. If we let those people get out, there would have been something worse than the black plague in Europe.

CORY: Was your platoon the first or among the first troops to enter Dachau?

JAMES: There's some debate about that. It was a huge camp; it covered many square miles. There are estimates that there were as many as 70,000 people there. We were among the first, but I can't tell you actually we're the first, because one group would run into the concentration camp over here and another group would run into it over there, so who was first is still up for debate.

CORY: Did you talk to any of the prisoners there?

JAMES: I talked with a number of them, I mean, there were some very educated people there, there were people that spoke excellent English and we also had people in our platoon that spoke other languages, European languages.

CORY: Did you run into any German civilians? What did they think about you? What did you think about them?

JAMES: The old people, and I mean old, my age now, practically old men, had some school age children. By that time, in the war, the German army was taking fifteen-year-olds.

CORY: What were the conditions of the civilians like?

JAMES: They were hungry. They had much more severe rationing than we did here in the states. For instance, you could get a German to wash your clothes if she could have the soap that was left over.

VICTORIA: What was it like when the first liberators showed up at camp? And were they Soviets or Americans?

AGNES: I wasn't liberated in any camp. I ran away when the commander announced that the Americans are nearby and the American planes were flying every minute. Two days later, the Americans came. And when the first jeep stopped and the first American came out, I ran over I just hugged him and he hugged me. It was a very emotional scene. And he said that, "You are from one of the concentration camps? Because we liberated a few." And I asked him, "Will you be so kind to send a letter to my family in New York and let them know I'm alive?" And he was laughing and he said, "If you would only know the address." And I surprised him that I did memorize the address and I told him the address and he was laughing and he said "I live about two blocks away, in the Bronx in New York City."

VICTORIA: Did any of your other family members survive?

AGNES: My sister survived, but she went through an awful lot in Hungary in order to survive, because, after a while, they lined her up like a hundred other Jews by the Danube and they were not Germans and they were not Hungarians or military. Those were civilians, lined up hundreds of Jews by the Danube to be shot into the water. My sister was a very strong swimmer and when she saw the machine guns pointed at the people, she just jumped into the Danube and swam under water as long as she could, until she reached the Swedish embassy and they found her a place to hide until the end of the war.

HILMAR: The war was over was when the Soviets went into Germany and they arrived from the other side. We were on the side where the Soviets entered. They took my father immediately, he had done nothing wrong. In his office, he had saved a lot of Jews from being taken by the Nazis and be killed and he said, "I can't leave the people alone and I cannot flee." I wish he hadn't done this, because he couldn't do nothing. He died. So, my older brother was killed, he was fell in Russia, and so they took over and threw my mother out and we had practically lost everything we had, and there were about twelve million refugees.

CORY: How was your family affected by the war?

HILMAR: My mother hated the Nazis. She made them responsible for the destruction of Germany and the destruction of our family.

VICTORIA: How knowledgeable were you about Hitler and his plans and the Nazi party?

VIOLET: I used to hear my mother and father speak about him when they would hear things on the radio and my daddy would just get infuriated.

CORY: When did you realize what the Nazis actually did and how did you feel about this when you learned about it?

HILMAR: I felt I had been part of this band of assassins and murderers and they brought shame on Germany. And I realized that the Nazi philosophy was based on lies. The first lie was that there is no God, and the second lie was that there is a difference in value of people and the only value- people with real value were the Germans and the people of least value are the Jews and that's why they killed them. And I realized that, somebody who is detested by now, the Nazis, the National Socialists, I realized they lied for power; for political power; for global power.

JAMES: Well, the Nazis were, I would say, a small percentage of the population. Some of the kids were raised as Nazis, like your SS troops and that sort of thing, they were very strong for Hitler; they thought Hitler had saved them from another major depression.

VICTORIA: When were Americans made aware that concentration camps existed?

VIOLET: Well, that was- during the war, I mean, it was a known fact before the war, even, it was a known fact what they were doing.

CORY: Did you ever run into any German civilians?

JAMES: The Germans we ran into, they knew nothing about Dachau, I mean, they didn't know it was there, they had no idea what it was.

CORY: What do you think about people who deny the Holocaust ever happened?

JAMES: It's unbelievable that people say that it never happened. Surely, they were not anywhere near there. There were thousands and thousands of people in these concentration camps and they were literally starved to death. There was never anything like that in the world and I hope there never is. President Eisenhower was right when he ordered all the photographers and news reporters to go to these concentration camps and see for themselves and photograph for themselves just what was going on in those camps.

COMING HOME

VICTORIA: Making the transition from war time back to normal life was challenging for all those involved with the war, but was unimaginable for the hundreds of thousands of men who fought during the war.

CORY: What was the first thing you did when you got back to the states?

JAMES: Took GI bill of rights and graduated from Vanderbilt University with an engineering degree.

CORY: Did you get married when you got home?

JAMES: Five years later; took me time to find her.

CORY: Do you have any kids?

JAMES: I have five children and ten grand children. Nine of them are boys.

VICTORIA: Where did you go after the war?

AGNES: After the war, we had to stay in the village for a while, like, a few weeks, and then Munich, because Munich was supposed to be the first place to open an American embassy and I wanted to register myself in order to come to the states. And we couldn't stay in Munich because it was bombed so badly, there was no way we found a place to stay, but I heard about a displaced person's camp, about a two hours train ride from Munich. It was by the Sternberger See, which was the most beautiful lake you can imagine. I stayed there until I got married and moved to Munich. Two months later, I was pregnant. I didn't count on it, because I wanted to come to the United States first; I was single and unmarried without a child, because I figured it was not the right place to have a child, Germany, right after the war. Then I had my son and he was nineteen months old when we came to this country.

SYBILLE: At the end of the war, I lived the last two years on a farm, that's where the school took me to. And I had told my parents, "If the Russians come, or if anyone- I will get home, I'll come home!" And then when the war was end, we got refugees every day; a hundred, two hundred people, so we'd cook for a hundred, a hundred-fifty people, and they told such horror stories, that I was like, "Here, I have a roof over my head, I will not run," when I told my parents. So, I waited it out. We fed up to five-hundred people. So, I mean, food was not a problem; it was a big farm, we had plenty of it. And we welcomed the Americans with open arms, and we were grateful; we were glad to get rid of Hitler. The Americans came every day and wanted some food, eggs and so on, and I talked to them and I said, "Is it true? Are you leaving us? Are you going away? Are we getting rations here?" They didn't answer. Either they didn't know, or they didn't tell us.

But, sure enough, next day, they were gone. Twenty-four hours, we were in no man's land and we were only four women in the house. And we closed all the curtains and I saw in the middle looking out and there came the Russians marched in. But we had decided, we were only four women in the house, and we Germans knew how the Russians, how they were after women, so we decided who had kitchen duty, she was in the kitchen. The three of us would vanish, we would just hide, so they came every day, we cooked every day now for the Russians. But it was not easy, and I know one night, they wanted to stay overnight. I don't know who was more afraid, but nothing happened. I really feel it's God's protection.

And, there, my mother, she was thrown out after my father was taken by the Russians and then she had to leave within two hours. She came thirty hours on top of a coal train, make it to the west.

HILMAR: I studied economics at the University of Hamburg. I went to Latin America to Lima, Peru, where I met my wife.

VICTORIA: What brought you to Mobile?

AGNES: After living twenty years in New York, happily, we moved to California. My son was living in Phoenix, Arizona, and I moved to Arizona, and I was very happy. So, one day, I got a phone call, my son says, "Mommy, I am calling you from Mobile, we are moving to Mobile, I just bought a house and you are moving to Mobile." I said, "No, way." I said, "I am very happy in Phoenix." "No, mommy, you are not getting any younger and it is my duty to take care of you." I said, "But I don't want to live with anybody! I love living alone; I have a wonderful social life." And then he kept talking, "It's no use mother, I'm coming and I'm going to sell you a condo and you are moving in." Unexpectedly, I'm quite happy here.

VIOLET: I married Poppy Raymond. We came here in '52 when the temple was on Government Street. We started a business and, of course, being in the paper business, with all the Hirsches and the Greenblatts, they were all in the paper business; it was natural that we come here and started Bay Paper Company. We've loved living in Mobile, Mobile is wonderful, we're very proud of the temple we helped build.

JAMES: I came to work for Scott Paper Company as an industrial engineer.

CORY: Do you like it here?

JAMES: Very much. I've been retired for a long time. And I still like it here.

VICTORIA: We wanted to create this documentary to ensure that these stories are never forgotten.

CORY: We hope that these people and their stories have given you a new perspective on what it's like when worlds collide.

JAMES: It's unbelievable that people say that it never happened. Surely, they were not anywhere near there.

WE REMEMBER

BECAUSE WE ARE STILL HERE