

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Arthur Bowen  
Interviewer: Edward Applebaum  
Interview Number: 194  
Interview Date: June 12, 1986

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MR. APPLEBAUM: My name is Edward Applebaum, and I'm speaking with Arthur Bowen on Thursday, June 12, 1986. We are beginning this interview at about 10:00 a.m. in the morning. We are about to interview Mr. Bowen about his immigration experience from Germany in 1922. This is interview number 194.

Mr. Bowen, can you tell me where and when you were born.

MR. BOWEN: Where? I was born in the vicinity of Cologne. My father was owner and director of a mine, and I had two sisters--I had one sister and two brothers who are older. They're older. And--

MR. APPLEBAUM: What year were you born?

MR. BOWEN: June 1, 1901. And--

MR. APPLEBAUM: What was your family name in Germany?

MR. BOWEN: Gobel.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Could you spell that?

MR. BOWEN: G-o-b-e-l. I haven't, of course, used that name ever since I came here.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Can you tell me what it was like growing up there as a boy?

MR. BOWEN: Well, growing up, it was country life, country, yes, and a mine, there was a mine involved, and we even had an automobile in 1907, I didn't have any chauffeur or whatever. It was quite an elegant whatever. And electric lights and a flushing toilet [. . .] and the bathroom was. But every--I went to grammar school, and I went to gymnasium. And, and I made a note of [a tour]. Do you know what that possibly could mean? That means did not quite finish my gymnasium, but because I volunteered to the army, right? And therefore, they gave me

the [sort of note of a tour] to translate this would be, "note" means necessity or whatever. I was very, very somewhat borderline translation, you know. Anyway, then I went--I was in the army, and it was in 1918, and about July, so I was taken--I served in the army about two months, I was taken to Metz, Metz, and there was the--by [these war] there was[n't] [Arab] terrorist, whatever, don't forget the year I was young, I mean, I was to begin with enthusiastic, but--war is over--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did you do any fighting when you were in the army?

MR. BOWEN: Pardon?

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did you see any fighting?

MR. BOWEN: No. No, I didn't, no. Anti-aircraft is what I, this was what my duty was, anti-aircraft. The aircraft was then coming in, in use then. The first, I saw--the first--I saw the--during the end of my gymnasium era, there were, how do you call, [. . .] in Cologne, aircraft flyers, I mean, the first one [. . .] I mean, they didn't have no bombs in those days; they had nails about this long, but a fin on it, on the end, I mean, and they threw the nails down. This is, was the first one [I go]. And the second one, they had bombs, they killed two people. This is in Cologne. And that, they had [sareem] then, or then, or, you know. I stood in the--to get--come on back to the army, I stood in the army, I didn't go home, I didn't like home. Whatever, I didn't like home, no. But--

MR. APPLEBAUM: What was it you didn't like about home?

MR. BOWEN: Well, I was always a loner. My brother was a little bit older than I am. And, and--I had no--there was no sense of being, going home. I had no mother; mother died very young, I mean, very young. She was, I think, thirty-eight years old. And, so, I stood in the army. And I was taken in the so-called [Reis War] and I was taken to East Germany, and finally, it was very strange army, then, I mean, this was almost communistic, somewhat, a little bit, I would say, you know. And, you could, if you didn't like the army, you could just go to your commander and say, "I don't like this any longer," and you could, within one month, I mean, you're discharged, you know. No problems, no nothing. It was very strange, you know. Anyway, it was a liberal attitude then, army-wise, I mean, [. . .] last two months, were army [. . .] better do what you're told to, you know? Anyway, this--I'm in East Germany then, and I quit, because there was the recruiter from--from mayor or bishop, and we went into Russia--well, not in Russia, Lithuania, and Riga, city of Riga. And I recall, not distinctly, but anyway--we were up to [. . .] I was there when this mayor/bishop offered or [approximately] maybe six months or so, or, I don't know, I don't remember. But we were then told one morning, if we don't get out where we are, we lose our citizenship. And, so we decided--I was on an armored train, then. And we, we decided to go back to Germany, and I was, how do you call, [. . .] [oldest] city in Germany, of course this is all Russia, you know, and then [Korningsberg], and from there, I don't remember. Anyway--

MR. APPLEBAUM: [. . .] that you were involved with after the war, who were you fighting against?

MR. BOWEN: They were White Russians--the Red Russians.

MR. APPLEBAUM: So you were allied with the White Russians?

MR. BOWEN: Yes. Yes, more or less, yes. This [bishop] was allied with the White Russians, and--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Were you doing it for political reasons, or--

MR. BOWEN: No, no, there was no politics involved, no, no. This was something that--when you are, as a soldier, as I was, you are taken care of, I mean, I mean, you have your clothing and you get fed. And, you somewhat contented, you know. This is all [. . .] I can tell you,

you know. And, there was, there was [. . .] fighting in this Riga area, you know? There was [a] little fighting, all right. And--we had a lot of prisoners. What happened to them, I don't know. I don't know. I really don't know.

MR. APPLEBAUM: So you said you needed to return to Germany?

MR. BOWEN: Well, I returned to Germany, I was still in the army until about twenty-one, in this area, and then I decided, I mean, I should go to college, and I--this was the tradition in my family. You had to go to college, you know. Anyway, I tried college for two semesters, and it was not for me. I didn't like when they talked [. . .] and matters and chemistry, I mean, whatever, this was not for me. And I quit. And my father, being a prominent man in mining circles, I mean, I took a job, I mean, as a miner, in Germany then. I went home, and I saw my family maybe a week, or so, and I took off again. And, went mining. It was a zinc mine, brown coal mine, and anthracite mine. I was [function] as a student then, and whatever I want, whatever--I took advantage of my own family, my family, my father's reputation, I mean, by not working too hard, and, but--here I am. You ask me how it was came that I came to the United States. I'm in a cafe in Germany in, town was Bottrop. Anyway, I was in this cafe, and we are playing seventeen--twenty-one--meaning, twenty-one means blackjack. And, there was a man sitting alongside of me or whatever, and says, "I'm going to the United States next week." He's going to the United States. So I told him, "I go with you." Just like this. And, I was [. . .] and what not. And, so I could go with him. So--

MR. APPLEBAUM: What had you heard about the United States, that you were willing to go?

MR. BOWEN: Nothing. Absolute nothing. Absolute nothing. And, so, I go after a week or so. That time, I can't tell you, but about a week. And, what did happen then--we went to--I never saw an ocean or whatever, you know, just Cologne, the city of Cologne is quite near the border as well, you know--but anyway--but ocean, and what goes with it, I had never saw anything like this, you know. Anyway, we went to Bremerhaven--Bremerhaven was the town, and we didn't have--this man had nothing, himself. I mean, of course, I didn't know about such a--a passport, or whatever. Immigration--I didn't know nothing about this. And, he said, then, we had to stow away on the ship. So, we look around for a ship, a boat [. . .] I mean, you know, for our purpose. And, we find a ship was going then about ten days from then, going to the United States. And would make two trips to the United States, and will continue, go on to South America. And the name of the ship was Sierra Nevada. And, so, we got acquainted with sailors, of course, in these cafes at the waterfront, and all they told us, I mean, [. . .] [They weren't] the most interested, these guys, you know, in the beginning. And the ship would [sail then in a] day, and you were--[a] young sailor said, "You want to stow away? Go ahead and stow away!" So, somebody must have helped someone a little bit, and we--this man and myself--went on this ship, the day before, and I hid in the lifeboat. We had a lot of chocolate, cigarettes, and some beer, bottled beer. And I have no knowledge of anything of all this, absolutely no knowledge.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Was this a passenger ship?

MR. BOWEN: Yes.

MR. APPLEBAUM: There were immigrants traveling on this ship?

MR. BOWEN: Oh yes, oh yes. There were immigrants. I remember--no--when--let's see--we were on this ship, and we were in the lifeboat, and about three days later, we were quite comfortable, but someone saw smoke coming out of this lifeboat, and we were smoking. And, they

discovered us, and here we are. We are stowaways. So, we were taken interview with the captain, and of course we got plenty of hell from the captain, and he says, "I promise you, [prisoner] to this." And, they made us do--peel potatoes, or wash and paint, and they put us in the steerage, where--I saw the real immigrants then, you know. There was immigrants from Poland, I mean, I remember seeing herrings and all this, you know? And, anyway, I arrived in New York. The ship took nine days. And we were then guarded, we were locked up in place on the ship, we were locked up, I mean, when they came to New York, they locked--overnight, all of us--we were locked up. And we were taken to Ellis Island, with a guard, and we were taken in Ellis Island, this is a big place. I recall that I was taken upstairs and it was quite a big--it was a room you could where sleep, bunks, where you could sleep a hundred people there, and the beds were individual beds, but had somewhat--the--chicken wire on top and all this, you know? But anyway, I was fully dressed and all this. I had a little [drip] with me, clothing and whatever, a little underwear, whatever, and I was taken in front of a judge about the next day or so. And, the judge told me, after [. . .], he said--first, he interviewed my friend, the friend, I didn't know the man more or less, I know him somewhat. Anyway--this was, this was the other passenger, my friend. Anyway, he said, "Due to the fact that you have a relative here, you will be kept for further interrogation or what," and they didn't separate us, but he said to me, to me he said, "We like to have you here. You are trained to be a student, we like to have people like this, but I'm sorry, being that you are a stowaway, I have to send you back. And, do you have any wishes?" I said, "Yes, I like to go back on the same boat," you know. "All right," that was it.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did the judge speak German, or did you speak English?

MR. BOWEN: They had a [. . .] interpreter. They did. My English was school English, well, I recall, continue to be there, I mean, about six or seven days, something like this. Anyway, he was taken away, this man was taken away forever or whatever, I don't know. But--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did you ever hear from him or see him again?

MR. BOWEN: I never saw him again. Never saw him again.

MR. APPLEBAUM: How did you feel when the judge said you were going to have to go back?

MR. BOWEN: Well, I was full of ambition or whatever. I wouldn't care, I go back, I mean, it didn't bother me whatsoever. So I had to go back? But, I mean, I knew, being, having been acquainted with the ship's people, I mean, the sailors and whatnot, I would go again--I knew this and all. So, anyway--

MR. APPLEBAUM: You mean, that you would come back?

MR. BOWEN: Oh yes, oh yes.

MR. APPLEBAUM: What did you see of New York and the Statue of Liberty?

MR. BOWEN: Well, upstairs at Ellis Island, I was there for six or seven days, you know, or whatever it was, I saw the Battery, and beautiful view from the upstairs windows, you know? But, you couldn't get out; you could not get out. I was looking down, down, there's a lot of rocks there, and to jump out of the window, it was quite impossible. Quite impossible. So--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

MR. BOWEN: No. No, no, you couldn't see then, then you couldn't see the Statue. You couldn't. The area was there must have been on the eastern side, I don't know. And, you couldn't see the Statue, no, you couldn't. But I saw the Statue later on.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did you meet any people while you were on the Island this time?

MR. BOWEN: No. No. They were all deportees. For some reason or another, these people--they were all held for some reason or other.

MR. APPLEBAUM: What were some of the reasons? Do you know?

MR. BOWEN: I don't--honestly, I don't know. Again, language-wise, I mean, they were all sorts of nationalities and whatnot. And, I couldn't answer this. But, I was again--guarded, taken away from Ellis Island, and put back on this ship, and the same ship this was, and all. And, I was confined with a deportee, I think he must have been Polish or Russian, whatever he was, I mean, and he was--there was something--the guy was classified as crazy or whatever, you know. And--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Was there anything that made you think he was crazy?

MR. APPLEBAUM: No, you could--in other words, there was something wrong with this man, you know? The man must have been--he was quite older than I was; he must have been forty or fifty years old, or whatever. But again, if you were in a padded cell [leave them outdoors] a padded cell, or--I recall eating--they gave us a great big chicken, some sailor came in, opened the cell door, and they gave us a chicken. And you put it in the pot to eat the chicken, because I mean, the refrigerator on the fritz, and the ammonia was--chicken contained I say ten percent ammonia. Where you couldn't possibly eat this [. . .] Well anyway, forget about this. But I was taken out and I was confined with the black gang--that means the coal people who were [put down in] the ship and the coal passers and I was qualified as a coal passer.

MR. APPLEBAUM: This is the end of side one of tape one of the interview with Mr. Arthur Bowen. This is interview number 194.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

MR. APPLEBAUM: This is side two of tape one of the interview with Mr. Arthur Bowen. This is interview number 194.

So you were telling us about what you did on the ship.

MR. BOWEN: On the ship, I was taken to the black gang, and I was ordered into the coal [bunker], and I had to--in those days, ships had coal, I mean, there was no oil in those days, you now--and I operated in this coal [bunker] about three days or so. And it was rough work. And hot, man, this was a hot place. Anyway, I said to myself, "This is not for me." And I went and saw the doctor, I say, "I'm sick." So, went to this doctor, and the strange coincidence is that he's a young doctor, this is his first job, more or less, and he knew my brother, due to the fact that my brother was quite, well, I wouldn't say famous, but he was known, I mean, as a duelist, I mean, heavy sabers. In those days, I mean, college-wise, I mean, these boys, I mean, they [you should have saw] one of these guys, I mean, these--scars here, all that. You don't see them no more. But, [. . .] only recently, they were taking it up again, or whatever. [. . .] I don't know. Anyway, here was this doctor, and I told him I got consumption. Now, to verify consumption, it would take quite some tests, whatever, I believe, I mean. This is by [. . .] my attitude, I mean, I was thinking this, you know. So anyway, he says, "Well, you can't work any longer in this place," and he said, "I'll put you in the kitchen, and you can peel potatoes." All right. So, and I went back, and with the help of the sailors, I got off the ship. I had no problems whatsoever, you know. And went back to Bremerhaven, and the black gang, which I was acquainted with, of course, you know, they, I told them then I wanted to go back, you know. And they said to me, to do what I was supposed to do, "You go into the coal bunker, and we will feed

you." And they concealed my [. . .] Clothing I did have. And I started in Germany, when I go back, I mean, I had to wait a week or so, they had to load the ship or whatever, and, and--where am I?

MR. APPLEBAUM: At the point where you've gotten back to Germany and now you want to return to the United States.

MR. BOWEN: Right, right, right. And the black gang would furnish me with food and that was it.

MR. APPLEBAUM: After having been returned as a stowaway, why didn't you return through normal procedures the second time?

MR. BOWEN: Go home and whatnot?

MR. APPLEBAUM: No. You're the one with the story. Tell me how you returned to the United States.

MR. BOWEN: Well, as I said, I stood in Bremerhaven in a riverfront hotel, it cost very little, whatever, and I sold a watch. I remember selling my watch, and I had some German money and a two-dollar bill American money, the first one I ever saw. Anyway, I had this money, and the black gang would--is--like I said, the black gang would take care of me. And, I went back to the ship, it was common [place], whatever. They--I undressed myself, I mean, I had a pair of shorts, that's all I had on. And, went into the coal bunker. And, here I am in the coal bunker; I have with me candles, about half a dozen candles, I have the chocolate, I have something to drink, it must have been beer or whatever, and I'm quite happy, and within an hour, I knew there was someone else in this coal bunker, you know. And this coal bunker is huge [affair], and the coal is about two feet from the top, this is all coal space, I mean, this is all [they've been] doing. This is the beginning of the trip, and the ship has been fully loaded again. Anyway, I know by then that I'm not by myself, you know. And, and [. . .] Of course, everything is pitch dark. I see a pair of eyes coming to me, and all at once there's a half a dozen pair of eyes coming to me. They're bluffing. How they're expected of me to do what they did do, was supposed to do, was to go to the United States, I mean, with [. . .] nothing. I was the only one who would be fed. And, at the first day, I got fed--the coal bunker was open and here come the bucket of food. Beautiful. And, of course, I had to part with--and this took--twice, or three times, they did feed me, and that was it. They then--somebody knew them, they are most always around here. Anyway, after about the fourth day, the poor people, there were six other stowaways, four of 'em decided they would go out and give themselves up. Who they were, I don't know, I don't know. I don't know. One conversation I did have with one of them, he had been to the United States. He must have been the real hobo, and he worked as a construction person on the first skyscraper we ever built--what name--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Woolworth Building?

MR. BOWEN: Woolworth. Woolworth, Woolworth, Woolworth. Woolworth Building. He worked on the Woolworth Building. And, well, whatever happened to him, I don't know.

MR. APPLEBAUM: The second time that you were coming back, why didn't you just pay and go steerage?

MR. BOWEN: Pay?! I didn't have no money! I didn't have no money, no money, no.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Would your family have given you money, if you asked for it?

MR. BOWEN: That could have been--that was something--I didn't want no--nothing to do with the family.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did you tell them that you were leaving Germany?

MR. BOWEN: No. No, I didn't tell no one. Again, I was acquainted with--you asked me a question--why didn't I pay the steerage?

I would have had to have a passport, or something, you know? I had nothing. I had nothing. And, they would not--that wouldn't--well, I wouldn't have been classified as a stowaway then. I might have been all right. You must be right, I don't know, I don't know. But it never occurred to me.

MR. APPLEBAUM: So what happened when the boat finally got to New York Harbor?

MR. BOWEN: Well, well, there were three of us down in this coal bunker left, and we had decided to stay there, and because I wanted to do--I had my mind made up, I mean, I'm going to the United States. And anyway, what did happen, I mean, the coal, I mean, in the funnel, there were two or three of those funnels, and one of these guys, I mean, falls in there, and breaks a leg. And, we had no choice, we had to get out. So, we got out. And, there was a sailor in front of--steel, of course, in these ships--and there was a peephole and where this compartment was, and the sailor was gone, anyway, the reason--I have a reason for saying this--any--I'm taken out and get cleaned up, showers, hospital--they have a hospital in the ship, before, six people could live in this hospital, so-called hospital. And anyway, there was a shower, and I took a shower, and my little bag, I mean, it was waiting for me, I mean, these sailors took care of me. I put some clothing on, and here comes the captain. And, with the engineer, who tried--almost tried to kill us, I mean by putting steam in the coal bunker, and all this. But it didn't work.

MR. APPLEBAUM: [I guess] He knew that there were men hiding there?

MR. BOWEN: Oh, they knew, they knew we were hiding there. But it was impossible to dislodge us, I mean, it was impossible. Anyway, here is the captain, and I thought he was going to have a heart attack. "You again! I promise you ten years hard labor! Ten years I promise you!" Hard labor. Nice how-do-you-do. So, and, here is my friend the doctor. And, the doctor says, "I give you a slip. Here. I put you in the hospital, in Ellis Island. And, you say you can swim, good luck to you." So, I'm taken to the hospital. And the hospital, no interview, nothing. But, "Take off your clothes. Take off everything, everything." They took everything I had, including my wallet, and gave me pajamas.

MR. APPLEBAUM: What did the doctor say was wrong with you, to put you in the hospital?

MR. APPLEBAUM: Supposed to be consumption. But, here I am, the pajamas, I had hat, cap, my own, pajamas, and shoes. No socks, even the socks they took away from me. This is on a Saturday afternoon or something. And, all right, supper. All of us. The [best] supper I ever had. Whatever it was, I don't remember, in this hospital. And I had tea, and this was very sweet, beautiful tea, but it was full of saltpeter, whatever. Anyway, I was--in the ward, there were about twenty guys there--well, twenty, possibly. And, what--no examination, no nothing. And, this is Sunday there, at breakfast, in the morning, I had lunch. In between, I met two young sailors who gave me directions what to do when I do swim, and make it. And, they told me exactly how to go when I arrive in the United States in Jersey. That would be Jersey. That was the eastern part. Here--anyway, and they introduced me to a card game, casino, I recall. Anyway, they gave me directions that was very precise directions.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Were these German sailors?

MR. BOWEN: No, no, they were Americans. But again, I could understand 'em, you know, good enough. But, I took supper--yes, I did, supper, this is Sunday, and my supper, this was about seven o'clock at night or so, and I decided, I mean, to disappear. And, we had taken a

walk. It was a nice, a beautiful day, I mean, sunshine and whatnot, this Sunday. This was on the fourth--I don't remember now whether this was October or November. Anyway, I crawled underneath the hospital where there was a crawl space, and I hid there.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Were there guards?

MR. BOWEN: No guards, no nothing. No guards, no nothing. No guards, no nothing. No guards. And, I was missed, of course, whatever. And, I found a string, and I rolled up my pajamas and my shoes, and I was stark naked, and it took about, well, fifty feet from the hospital, there was another hospital, which was a female hospital, this was for women, and it was a six-foot high fence, and I crawled over the fence about ten o'clock at night, I waited quite a while down in this crawl space, and anyway, I went over that fence stark naked, and no one saw me. Not a soul. And, I arrive at the power plant, which provides heat for the Ellis Island or whatever, and there was a big chimney, I recall, and anyway, I'm level with the waterfront then, and I see a great big pipe. I mean, it must have been four inches thick, whatever, going out into the water, and I slid on the pipe, and put my feet in the water, and the water was cold. That water was cold. Anyway, I decided, now or never, right? And, the shore is quite near, you know? And, I dove in the water, right? I got acquainted with the water, and not knowing about ebb and tide, I should know, school-wise, but I forgot all about these matters, and here I'm the luckiest guy--the tide must have just come in, just about, and it took me, like I said, you talk about the Statue of Liberty, it took me around the Statue of Liberty. And I see the Statue of Liberty--huge--up there. Never saw this in my life. And I saw lights there. And I decided I was getting a little [woozy]. This is cold, and maybe I should go there. But, then they catch me. And I will swim where these guys told me to swim. And, and the tide just went in. And here, I'm swimming, I must have swum for four hours, now, swim. The only swimming I didn't know is breast stroke. I never heard of a crawl stroke, or whatever. Never heard of it. And rest--I rest on my back, I could rest for hours. But anyway, I drank a lot of seawater, and arrived eventually on, in New Jersey.

MR. APPLEBAUM: When you swam past the Statue of Liberty, what did you think it was?

MR. BOWEN: I don't know, I didn't know what it was. What it would be called, I wouldn't know. I didn't know. But--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Hadn't you seen it from the boat before?

MR. BOWEN: No, no. I didn't see it, I didn't see it. They confine me in this boat, coming here. They were afraid, I mean, I might do things, you know? I didn't see nothing. Maybe, I got acquainted with the Statue of Liberty quite well. I mean, [. . .] look at this from the sea, you know. Well, I arrived. I'm grabbing the--I grabbed the first pile, I recall, and got even cut by barnacles. And I said, then, there must be a way I'll get on this pier. And I found a way. There was a ladder, and I climbed up on this ladder, and I collapsed. And, I was there possibly an hour or maybe two hours, I don't know. But this, I was quite a strong person then, don't you forget this.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Move your hands, please, okay? Just don't cover the microphone.

MR. BOWEN: All right. And--I rang up my pajamas when I got through, and put on my shoes. It was quite an effort, I recall, I mean, with the salt water, whatever. I took my, my directions which these two boys gave me at the hospital, and here, I saw the lights, great big lights, and this is a [ferry]. And there is a man walking, uniform wears, quite a short guy, old, white hair, he had a cappy on, like the

Foreign Legion, which I almost joined as well, you know. Anyway, he didn't say--he looked at me, and he didn't question me. I'm wet, and--

MR. APPLEBAUM: What were you wearing at this point?

MR. BOWEN: Pajamas. And everything is stamped Ellis Island. I have a cap, shoes, and pajamas. I have nothing, absolute nothing. Well, he, he must have said something, whatever, but he never said, "Where do you come from?" He never said nothing. Anyway, I asked him, finally, "I have no money." He told me--I must have asked him directions to go to New York. And, he said, "You go into this ferry, and then you go to New York, and from New York, you go where you want to go." Another ferry--I wanted to go to Hoboken. So, I asked him, "Would you loan me four cents?" He gave me four cents, just [. . .] the ferry, the New York ferry. He said [. . .] He knew there was something wrong. "You go into this ferry here, and you go into the place where it says 'men,' and you stay in there until you don't hear no engines, no nothing, and you are then in New York." And sure enough, I'm in New York, and, first thing was, then, this is daylight, it's not quite daylight, but I see a policeman, and like I said, the chill--attack is the best event to the policeman, and--because I knew he gave me a funny look, you know, and he said, he asked me, "Where do you come from?" I says, "I fell in the water." My broken English, whatever, and "I'm a sailor, I have a ship in Hoboken," and I gave him the name of a ship, this was a Holland ship. I claimed to be a Hollander. And he said, "Get lost!" Here I am, free as a bird, you know?

MR. APPLEBAUM: We have to take a break for one second. This is the end of side two of tape one of the interview with Mr. Arthur Bowen. This is interview number 194.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ON, TAPE TWO

MR. APPLEBAUM: This is side one of tape two of the interview with Mr. Arthur Bowen. This is interview number 194.

I think we're up to the point where you're walking around in pajamas and the officer told you to get lost.

MR. BOWEN: Right. I took my four cents, and took the ferry, you know, to Hoboken, and I--you can't go anywheres but Hoboken then. It was the [Bartley] Street ferry. I recall the name. Anyway, here I am in Hoboken, and it's daylight now.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Why did you go to Hoboken?

MR. BOWEN: Well these boys, I mean, from the hospital, they told me to go to Hoboken, and go to the seamen's home. And, this is--you couldn't possibly get lost, even. So, anyway, here I am in Hoboken, coming out of the ferry, and the seamen's home is about two blocks away. It has been torn down since. And I went to the seamen's home, and I knocked on the door, about twenty minutes, somebody opened the door, and slammed the door, and says, "We don't want no bums in here!" So, here I am. I go out on the street, and this is so coincidental. Here I see two people, a mother and daughter, and who had--knew me, due to the fact that sea voyage, I mean, then the discovered there were stowaways on that boat, and a sailor was guarding us, and the people [. . .] on this contraption, whatever, the coal bunker, and the sailor charged these passengers a quarter or twenty-five marks or cents or whatever in order to look and see--we came out, occasionally, and you could see us. But anyway, she says she knows me, right, and they were going to Milwaukee, and going to the train station, which is right close there. And, then, I asked him for fifty cents. And, you know, I'm a beggar practically. "Here!" Fifty cents, and they gave me their address, and they--here, I have fifty cents, right? And, I walked, and here--I'm in the United

States. This is quite a feeling, must have been, right? And, I saw a light in the saloon, and walked in there, just about six o'clock in the morning, and the bartender is there, just the bartender. And he is cleaning up, or whatever, and don't forget this is Prohibition. And, I asked him for a beer. I didn't know that this was Prohibition or not, but it was Prohibition, and he gave me a great big stone mug of beer, dark beer, I call, ended up a half a dollar there, and I saw eggs behind the bar, and I have one of those eggs, and I was hungry, and so. The bartender kept on working, and he said, finally, "Where do you come from?" He asked me a straight question. So, I told him. "I come from Ellis Island." "Ellis Island?" So, he didn't ask me how and why and whatnot. But, "I take care of you, lad." The guy was about forty years old, and so, didn't ask me no name or nothing. And he gave me another egg, and another beer, and in comes a drunk. He was quite drunk, he was about my size, and he has coveralls on, and whatever, and he said, his name was [Ikey], I'll never forget this, [Ikey], go in the back room and change clothes with this man. And he did. [Ikey] went to sleep, I mean drunk, whatever. And, I didn't see [Ikey] any longer, and I was furnished with new clothing. And, my pajamas were gone, but I wish I had 'em. But anyway, here I am, and the place is beginning to fill up, all men, from--all older, I was the youngest, of course, just twenty-one, then. And, it was quite a rough introduction into American life. One of these men, I mean, started an argument with someone, and the bartender came, hit him with a lead pipe, and the guy was out, and he grabbed him and put him into an empty icebox. And, then the bartender [. . .] the [incoming/income of] man [. . .] dressed, and says, "I want ten men for this, ten men for this, ten men for this," and this was almost like selling someone. I was introduced to catch oysters, into an oyster boat, in Bridgeport, Connecticut. And, I was taken to New York, with four other guys, five guys, I don't remember.

MR. APPLEBAUM: The man who had walked into the bar?

MR. BOWEN: Walked into the bar, and he had wanted men for lumber camps, for factories, for spinning factories, for whatever. And oyster boats. This was almost like slave labor. Anyway, this is my introduction to the United States. And I was working on an oyster boat, right? On this boat, I recall, I mean, somebody sold me, one of these men sold me a pair of rubber boots, which were of course leaking, but I shoved oysters, I never saw an oyster in my life. And, this must have been six weeks, somewheres around there, I don't know. And, I quit. There was a big fight, somebody almost got killed. I mean, they would stab each other, drunk, on payday. And, I got my pay and I quit. I didn't say nothing to anyone, nobody asked me anything. They asked me--they did ask me--someone, office-wise, must have asked me "What is your name," and I was supposed to be a Frenchman. I could talk better French than in English, of course. Henri Chaussay--I think the name was Henri Chaussay. But again, they called me "Heini," which of course, I mean, "Heini," just after the war, and "Heini" was a misnomer or something [. . .] they called me "Heini," these companions on this oyster boat. Anyway, this so-called "Heini," so I would forget this, and anyway, I quit. And within a few blocks in the city of Bridgeport, I saw a clothing store, a second-hand clothing store, and I went in there, bought a new--not a new--a used blue suit, shoes, shirts, underwear, and the bill was about twenty dollars, or something. I don't recall; something like that. And, I was a brand new man.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Weren't you worried that you would be caught for coming into the country illegally?

MR. BOWEN: Well, yes and no. So far, nobody asked me anything,

nothing. Absolute nothing. And, as a matter of fact, I mean, until, I would say, into the late thirties, no one asked anybody for identification. There was, "What is your first name?" "My name is Arthur." "You go to work." That's it.

MR. APPLEBAUM: How did you make up your name? What were the circumstances?

MR. BOWEN: No, no, no. I went to this same saloon, where this bartender was--befriended me. And he said "Hello," and the next thing he said, "The gendarmes were looking for you." So, I saw a truck, white-painted truck, and [. . .] last name was [Bowen]. And, I said, "This is somewhat German," and I assumed the name [Bowen]. Arthur [Bowen], I called myself from then, Arthur [Bowen]. And, this bartender got me a furnished room, which costs three dollars, or two dollars, or three dollars, what, I don't recall. Anyway, nice and clean. And, I got a job as busboy on Rupert Street in Hoboken, and they paid me twenty-five dollars. I almost fainted at twenty-five dollars; I got thirty dollars pulling the oysters--I mean, thirty dollars a month, right? Twenty-five dollars for overtime on Sundays. Thirty-five cents. And, here, they offered twenty-five, and I had to work like a beaver so [. . .] it didn't bother me, the so-called consumption, I mean, it was all forgotten, I mean, this was old thing. Anyway, after about two months, I started a bank account, I had sixty dollars in there, and I'm--this bartender tells me he be going to a nightclub in Hoboken, and he's going into a nightclub, the name of it was "Peek In," I'll never forget this. And, I'm in this nightclub with two Italians, two women, which I never saw before, and the bartender and myself. This was the group. And we are sitting there drinking wine, and the door opens, it was quite a huge--quite a [flashiest] place, and in comes two guys and start shooting. Boom boom [. . .] I don't know. And, no one is hurt, whatever. And, these Italians pull out guns, and go after these people, and coincidentally, a cop on a motorcycle comes by, and they shoot the cop, and it didn't hurt him, no, no, it went right through his core, but he didn't get hurt, but they shot the cop, you know. And, here, I go home, it was a [. . .] or two in my furnished room. And the next morning, boom boom boom, here comes the police. And, they locked me up. And, it was a good thing they did. Why? I tell you. Anyway, here I am, taken to the police station and into--being interrogated from the police, whatever. And they call me all kinds of names which I didn't understand, of course. But I probably would have got made with these people. But anyway, here I'm held as in a terrible business, a thousand dollar bail, and I stayed in the Hoboken jail possibly two days or so. And taken to Jersey City into a jail which was better, at least it had a bed, and you could buy your own meals, and I was ten days in jail. I received five dollars recompensation for this, and I had to bail myself out. After ten days I got tired of this, and [it] cost fifty dollars, instead of a hundred, they wanted a hundred. I only had sixty dollars in the bank. I think up, somehow, fifty dollars for me, I must have signed something, and I got out of the jail. And, my job was lost, and--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did you ever find out what all the shooting was about?

MR. BOWEN: Yes, this was something about beer, beer matters. These people, this was Prohibition, it had something to do with Prohibition. This bootlegging business was then, got, in the early twenties, bootlegging was--this was [. . .] But you had to be [a tough] and whatnot. Whatever. And, whatever the cause was, I don't know. There was no trial, no nothing whatsoever, you know. I never read of this whole business.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Were you able to find another job?

MR. BOWEN: Yes--a day bartender, my friend, then, he said, "I get you another job." And I was some sort of a bartender. And, bartender. I didn't know anything about bartending, but as I said, Prohibition is on, and all they had was bottled beer, [near] beer. This is beer which contains two or three percent alcohol, or whatever. And this was a house of ill repute. I didn't know this, of course. And, I worked in there to serve bottled beer and they were girls in there, they were not in there, but they came in there, and they had their own clientele, whatever. I'm an observer, I'm learning very, very fast, you know. And they served meals, I recall. And I was fired after about six weeks or so; they claimed I was dishonest, I didn't ring up something. Whatever. And I knew, whatever, somebody else wanted the job or some reason or other. I don't know. I don't know. But anyway, here I am, I got fired, and then, where did I go? I don't know.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did you write to your family and let them know where you were?

MR. BOWEN: No, no, I didn't. I didn't write. The first time I saw someone of my family, after forty years.

MR. APPLEBAUM: What did they think had happened to you?

MR. BOWEN: Well, they thought I'm dead, or just disappeared. They didn't care more or less. Anyway, my family was, all of them are dead, except one. One brother was still alive, you know. And, this was 1959. This is the first time--here I'm trying to get to be a citizen. Here, I said, here, I worked in the restaurant as a counterman, and saved my money, and I had, 1929, or between 1925 and '29, I had quite some experience in--I lived in New York, quite some experiences. They were fantastic experiences--they were all pleasant, all pleasant, there was no criminal matter whatsoever. I never dreamed of being anything criminal, or--

MR. APPLEBAUM: How did you finally become a citizen?

MR. BOWEN: Now, that's what--I'm trying to tell you how I became a citizen. Now, here, I decided, I mean, in [. . .] So, anyway, I claimed to be a citizen, but I was not a citizen. So, I decided to become a citizen. Here I go to a lawyer, and which I shouldn't have done, it cost two thousand dollars, and he said, "Well, we have to prove that you were here in 1922." Right? Well, the only way I could prove that I was here in 1922, when I was locked up in this shooting matter. I was taken, handcuffed, t--before the [. . .] six blocks from the police station, there was a big crowd and whatnot, and other people, whatever. These were people who got locked up. Anyway, I had the pictures of me in the police station. And, it didn't dawn on me, but this wasn't [. . .] people. I mean, knowing me, was quite a job. There were no people. We found one. There was a woman who knew me before 1924. In 1954 they made two laws in regards to immigration. I could have been a citizen with no money, if I would have qualified.

MR. APPLEBAUM: So, what year did you finally become a citizen?

MR. BOWEN: 1959. 1959. Then, as I said, I went to Germany, and saw my brother. He [. . .] a man, he's about four years older than I am, he was a duelist, I mean, full of scars, and he had an automobile agency, and he was graduated as an engineer. But he had an automobile agency, and a repair shop, employed about twelve people or so. Was quite all right; had a beautiful house. And, that is the first contact I did have.

MR. APPLEBAUM: What did you and he do when you saw each other?

MR. BOWEN: Well, he almost had a heart attack. But--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did he recognize you?

MR. BOWEN: Yes, he must have. It was quite an [. . .] then.

And--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Did you write to say you were coming over, or you just sort of--

MR. BOWEN: Yes, yes, yes, yes. After the war, after the Second World War, I did write to the authorities in the place where I was born, and I wanted to know what happened to my family, right? Because I [. . .] something, you know? I was then--I was in business here, right? I had forty-five--let's see--I had a diner, I operated a diner--

MR. APPLEBAUM: Are you glad that you came over? Do you think that you did the right thing?

MR. BOWEN: Did--my brother?

MR. APPLEBAUM: You. Did you do the right thing in coming over here?

MR. BOWEN: Yes, I would say, yes. I investigated in the meantime South America, Buenos Aires, and I investigated the west coast of the United States, but it always drove me back, I mean, to this area, you know? But, I was contented to be in this area.

MR. APPLEBAUM: Thank you very much. You've had a remarkable life, I think.

This is the end of side one of tape two of the interview with Mr. Arthur Bowen. This is the end of interview number 194.