United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Leo Bretholz
July 31, 1989 and September 27, 1989
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Leo Bretholz, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on July 31, 1989 and September 27, 1989 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

LEO BRETHOLZ
July 31, 1989

01:00:11

Q: Could you please tell us your name and where you were born?

A: My name is Leo Bretholz. Do I have to spell that? I usually do have to. And I was born in Vienna, Austria.

Q: In what year?

A: 1921.

Q: Tell us about the family which you grew up in.

A: Our family was a normal, or what you might call a "normal family." My father was a tailor. They were originally from Poland. My parents were -- came to Austria right after the first World War, married in Austria, and there were three children in the family. There would have been a fourth, but that child, a boy, died six weeks after birth. I was the oldest. My sister was a year and a half younger, and the other one, born in 1928, was seven years younger. A normal family, as I said, with schools and activities, fun -- although some of that was disrupted by the death of my father in 1930. I was nine years old, the oldest at the time of the three children. And, my mother, a young widow at 35, never remarried. My father was 39. And it sort of made me a father image, young as I was, to my children -- to my sisters -- because my mother had to go to work and support the young family. But that was all bearable and we coped as best we could. We do not want to forget that in those years it was still, if not depression, but very close to just, just post-depression.

Q: Tell us about that.

A: And these were hard times. Just as here in America in the middle '30s, latter '30s, we had to make with -- make ends meet with what was available to us. And income -- my mother was a, as I said, a widow who had to come up with, with the support of the family, and there were Jewish organizations who helped out in that respect. And the real, the real tragedy began then in 1938 with the annexation of Austria. Where that family structure, that family entity as in so many hundreds and thousands and millions of cases, that family entity overnight was destroyed.

Q: Tell us about -- before you begin with 1938, tell me about a Jewish child growing up in Vienna as a Jew. Were you aware of being a Jew, and what did that mean as a child?

A: Vienna and Austria had a history of antisemitic activities and antisemitic attitudes. When we grew up in Austria, as Jews, we were always aware of the fact that we were Jewish. It so happens that I lived in a district in Vienna where there were more Jews than in other districts.

01:04:27

It was the 20th district, and the second district had more Jews than the 20th, and a few other districts had -- but the majority of the areas were non-Jewish or very few Jews and antisemitism was almost a part of daily life. It's not that we thought a lot about it, because it just became part of life. If you, if you, if you live with something everyday, then it becomes part of you and you cope with it, if it didn't become too violent. But from time to time, there were denigrations. Sometime we were spit at. Sometime we were singled out for a particular rough treatments in schools, the Easter and Christmas seasons particularly. When I think back to those days, to me they represent a certain trauma because we, we were set apart. There was Easter dealing with a religious connotation of Christ and the resurrection which automatically brings back the killing of Christ, and that was the Jewish misdeed. And at Christmas time it was -- again we, we couldn't, we couldn't be part of a, of a festive mood even if we wanted to. Oh, there were many times when we did participate with neighbors in trimming a tree or sharing in, in the Christmas cookies and that sort of thing, but that was all surface. As children, we did things like this because we were part of a, of a, of a greater community where there were non-Jewish children and we, we related to them. But the excesses took place at certain times for certain reasons and especially during the depression years. I was then in my early young years, but I do remember that often could we hear that all these economic problems -- and even the first World War -- it was all the fault of the Jews. So we were being maligned and singled out and we didn't like it, but nevertheless we asserted ourselves in some way because when, when we went on outings with the Hebrew schools, we, we sometime carried the Jewish blue and white flag and we were taunted for that by people who were looking at us. But it was a segment in history that does not reflect too well on, on the Austrian attitude towards Jews, and when we go later into ‘38, it is very easily perceptible. You can touch it. You can feel it. You could see it, that as soon as the Austrian Anschluss[1] took place, Austria in the next five, six weeks, or perhaps several months, the Jews in Austria underwent much more hardship in those few weeks or months than the Jews of Germany did in the previous five years from ‘33 to ‘38. It lent itself -- the climate in Austria lent itself more to antisemitic excesses.

01:08:25

Q: Give us examples. It's 1938, you have described a really dramatic change in your feelings. What happened? What happened to Leo Bretholz?

A: Seeing that some of my uncles had been arrested and many of our friends and neighbors had been arrested, my mother actually urged me to think of leaving as soon as I possibly could --

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[1] Term used to described the incorporation of Austria in the German Reich on March 11, 1938.

leaving Vienna. I had already left school. And an aunt of mine had left for Luxembourg right after the Anschluss, and we planned for me to join that aunt and her husband, my uncle, in Luxembourg as soon as I would be able to -- as soon as arrangements could be made. It was my mother who prevailed upon me to leave because she said that for boys and for men, it will be very bad, as we can see. People were arrested every day and within days or the most a few weeks, ashes were sent back of these people to their, to their relatives. Now whether they were these peoples ashes or not, nobody could ever find out. But they received a container with ashes, describing them as the ashes of the deceased who was caught trying to escape and shot because shooting was a justification for, for catching someone who tried to escape, killing someone, or that he had contracted a disease, a pneumonia. But there were these, these explanations given which no one hardly even believed because some of the people who were freed from camps periodically brought back other horror stories, so we know that. My mother was very much bent on sending me away, and frankly, it is constantly a source of guilt for me, to know that she had sent me away and they couldn't do it. But then when I consulted with psychiatrist, because I didn't want to have to live with feelings such as these, he confirmed to me that, “Would your mother be able to speak today, she would still say…she was glad she did it.” So, to begin with, she was actually instrumental in getting me out and saving my life. She was a good woman. My mother was what you might call in, in Hebrew, it's described as “Eshet Khayil,”[2] -- woman of valor. She did the best she could under the circumstances. I am breaking down because…she never had a chance in life… She and my sisters and 55 others of my family never had a chance in life.

01:12:00

Q: What did she do?

A: She was a widow and had to struggle to support the family and always helped poor people, people that were less well-off than we or less fortunate. Always helped somebody. There was this poor painter around the corner from us. When the apartment needed painting, she called him. He didn't even do a good job, but he needs the job. And when it was finished, the painting wasn't -- the painted room was sort of streaky, but she had given Mr. Fried a job because he needed it for his family, you see. But, I got to get myself together to make this thing.

Q: Let's pull it back. Pull it back. Your mother...

A: She urged me to leave, and I did leave.

Q: Where did you go?

A: I took a train from Vienna, Frankfurt, Koblenz, to the west of Germany and Trier, the ancient town of Trier. By arrangement with a committee in Luxembourg; it was called the Ezra

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[2] Woman of valor (Hebrew).

Committee.

01:13:55

Q: Who were the Ezra Committee?

A: The Ezra was an aid committee, almost like a HIAS,[3] perhaps. Aid to refugees that came from Germany and Austria to Luxembourg, provide some shelter, provide food, kitchen, and help these people who could not stay in Luxembourg unless they had regularized, temporary documents. Somebody came with a passport and a, and a, and a visa could do that. Others that fled and came illegally, could not. And the Ezra committee was such a committee. And a Mr. Becker who was the smuggler that smuggled me across from Trier into Luxembourg, was in the employ of Ezra. In a way because later when I went to Belgium, he was also the one that smuggled us into Belgium, but I am jumping ahead here. But we were -- I went to the border town of Trier, and on the 31st of October, Mr. Becker picked me up in Trier and smuggled me across the border. Actually he took me to the river, the Sauer River and asked me cross and then meet him at the other side of the Sauer. And during the night from October 31st to November the first, after it had been raining for four or five days in western Germany -- these are the rainy periods there -- I crossed into Luxembourg. He had asked me to put a pair of dry socks into my coat pocket so that when I came across and once I had crossed, I would put these dry socks on, which at the point was not even possible because I didn't have dry socks in my pocket after I had crossed the river. When he told me I was to cross that river, I asked him would I -- no, he asked me do I know how to swim. I said, "Yes, I know how to swim." I said, "Would it be necessary, you think?" because he told me I would wade across. But no way could I wade across that river after four days of rain because that river carried a lot of torrential waters with debris, branches, mud, all kind of things. That river springs in the Ardenne Mountains and comes down. It's a, it's really a tributary of the Moselle, a small river which under normal circumstances is a creek, a small stream. I went there later in years with, with my family to get to that same area, and people were just waiting there ankle deep, knee deep in that particular... But I crossed, and the first step I took into the river, I was up to my knees and the second step up to my chest, and then here go the dry socks in my pocket, and it wasn't a concern of mine. My concern was to get across. And I did! And on the other side, Mr. Becker was waiting to take me into Luxembourg, and my aunt was waiting there, and I had crossed into safety. Or at the moment, relative safety, because three days later, I was arrested in Luxembourg. The police came into this cafe where I was sitting and having breakfast just a couple of days after I had crossed. Actually, my coat was still wet and not even dried yet, and they asked for my papers and I didn't have them, so they arrested me and took me to jail, and I spent the night in jail in the Luxembourg jail -- by the way, a very clean facility. And the next morning, they interrogated me. How did I come over? I said, "I crossed the river. The river Sauer." "Who brought you over?" I said, "I just crossed." "And how did you get into Luxembourg." "I just walked into Luxembourg." I wasn't going to say, "Mr. Becker brought me over." And, well, it is my choice. I have two choices. I can pick a place where I want to be taken to out of Luxembourg, either Belgium or France or back to Germany. So the choice was very simple. I said, "Well, I have an aunt in Paris. Maybe I can make my way to Paris." So they decided, yes, take me to the border, to this Luxembourg-French border.

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[3] Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

01:18:59

There is a little town called Thionville-les-Bains. It is like a thermal spa. And they took me there and they -- the next morning -- and they -- commuter train that went to the border, just about a half an hour or 40 minute ride. And I crossed into France. But earlier before we went -- before we took that train, at the railroad station, when they went to the ticket to, to, to show that to the ticket window that day, were transporting me, whatever, they needed to have transportation. My uncle had found out that next day I will be taken to the border, appeared at the railroad station and he wore a cap. And he was standing on the side, and I noticed him and he noticed me, and he did this to his cap, the visor of the cap: he turned it around. There is an expression in Yiddish which translates “Turn the visor around,” which to me meant, “If you can come back, come back.” And when they had taken me to the border and I crossed, they indicated to me that the other end of the border, just a few hundred yards inside France, there is a Jewish camp, they said. That's all they told me. And they will probably be able help me. But when I told them earlier, "How do you want me to manage going into France by myself? Can you --” They said, "Well, you just told us that you managed to swim a river and come into Luxembourg. Now if you could make it across a river, you will make it across dry land, we know." They were sort of patronizing me but also very nice to me. They were not in any way vicious. They were just doing their job to get me out of there. And I was glad they didn't -- that I wasn't sent back to Germany.

01:21:18

As I crossed into France, I went to that camp and it was a preparatory camp, hakh’sharah,[4] where, where Jewish young people were preparing for aleeyah[5] to Palestine. I got into this area and somebody at the gate actually stopped me, wanted to know who I am, and I said, "I am a Jewish fellow, just escaped from Germany. The Luxembourg people told me -- Luxembourg authorities told me that you might be able to help me.…” “Well, they do that periodically just to make you feel that when you get across the border, you will be all right.” “There will be no problem so that they should be off the hook. But actually as many as we get here periodically, we do get some. We always have to tell them that the French authorities tolerate us here. We have only temporary permits to live in France, and if we are being in any way compromised to give you shelter, to help you further your, your travel in France, they will dissolve this camp, so we can't do it.” Being that far away from Paris and not having money on me, I thought of my uncle's turning the visor around and waited until nightfall to cross back into Luxembourg and made my way back to Luxembourg city during the night. The last leg of that trip was in early morning catching a farmer with bales of hay or whatever he was carrying on his wagon to get me to the city line of Luxembourg. And from there I found my way to the address of my aunt. An hour later I showed -- a couple of hours later I showed up at the apartment where she lived. I rapped on the door and my uncle stood there and my aunt was sick in bed from, from aggravation that she had brought me there and now I was arrested again. I was a kid of 17 years old. She -- that aunt lives today in Baltimore. She is in her 80s. She is my father's, my father's youngest sister. And as soon as I opened the door, my uncle said, turning to her, "I told you he'll be back." So, then they prevailed through the Ezra Committee to have me stay with a family in Luxembourg where about a half or dozen or more people were also staying waiting for further disposition of their situation. And I stayed there from the night of the second, third of November to the ninth -- six days. And the night of the ninth to the 10th of November, exactly Kristallnacht night, Mr. Becker took six or seven of us into Belgium, smuggled us into Belgium, into Brussels. And it was during that night that we saw the strange phenomenum looking to the east as we traveled in the car of skies that had changed their color. It was the night sky, but we could see reflections almost some eerie looking reflections of reddish-purplish coloration and it was only the next morning in Brussels that we found out that Kristallnacht had happened in Germany where hundreds of synagogues and businesses and homes had been set afire and, of course, Luxembourg being in this tristate area, Belgium/Luxembourg/France, we were very close to the border. And chances are the flames that we saw reflecting were those that happened in Trier or Koblenz or other border, border, localities that were evidently destroyed in that night of horror which many considered the beginning of the end of the European Jews -- Judaism, you know.

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[4] Special training for youth preparing to settle in Israel.

[5] Immigration to Israel (Hebrew).

Q: What happened? You are now in Belgium. What did you do?

01:25:55

A: The next day after we had contacted the Jewish committee in Brussels, in Brussels, Belgium, they gave us transportation to go to Antwerp. We took that train which is a train that goes every 20 minutes; a electric train from Brussels to Antwerpen. Within an hour, we were in Antwerp, again going to the Aid Committee who were registering us, giving us food coupons, and trying to help us regularize our situation as refugees from Germany to Belgium. I met an uncle of mine there who had left Vienna., my mother's brother, distant relatives which came from the same town as my mother, which we found out about. And from November '38 to May 1940, I spent 18 months in Belgium, which were pleasant months with distant relatives and friends, constantly under the pressure of not being sent -- avoiding to be sent to a camp because they also had camps for these refugees. Somebody working in that committee, also a Viennese fellow who worked there in, in the office helping out with paperwork made sure that when the time came to select people for the camps that I was not being considered for it because they tried to get me into a school, to register in a school, and I did. And having registered in that Flemish school, I became authorized to stay with a temporary ID card which I have here with me, too, as a memento. And periodically we knew that temporary permit to stay. It was a school which, in Dutch -- Flemish -- was called "Openbaar Beroep School voor Jongens,"[6] which means "Public Trade School for Boys." And I took a course in electrotechnical, studies, you know, was a trade school. Took also languages and I learned Flemish almost, almost to perfection. I had good marks in the Flemish language and as a young man you learn faster, and I had a facility for languages anyway. So that's why I was in this trade school. With my distant relatives in 1939, I went for a week's vacation to the ocean. All along I got letters from my mother and sisters that they were coping, that things were at the normal rate as normal can be considered, and I always had intended to bring them over, but I didn't have the money to do it, because you had to pay a smuggler. And they themselves were not really urging me, my mother and sisters. Because they -- the mood was that "How long can this last?" or this sort of thing. There was constantly that hope against hope. How much can it last? Although when my uncle brought his wife and daughter and son over to Belgium, he had to pay an amount, whatever it was, to the smuggler. I asked him why it wasn't possible to bring my mother also -- at least suggest. So he said, you know, they had to leave on quietly. Nobody could know about it. The fewer people knew about it, the better it was, and again the money aspect was something that we didn't even discuss because that sort of becomes something of a very delicate situation. But my mother and sisters did not come and actually, really didn't urge me to do something for them to come. They felt it'll, it'll work itself out. Then in '42, we found out differently. When I was in Belgium then, then, of course, in 1939, the War broke out. So after 1939, September 1939, there was no longer any question of anybody leaving from Austria. By that time even they had wanted to...had they wanted to leave, there would be no problem, no way to do it. That would be a problem, you see, would have been because the war was on. The Germans were fortifying the borders and Maginot Line in the south of France and the Siegfried Line further to the north. There was no possibility any longer after '39 for anybody to come across, although some tried and did. But it wasn't as open and free as up to the beginning of the war. And, of course, in 1940, in May 1940, on the 10th of May, the Germans attacked the lowlands, Holland.

01:31:12

Q: Where were you and what where you doing when the Germans attacked ?

A: That is the day that I will never have to guess where I was, because I was in a hospital. I had a hernia and I had decided to see a doctor and rather to go on with a hernia bothering -- having from time to time -- why not do it? And on Thursday night, May the ninth, I went to the hospital at Antwerpen in a suburb of Antwerpen called Berchen and the same evening they prepared me for the operation of next day, meaning cleaning my body, shaving, that sort of thing. And operation was to take place next day, about seven in the morning. Between 5:00 and 6:00, Friday the 10th, fire bombs were flown over Antwerpen. Visibly. We could actually see them. In fact one of those bombs dropped right into the yard, the courtyard of that hospital. And the order came for those who were ambulant to pick up their documents in the office and leave the hospital. And I left the hospital, never been operated on. I made my way, not where I lived in my apartment that was in the middle of the town, but in that suburb where my distant relative lived, and I made my way to their apartment. And that time I already found out that there were notifications, proclamations that all aliens of enemy alien origin have to register with the Belgium authorities. Although I had Polish nationality due to the fact that my parents were never naturalized in Vienna, I as a Viennese-born person could not be an Austrian until I would have been 21 years old with the first military service. It's not like in America. When you are born America, you are an American. And so I was, to all intent and purposes, also a Polish citizen which showed on my ID, and I went and registered and in good faith, hoping that they will see “Polish citizen.” I couldn't have done differently anyway because they would have caught me or perhaps I could have fled. But in good faith, I did it. Like many hundreds did. I am, number one, I am of Polish nationality. And the Poles are Allies because Poland had been attacked, and besides that, even born in Austria or others in Germany, we were the first victims of this Nazi regime. We are here now. We came here looking for shelter, for refuge, as people who ran away from that system. So we're certainly not enemies of you. We are enemies of that system. But in bureaucracy, that doesn't count. When you are born on enemy in enemy territory, that makes you an enemy alien, I guess. And a train took us to southern France. After we were arrested, we were told to bring a change of clothes, a toothbrush, a blanket, and food for a day. And they transported us to the south of France. Ironically enough, Germans were with us. German Nazis were with us in that train. They also had to register, but to them that was just a formality because eventually they knew they would be exchanged for Belgium nationals because that goes in international relations as a normal procedure. But we as Jews, number one, we were not exchangeable, and number two, we wouldn't have wanted to be exchanged. Were we arrested, number one, we would have wanted to, and number two, we were not exchangeable, whichever. For us, that didn't count.

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[6] Public Trade School for Boys (Flemish).

Q: Belgians have deported you as an enemy alien. You are going on a train to the south of France. Where did you go?

01:36:15

A: To a camp called Saint-Cyprien. The ironic, more irony, that when we got out of that train, in the camp on the way to Saint-Cyprien where we stopped for one night near Agde somewhere. When we looked at our train on the outside, the facing of the train, in white paint, it was marked 5th Column -- "Cinquieme Colonne.”[7] So they transported us as Fifth Column people. No wonder that when we traversed the French countryside from north to south that in those small stations where we did, where we made periodic stops, that people were doing this to us [making “slitting throat” gesture]. They thought we were, you know, Germans. We wound up in Saint-Cyprien, a camp in the Department of Pyrénées-Orientales in France, right near the Spanish border near a major town, a larger town called Perpignan.

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[7] Fifth Column (French).

Q: Tell me about Saint-Cyprien.

A: Saint-Cyprien was a -- an established camp. That was -- this was 1940, so that camp had been established somewhere between '36 and '38, mainly holding Spanish refugees that had come into France due to the Civil War in Spain. People had left Spain; the duress of the war -- fled into France and there at Saint-Cyprien at the time, was nothing but beach. So these refuges from Spain had come there, and established a camp facility. First they had tents, then they built barracks with undulated metal roofs and later more barracks were built, but the floors in the barracks were not floors. They were sand. It was just the uprights were there and the roof. But in the barracks, it was just the sand of the, of the beach. And there, straw was put on there and we were lying on that sand on that straw in that barrack -- shelter. As we walked through the sand, to go to the latrine, or to go to the kitchen to pick up the rations, we walked sometime on bones. A jaw bone here, a tail bone there, a skull here there of domestic animals, donkeys and horses and goats and dogs. The Spaniards had brought these animals with them. They were farmers. They were people who had a little livestock. They brought them with them, and in the process they died or they killed them even for food. And this, this was the scene there. The ocean periodically -- the tide carried the waters up to the barracks and sometimes right into the barracks, the ones that were closest to the shore. A beautiful sight it was scenically because there was the Mediterranean and there in the not too distant future were the Pyrénées Mountains jutting right into the Mediterranean, so scenically this was a beautiful place. And if any of us had thought to escape, that wasn't possible because at the end of the beach where the beach meets the ocean, you had barbed wires. And patrol boats were cruising so if somebody would go through the barbed wire and try to swim, they would be detected. The better way to escape would have been trying to escape from the camp, and then by foot make it into Spain. Be this as it may, we got there in May of 1940. Sometime in July or early August, and I couldn't pinpoint that, dysentery developed in -- broke out in that camp, and typhoid fever. There were a handful of latrines. There was a male section camp and a female section camp. There was a handful of latrines, and with the condition under which we labored, it was a constant line to these latrines. And they were elevated on stilts because the ocean would come in -- the seat of the latrine would be covered, so it was on stilts. So you walked up those stilts and there was that one door, that swinging door like, and you would go up there and relieve yourself and as soon as you were sitting down somebody rapped on the door, so you had to get out and get in line again. And there was no paper. There was no tissue paper. There was not even a newspaper. So what we used was straw. It's awful to bring back these things, but these are all segments of dehumanization that people go through and you somehow cope with it because you live and you hope you will survive. What happened later, of course, these situations were almost bearable, sometimes even comical. And I escaped from that camp with another fellow.

Q: Tell us about it.

A: Some people that we knew in Antwerp who came from Antwerp as Belgian citizens with a stream of refugees into the area, this is the general southern area from Toulouse to the Pyrénées. One of our friends by the name of Oesterreicher had finally arrived in Toulouse and he had inquired with the authorities where some of the people that were transported into France were taken. And they told him, the foremost reception for these camps, they called them “Centre d'Accueil,”[8] -- Center of -- Reception Center. Like they had a red carpet out for us, or something like that.. These euphemisms, they have their way of creeping into a language and then that's what it is. And they found out that we were in this camp, and Oesterreicher wrote to us. We could receive mail there. Communication between people who had left in the train and others that left by car on their own volition because they want to get away from the war zone. So, sort of, families through Red Cross and through authorities found each other. That's communication. Slowly as it went, it still helped.

01:43:35

And Oesterreicher found out that we, that we were taken to this camp, and he came to the camp and asked the commandatur, the office to issue a visiting permit so that he can visit his friend. And they called me that there is a friend here visiting. And I got dressed, went to the visiting area, and he told me then, "Why don't you go back and get your shoes?” I was barefoot. “Get your shoes, get your clothes because I think you can get out of here." I say, "How do you do it?" He said, "I see that these guards here are not very watchful. They are half asleep. They walk around. They talk. They talk to the internees. They exchange cigarettes. You can give them cigarettes and you can give them chocolates and they will be, will be looking away, maybe.” So I went back to the camp and took my things and told my uncle who was there with me from Belgium and his son, a cousin, that I am leaving with a friend. They were not amenable to fleeing. They said, “Oh, we will.” because they had, they had -- he had his wife still in Belgium, the other one had his wife still in Belgium, so they were not going to go anywhere where, where, where their wives may have, have no knowledge where they are. In other words, you are there, and you hope that these authorities will take care of it. As you saw others were exchanged, you hoped that you perhaps would be let out and -- but with the situation that it was, that there was dysentery and all this illness. The guards themselves were not crazy about guarding these people because they're not immune to that. I mean, dysentery can spread across a barbed wire too, you see. So they relaxed their watchfulness. And my friend was right! When we walked out, we walked across the barbed wire that was surrounding the compound where the, where the office was. He walked out the regular door, the regular gate, because he had his permit to visit me, and I did not. But as we walked there, we saw at the bottom that one of those barbed wires was actually lifted off. So he said, "If you can climb through that underneath and cross behind the barrack, they won't even see you. Join me in front." And that's exactly what I did. That was exactly what I did. And we walked into the little town of Perpignan. We bought a box of peach preserves and a slice of Roquefort cheese, and I learned how good preserves can taste on a fully ripened cheese. That is a great combination. You should try that sometime. And he brought some money for tickets, my friend did, to go to Toulouse, to travel to Toulouse. And he knew where these people that I had been with in Belgium. My distant relatives had finally also come from Belgium into France, and they located themselves into a little town called

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[8] Reception center (French).

Bagnères-de-Luchon in the Pyrénées. I got a ticket from Toulouse to Bagnères-de-Luchon and joined up with them. And with them, I spent most of the time in France living in the same places there, then we were taken to forced residence, and then we were taken to another forced residence, but they were always involved, these people. Their family name was Frajermauer.

01:47:31

Q: Spell it.

A: F-R-A-J-E-R-M-A-U-E-R. Frajermauer. The German word frajermauer means freemason. But that's sort of a derivative of that.

Q: And your friend's name?

A: Oesterreicher.

Q: Will you spell that?

A: O-E-S-T-E-R-R-E-I-C-H-E-R, which translated means "Austrian."

Q: So you are there in this town. You are in the town and what happened to you? You lived there for awhile?

A: I lived in Bagnères-de-Luchon from 1940 to 1941, to the beginning of '41, when we were asked to leave Luchon beginning of '41, to join other Jews who had been confined in that assigned residence of Bagnères-de-Bigorre. Bagnères -- B-A-G-N-E-R-E-S D-E. That's " Bagnères," one word; "de" is second word; the third word, "Bigorre" -- B-I-G-O-R-R-E.

01:49:13

Q: Now how did the authorities know that you were part of the party? You said you were taken to this assigned community. But you had walked out of camp illegally. How did anyone know you were there?

A: When we...when I came to Luchon, I had to regularize my situation in Luchon with the authorities there. To them, I told them that I just came from Belgium. They didn't know that I came -- there was, in those days, there is a Hebrew word right in Genesis, and it speaks about tohoo va-vohoo.[9] This was tohoo va-vohoo. You know the expression?

Q: Yes.

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[9] Chaos, disorder (Hebrew).

A: It was utter turmoil. So when I came to Bagnères-de-Luchon, these relatives, distant relatives who had already established themselves with, with the temporary permit of residence took me to the, to the city hall. It was a police station. Well, this is a relative of us who just came from Belgium. He walked a lot and he -- that's why he's so late, and he stayed somewhere on the way. And I got these papers. I became -- I had to have these papers because of ration cards. I couldn't get ration cards unless I had this regularization of the situation involved in it. And I became just another one of the refugees in Luchon. You see these were not all Jewish refugees, although the majority were. But there were Frenchmen and Belgians there who just ran away from the war zone and finally wound up somewhere in the south of France because the south of France was then considered probably the furtherest and safest part. And then when the -- by the way, in the fall of that year we were also asked to sign up for work if we wanted to volunteer to do harvest, wine harvest, and we did that. Came back to Bagnères-de-Luchon, there we got a Laisser-passer[10] for that, a safe conduct that we could do that. The authorities wanted us to help the wine harvest. Why? Because we were the refugees that could fill in the labor force. Their men had been taken to the army. Their French men were in -- had been inducted into the army since 1939. So they needed agricultural help and that's what we did. We came back to Bagnères-de-Luchon. We were paid in, in food. We were not paid in money, but we got eggs and chickens and wine and cheese and butter to take back with us, which were commodities that were probably better than money.

01:52:18

Q: What was it like for a Jew in Bagnères-de-Luchon?

A: As a community of, of Jews, we, we, we were a support system of each other, supporting of each other. The majority had come from northern France and Belgium, and the majority of people knew each other. Families, friends had fled together. Some of them came by car. Very few, but some of them did come by car, brought even dogs with them. And it was somewhat regularized. Bagnères-de-Luchon, the name indicating a thermal spa, had a pavilion like those places do have and for the Jewish holidays, the Jews got together and had services. One of the Cantors by the name of Kreistein, and you may remember why I remember his name. It so happens he is from Vienna and in the district where I lived. I once sang with his choir as a boy. And Cantor Kreistein, a very diminutive man, and I say very, because you can be five foot six, that makes you five foot five diminutive, but he was probably was like close to five foot, but the voice of an angel, a very high pitched soprano voice. Kreistein was leading the congregation there, and we had services. But shortly thereafter, after the services, then came wintertime, and we spent the winter in Luchon which is heavy winters. There's snow in these mountains. Right after that, after that in early 41, we received notification that we will have to move to Bagnères-de-Bigorre, giving us safe conduct to go to Bagnères, we had two weeks to do it: go to Bagnères, look for lodging, look for a place to live, and then make arrangements to transfer to that locale. Mr. Frajermauer, the father, he and one of his brothers went there, looked for a place, and found a nice place, right at the border of the Adour River, and the place was called Villa Susanne. Villa Susanne. It was available. People come there on vacation and rent places for vacation during the summer. Well, the owner of Villa Susanne was very glad to rent that, that facility out in January or February for a, for an unlimited time almost because we didn't know how long we were going to be there. But it wasn't just renting for a month or two months. We did, we did move, took our belongs, drove by, we rented a camion,[11] a truck, and the whole family, Frajermauer and me including. I was included -- and that's not good to say “Me included.” And we went to Bagnères-de-Bigorre and had a very -- some of the things I can really smile because they evoke more pleasant memories. It was just we moved from one town to another. In fact we moved from a small town, more confined and less accessible, to a town that was a little freer in access. That was 1941.

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[10] "Admit bearer" (French).

Q: Let's hold it right there. We need to make a tape change.

A: Okay.

01:56:20

End of Tape 1

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[11] Truck (French).

Tape #2

02:00:15

Q: Pick up now please. You are in Bagnères-de-Bigorre. Tell us what happened?

A: Bagnères-de-Bigorre, from 1941 to 1942 was a little bit of a, a spot of light, as I recall the whole period. Because we, although we were registering, under the law, under the new Vichy laws, we, we moved freely within, within the confines. We went to the movie theatre. We took excursions into the mountains. I remember some mornings with the weather being right and nice and refreshing in the mountains. We got up early, five o'clock, and by six o'clock, we were up on a slope and picked blueberries that we brought back and made jams and, and, fruit juices out of and we used them and we ate them. We went out and picked fruit and, and, and we raised rabbits in that Villa Suzanne. Food was hard to come by because we had ration cards. Periodically, we would have to stand in line because they were rationing everything, even tripes, even liver, even marrow bones. You had to give a ticket for a marrow bone, but then you forego, a marrow bone was something with which you could do, make a good soup, but you may have to forego five ounces of meat which may not have the same impact on your, on your, on your, what you're preparing for, for dinner, you see. You have to trade one with the -- against the other. It was a, a fairly regulated type of life, other than having to go to the authorities and register periodically under the Jewish laws.

Q: You registered with the Vichy French?

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of police presence was there? What kind of Vichy presence was there?

A: In that town, there was the police station, the police department, the police chief, the police in France -- or what you might call the gendarmes.[12] The gendarmes is like state police. They are an arm of the government. They do what has to be done to keep law and order. But there was another arm. That was the political arm. The Vichy arm. That was called the "Milice,"[13] the Militia. They wore their special uniforms, the black uniforms. The police wore their police uniforms. And they were out there to go along with the Vichy government law bent on pleasing and collaborating with the Germans. This was the treacherous element. The presence of the Milice in Bigorre, Bagnères-de-Bigorre, was minute. They knew they had a group of Jewish people there, maybe a thousand, fifteen hundred. They couldn't go anywhere without a Laisser-passer permit from the police. Therefore, the con game was on. We felt comfortable. We could go to a movie theatre if we wanted to. We could go to a restaurant if we wanted to. We could circulate. We could buy newspapers; and if we had to go to Tarbes, Bigorre, which was the Prefecture -- that was the seat of the Hautes-Pyrénées, that

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[12] Soldiery of the police militia (French).
[13] Militia (French).

Department Hautes-Pyrénées, we would get to regularize something or two, or ask for whatever, paper, have to travel to a consulate somewhere.

02:04:22

We got these permits, these Laisser-passer, and it was really a game of psychology that was played constantly to make the people feel as comfortable, as safe, to ease their mind as to what the future might bring in, in more drastic measures, and like all the other population, the native indigent population of Bagnères, we stood in line with them for, for meat and food and, and anything else, clothing even. There was, was no difference.

Q: How did you eat? You wore a star?

A: Not there.

Q: Not there.

A: The first time I wore a star was in Drancy later.

Q: Okay.

A: And 'Juif'[14] was never worn in the Vichy area. Only in the occupied area north of the Demarcation Line.

Q: When did it no longer become safe in Bagnères?

02:06:08

A: In -- at the end of 1941, just before the end of 1941. Sometime in the fall, we were told that we would have to make preparations towards moving to another assigned residence and that was Cauterets--C-A-U-T-E-R-E-T-S. Also in the same Department, Pyrénées, Hautes-Pyrénées. It so happens that at the time in 1941, during the summer and the early fall, I had received my papers from the United States, affidavit, an affidavit to come to the United States.

Q: How?

A: My aunt had sent me those papers into Vichy, France. I had actually received them earlier already in the beginning, but , but it took a while to process papers before you could come to the United States. I was on a waiting quota. And it was sometime in the fall -- no, it was actually around the time of Pearl Harbor that I was supposed to get my visa.

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[14] Jew (French).

Q: Your aunt arranged all this?

A: Yeah, in, in, in, my aunt from Baltimore. She had already earlier brought an uncle, two uncles and two aunts, a brother and sister here with their respective mates. But when I went to the consulate, that was on that day of Pearl Harbor. There was no more processing of documents. So my affidavit to come to the United States fell by the wayside. It expired. So that later after the war, after I had survived, I got fresh papers. But in Bagnères, we were notified that we would have to move to Cauterets. And we moved to Cauterets sometime after the first of the year early in '42, probably in the springtime of '42. Again, the two men went there ahead of time and picked a place for us to live. And that place was called La Pergola. And also the little house, they name the houses in Europe. You know that.

02:08:57

Call them one thing or another. A name or a tree. The Lindenhouse (ph) or something like that. When we went to Cauterets, we, at that point, frankly, we felt confined. For the first time since Luchon and Bagnères, Cauterets too was a thermal spot. A lot of, about 1500 inhabitants during the year, but during the summer season, it, it could rise to about maybe 10,000. Thermal spa. There were about a thousand or 1500 of us sent into that town into forced residence. It was called residence assignee. We called it "Résidence Forcée."[15] Even for those people who do not speak French, I think "Assignée"[16] speaks for itself. Well, again we tried to make the best of life. And we did excursions into the mountains to pass the time, and we gathered and listened to the radio. Of course, by that time some of the listening of the Radio, Radio London was prohibited, but we still heard it. Bumm, bumm, bummm, You familiar with that? The first bars of the Fifth Symphony. "Ici Radio Londres."[17] This is the Free French. Near the Spanish border. Hardly a mile or two from the Spanish border. When we went into a little excursion in the morning, again recognize let's go up in the mountain, make a little picnic or that sort of thing. This was all to pass the time as pleasantly as we could, because if you were sitting there worrying about when will the Milice come and when will things change, you could really fall into such doldrums and such despair and depression that you wouldn't even be able to think straight anymore. And life is life while it's going on. There's just, there's just not enough impetus to, to, to make you think of the most dire circumstances, because you have a mountain surrounding you and you have friends with you and, and you wake up in the morning and you hope for the next day. But there's not that immediate threat hanging over you. So you make the best of life and you say "Hopefully, this will end soon." Radio London gave us a little hope -- a note from here, from there would filter through that the resistance is starting to, to, to jell you know. And it was not until the fall, something in September, that the Mayor of that town sent the word out to us, the Jews, that within a day or two, they expect a raid by the Milice and the Gestapo.

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[15] Forced Residence (French).
[16] Assigned (French).
[17] Here is Radio London (French).

02:12:38

Q: Okay, let's pick it up. The mayor, tell us about the mayor.

A: We never met the mayor. But what he did at the time was a great thing. He notified us and left it up to us to do what, he wasn't going to say, “I am going to put a train at your disposal and send you all out of here or trucks” or something. Do what you can. I just want you to know that this place is no longer safe for you. A handful of us took to the mountains, in fact, and we stayed a couple of days and couple of nights up in the mountains. Periodically sending someone down. Once I went down, then somebody else, to find out what's going on. The first few hours nothing had changed in town and the people were still there, although very apprehensive. By that time, the mood had drastically changed. The parents had to console their kids. They had to tell them, “We may leave.” They started packing. Some of us, as I said, took to the mountains, a handful.

Q: The rest stayed?

A: Stayed! Two days later when finally the messenger that we had sent out came back and said, "It's finished. They were there. Most people are gone." That's when we came back from the mountains. In fact, the message was that when I knew they were going down to the mountains, "Go over the to Frajermauers and see if they are still there." Low and behold, the Frajermauers were still there. They had Belgian documentations. Those who apatrides,[18] means stateless, Polish, German, Austrian, were taken. Those who had French, Belgian, and Luxembourg nationality were left. Another psychological ploy to tell them, "You are safe." In the final analysis, no one was. Because when you look at the book of the Klarsfelds,[19] many people do not know that, but there were Americans and Swiss and Finns and Swedes and Norwegians who were Jews deported from Drancy. Those passports didn't matter at all to the Germans. But the ploy was there at this particular point. When you look back at this whole period -- the Nazi period, the deportations -- you see one psychological aspect of the progress of that dehumanization after the other.

Q: You are in the mountains caught in the middle of this. You are about to come down to Bigorre. What did you do?

02:16:25

A: I went right to La Pergola, saw the Frajermauers. They said, "You know, we are here because we are Belgians, but we don't know how long." In fact, they were not Belgians. The children were, the two daughters. That's why they left the family with them. “But you cannot stay here.” “But let's wait and see what we can think about.” I went up to the attic and hid in the attic. There was a room up there with a cot, a cot that had no sheets or anything, just a small mattress on it and some storage, a storage room it was mainly -- and there were suitcases and all kinds of discarded objects that weren't even ours. They were, these were of the owner of, of the, the building and I hid up there for two days and two nights. The door was not a regular door, but it was slats of wood and you could peep between the slats and it had a padlock on the outside. My distant cousin, Anny, the daughter of Mr. Frajermauer, locked me in. And the next morning I hear footsteps coming up, and I peep through that thing to that crack and I see two gendarmes, not Milice, local gendarmes from the police, come up with Anny and I hear them ask her, "Who has the key to that lock?" And there she is, and I peeped and then I stood sideways so that they shouldn't notice, and I had to be very careful not to move or make any crackling noise. You know these, these wooden planks, they can easily give you away. And I hear her say, "We don't store anything up here. We don't even have the key for this, but if you want to break it open, go ahead and do it." And I hear him say to her, "You know where your friend is still, don't you?" Because they knew there was another person living under that address because we had to register with the police here, just like we did in Bagnères-de-Bigorre. That was the idea of a assigned residence, where you would register periodically so that they know you have not left this assigned residence. There was a law against leaving this assigned residence.

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[18] Without nationality, stateless (French).

[19] Serge and Beate Klarsfeld.

02:19:20

And she said, "We don't even have the key." And I have never talked about that because that's something so private, but I guess eventually that has to be brought up, too. And by the time this is shown, well, the person herself will not be aware of it, but it has to be, it has to be told, I think. And he said, "The only way I will not try to break that lock open if you kiss me" to the girl. That was 1942. She was 20 years old. A 20-year old distant cousin of mine. In fact, I liked the girl. "If you kiss me." And she said, "No, don't ask me to do that"--"Ne demandez ça pas, ne me demandez pas faire ça." "Well, then I'll break the lock open." She says, "Well, go ahead and do it." She didn't want him to, to give away that there is somebody in there. He said, "Well, I guess you are right. I guess you are not lying to me." But regardless, he grabbed her and kissed her and lifted her skirt and tried to molest her, tried to have sex with her. The second gendarme said to him -- and I hear all this -- "Leave that girl alone and let's go." That's when he let go of her. And they all three went down. And I stayed up there another night. And then when they came back to tell me that it's time for me to get out of there, I am pretty safe, one evening, I kissed Anny and I said, "You almost got raped on account of me." She says, "I had to save you. I had to save you." "If I had to do it," she says, "I'll just have to do it. I didn't want them to get into that attic." She lives today in Antwerp. She has a family. An evening later -- the same evening, actually, because I couldn't stay another day--I left on foot from Cauterets at night. I had taken a rucksack, belongings, left on foot from Cauterets. Guess where I went to. Bagnères-de-Bigorre. Back to Bagnères-de-Bigorre. Why? I knew a family there that had remained there. The family Spira, S-P-I-R-A. Their daughter today lives in Kew Gardens, New York; and we visit periodically. And another daughter lives in Israel. Susie in New York and Recha in Israel. I went, left at night, heading toward Bagnères-de-Bigorre. I walked all night. I went through Lourdes. That's in that same area, slept under a tree during that night, resting up, next day during the day, I went to the Spira's, made contact with them and spent with them several weeks, all the time trying to secure a false identification so that I should escape to Switzerland. Living with the Spira's, I lived in hiding. I didn't go out. Maybe, no, I never went out at all at that particular point. The father went out to do the shopping and the marketing and everything else, bread and stand in line. Mr. Spira, Max Spira -- Mendel Spira, actually. And I stayed with these friends for several weeks, maybe five or six weeks. At one time, we feared a police raid into the house to just check out. It was during the night and the two girls and I slept in the, the two daughters and I were in the attic, slept in the same room. I on a, bedded out on the floor, and the girls on the bed, and at that point when we heard the noises, Susie just recently reminded me, "Leo, remember what you did when you, when that noise came?" I said, "No. No. I must have been hiding somewhere." She said, "You opened the window and you walked out on the roof." She said, "Do you remember when one morning you woke up and next to you there was a dead rat." I said, "Yes, I do. How did that happen?" She said, "Well, in the middle of the night, you remember, we heard that noise and something on you and you started banging and banging and you had killed a rat." That was right next to me. She brought back these things to me and I said, "Wait a minute, Leo, you went through some things that today, you wouldn't even believe you could have done it." They were good people, the Spira's. They harbored me. We remained friends for a long time. Still are, with the daughter and I in New York. But when I had, finally had my false ID papers,

02:25:49

Q: How did you get them?

A: Mr. Spira knew a person in town who was connected with an underground situation. And they procured these papers for me, for some other people, including a friend who was part of that distant family by the name of Albert Herszkowitz.[20] He later was deported in the same train that I was in. And we made our way to the Swiss border, having already through that contact with the cards, found out whom to contact near the Swiss border, near Évian-les-Bains. A farmer's family, the son had smuggled, a young man in his 20s, had smuggled people into Switzerland. We arrived in Évian-les-Bains, looked for the address. In fact, he picked up us up at the, at the railroad station, because we had notified him so that he, should directly come to his farm, spent a couple of days on his farm, and two days later, he took us up into the mountains to right to the Swiss border in the mountains. We walked some 40 some hours there or maybe even more. Heavy shoes. We spent one night in the mountains, sleeping on a, sort of an incline, a slope and that night, that was in October 1942, and that night a light snow fell. When we woke up we were covered with sort of a rime of icy stuff. Next morning we crossed into Switzerland. This man had instructed us, this young man. In fact, he left us up there, five of us. Went back to his house. He says, "All you have to do is just cross this thing. You are at the border." From here on in, we are on our own, simply because he as a Frenchman doesn't want to be caught be a Swiss being a smuggler. He would be arrested. He took us to, we paid for that. We crossed into Switzerland and we had been no longer than 10 minutes walking on the Swiss side towards the valley, we knew. It goes down and it goes into the valley.

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[20] The interviewee notes that various spellings of this name occur in several records: In one, Albert is listed as Abram Herskovicz. In another, Albert’s brother Mordka had been recorded as Herzkowicz.

02:28:39

When the path goes down constantly in a little serpentine, we go into the valley. That stands to reason. Before we could even reach half point, we had gone maybe 10 or 15 minutes, the Swiss border police, they wear these big hats. They look like scout hats. Like the Canadians some -- wear the Mounties, similar -- and shepherd dogs. So the dogs started standing up, and he gave them some command or whatever that is. The dog listens to these commands evidently, and we knew that if we were attempting anything like running or anything else, but who would run in Switzerland? After all, we are in free Switzerland. We are in neutral territory. We had heard that they had taken in German deserters and, and, fliers that had been shot down or had been on mission over France and had to -- and were shot down and made it to the border and were accepted in Switzerland. Why run from a Swiss? We were coming to them and said, "Hello, we are here. Here we are. Now we are in your country -- a free country, right?" Wrong. We were taken down into the valley into a little town called St. Gingolph which is a border town. Half of the town is French and half of it is Swiss. On the Swiss side, it so happens the cemetery is located. So when somebody dies on the French side, they got to take him across the border, aboard the border post. They lift the border post -- they inspect coffins even, to see that there is no contraband. At least in those days, they did. Now maybe that's eased up. St. Gingolph -- G-I-N-G-O-L-P-H. Exactly across from Montreux, which is in Switzerland on the other side of the lake, Lác Leman. That's the Lake of Geneva. But we were in Switzerland, in the Swiss part of St. Gingolph, taken to a police office. And there is a captain. And this captain was a rock. A cold rock. A stone. He had eyes and he had a nose and he had a mouth, but he had no feelings. We cried. We begged. We tried to take his hand and kiss his hand. We were young kids. We kneeled. You name it. Everything bureaucratic. "How did you get over? Who helped you?" "Nobody!" All these inquiries. "How did you make it up here? How -- how did you get there? Where did you originate?" "Well, we came from Évian and walked across." "Who showed you the way?" "Nobody! We were in these mountains for days." We didn't have to tell him it was just a night or two. Nothing doing. Enough. In effect, I know the words that we said. We said in as many words that we would like to stay here until the end of the war in one of your camps. We know you have camps for internees, refugees, just to work and for food. We don't need pay. All we want to know that we are there and can live, wait out the war. Not an emotion, nothing! Nothing at all! Just motions and, and, and very quick questions and bureaucracy. They sent us back to Vichy France. And the Vichy France gendarme took us over at the border post in St. Gingolph and brought us into the French gendarmerie,[21] and we spent a night in their cells. I had taken my shoes off. I had high shoes. I had taken my shoes off. I had to peel my socks off my feet. I had bloody feet from walking in the mountains. I know I had because they hurt, and I know I had it because I could feel my socks sticking to the shoe and a couple of women were among them that were sent back, and my friend, Al Herszkowicz, Albert. And from there by train, we were taken to a camp whose name you have heard many, many times: Rivesaltes. I met some people recently here at a meeting in Washington.

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[21] The total force of the gendarmes (French).

02:33:35

This woman, she was in Rivesaltes; same experience from Switzerland. Her brother, her husband, and when she heard that I went out and talked about it in Columbia to a group on a Shoah exercises, she came up to me and she says, "You brought back a whole period of my life when you mentioned the word 'Rivesaltes'." Taken to Rivesaltes in October. Separated women from men. Also again, Polish, German, group from -- Luxembourgers. Milly Cahen, a friend, the young lady whom I had befriended in the train from Switzerland to Rivesaltes, she was in, in an adjoining section of the camp and we spoke across the barbed wire. Later when I went to Europe with my family and we visited Luxembourg, and we went to visit her husband. I hadn't known that, but Milly just a few weeks earlier had been killed in an automobile accident. Never got to saw Milly again. A bright young person. Her husband, very saddened, told me that she had just had that violent death. Anyway, from Rivesaltes, after a few weeks -- well, not so many few weeks; just a couple of weeks, we were taken to Drancy. Now in Rivesaltes -- again, I didn't go to Drancy just because they wanted me to go to Drancy. I was hiding out in the camp. Yes, again. "Where will you hid out?" they said. I said, "Well, let me try." Barracks have a ceiling, but there is a triangular roof; something that looks triangle where you have an ungulated roof going this way and that way. And between that peak and the barrack, there is a -- is it plywood or plaster board ceiling? I climbed up there and lay down on that flat with my rucksack. I had to have that with me. Somehow that's, this was my apartment. This was my life. That's what I had to hold on to. If I didn't have that, I didn't have anything anymore, you see. This was ludicrous, really, in hindsight, because you only carry or shlep[22] around things that you don't need. But you hold on to things. I was lying up there and hearing them go and count. And I was missing. My name wasn't, I wasn't there. I wasn't in the barrack when we checked in the evening. We were checked in, in the evening as to presence. In the morning I wasn't there. And I hear them talk: "Oú est tu? Ne cachez pas."--"Where are you? Don't hide. It won't work."--"Ça ne marchera pas." "We know where you are."--"Nous savons oú vous êtes." "Tu est"--They don't "vouvoi" you, they "toutoi"[23] you. And there I am trying not to breathe even because I felt if I, breathing maybe, But unfortunately, and I could have expected it, should have probably, some of that plaster board started falling down and it fell down from there you know, and I really heard it trickle down like…

02:37:17

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[22] Jerk, drag (Yiddish).

[23] Interviewee explains that the polite or formal plural, “voivou,” wasn’t used.

And so they came in the area and said, "We know you are up there. Why don't you just come down and make it easier." I didn't get punished or anything. I climbed down, climbed down and they said, "You tried, but it just didn't work." To them it didn't really matter, because to them people came and went constantly. This was just another transport they had to do, and they wanted to just numerically have the right amount of people and to know that nobody had escaped, because that would reflect on their efficiency. So when they have x amount of people to take and count it in the barracks the night before and the next day these people have to be transported, so that number better be the same number that you counted the night before. That's all they were concerned with. Not the punishing me with -- if they had punished me and put me in a brig, I would have preferred that because my deportation would have been delayed. But that's not the case. They took us to the train and took us to Drancy on the 20 or the 22nd of October. We were taken by transport -- passenger train, not cattle cars. Another ploy to make us feel are we going to camp so, by that time all of us had been used to camps and those situations so much, that another camp was just a continuation of -- an expected situation. So Drancy -- by that time, we in the south had heard of Drancy but did not quite realize the immensity of the camp and the tragedy involved in that preparation toward deportation. It took us a day to get up there. We arrived in Drancy. Again in that train, several times going to the wash room, I looked at the situation over. Escape was always on my mind. Maybe this is the, the deep urge to live and, and experience. But there was no, there was no getting away from that bathroom because the gendarmes stood right in front of the door when somebody went to the bathroom. They were in the car with us. It was not like the gendarmes were riding in another car ahead, or in the back so that they should be there in case of emergency. They were with us in the train. And you know how the French trains are, were at that time anyway. Each compartment had their own door to walk in, so was no use trying it there and again, let's wait until the next camp and see what we can do later. We arrived in Drancy and checked in. The checking-in process in Drancy was, well, a first step in a, in a real dehumanization process. Number one, when we arrived there, the faces that we saw, the, the eyes with queries in them and, and a lot of questions, "Where are you coming from? How is outside? What did you, what do you think? What news do you have?"

02:40:38

Everybody gathering about a new group of arrivals because they may, they may have something to convey and we went through a barrack process of checking in which would also mean taking your watch away, your rings, certain belongings, money. And another psychological ploy: giving you a receipt for the things that they took from you, with the admonition, "Don't lose that!" because you will never get them back. That is your receipt that has a number on it. It had a number on it. Just imagine that! And people there tried to sort of whisper to us that this isn't good here. And we knew, as we came in, the mood immediately, it wasn't Rivesaltes any longer. It was not Rivesaltes by any stretch of the imagination. Drancy was a complex that was built to be a military barracks facility. It was a multi-story complex almost like a stadium because it was round. But due to the war, beginning of the war, that building, that structure, was never finished. So the places, the rooms that they put us in were wide open, concrete floor with piping laying around and half-installed electrical wires, half-installed plumbing, makeshift, and it was concrete. Windows -- no, no windows, There were no panes in the windows. It was just the opening where the windows were supposed to go in the frames later. That wasn't done so it was all open, breezy. And on this concrete, straw. Men, women, children together. Minimal facilities to wash. Community, one trough like, where you, where the water ran down from in trickle. Minimum toilet facilities. Watchtowers. Barbed wire. Suburb of Paris close to quote "civilization." Minimal food distribution. That's where we were issued the Jewish star. This is where we had to wear it. The population in northern France and the occupied zone had to wear that already in the towns, streets, everywhere. But we having just arrived in Drancy had to put that on because this was the administration of the German authorities. "Juif" --- French for "Jew." In Holland, it was "Jood;" in Germany, "Jude." I cannot fail to mention that, because I always mention that. And it has to be mentioned over and over and over again, that the German propaganda told you that a Jew, you can smell them a mile away. A Jew, you know when you see a Jew, from a distance, you can smell him, you see his actions, you see, there's no way where you can mistake a Jew for what he is. So the obvious thing, question is, it's a rhetorical question and even young children to whom I speak periodically in a museum or in school when I ask that and I say, so what is your next question then. And they would say, "So why did you need that star?" And some young people, eight, nine year old, says, "I know why." I said, "Tell me." He says, "To humiliate you." And for a child that's a big statement. He understands that. So we had this star and we were easily recognizable, yet we had to wear it. So that destroys their whole thesis, their whole propaganda, and their propaganda can be destroyed in thousands of ways because nothing ever made sense. It only dwelt on the, on the, on the emotions.

02:45:43

Q: Go back to Drancy. So you were in this camp. What happened in Drancy? What did you do?

A: We saw utter despair, uncertainty, acts of, of aggression, pushing, shoving, end of rifle butts, and threats. And it wasn't until I saw a newborn baby being shot like a clay pigeon, and the mother being killed too because she threw herself into the path of the bullet, that I spoke to my friend, Manfred Silberwasser. And I said, "Manfred, if this can happen in Drancy, what can we expect where we're going to? This is France. This is not yet Germany." There was no question of Auschwitz yet, because Auschwitz, the rumors that had come back to us were, were we didn't even want to think about that. We didn't even want to believe that, that that was possible. But this was November 1942; and in January 1942, the, the, the Wannsee Conference had decided on the Final Solution of which the news had only trickled down to us. And everybody was always suspicious, leery of that, that cannot happen, take people for thousands of miles to gas them to kill them and then the -- always came back that there were always rumors in the First World War that turned out to be just that -- rumors. And I said, "Fred, what we hear about what's possible, how they're going to… And we must do something. Now if these are rumors and we prove to be wrong at the end of the war, then so be it. I would rather be wrong at the end of the war than not be prepared now to do something about this." They take your watch away, your toothbrush, glasses, eyeglasses. They would leave you the eyeglasses, but when somebody had very thick eyeglasses where it was very necessary for that person to carry to see your hand in front of your eyes, those they took away. That's the torture. Somebody that had two eyes that needed for reading glasses, they left them those. They were very selective as to how they moved that, that psychological ploy. And compacts. A compact to a woman and lipstick to a woman is, is something to hold onto. Her person is a person. Without that she is not fully a person. Or the same thing for a -- combs they took away from us, because they could be a weapon. But we didn't need it anyway. They shaved our hair.

Q: What did you do then?

A: Well, on the sixth of November. We had one sign while we were there of something hopeful when towards the beginning of November, the skywriters were flying overhead in the Paris sky and I also later witnessed bombardment. But these skywriters wrote "Le Huit,[24] Le Huit, L-E H-U-I-T" which means "the eighth." And on the eighth of November, on a Sunday, November the eighth, the Allies landed in North Africa in 1942. So they were playing games with those things, but they just wanted to let the French population know that on the eighth, you can expect something. They had these little things going on periodically to encourage.

Q: When did you know you were going on a transport?

02:50:16

A: The day before they took us.

Q: Tell us about it.

A: Thursday the fifth, in the morning, they notified us that we will be leaving. In the afternoon of the fifth, Thursday, took us to the train station of Drancy, to Le Bourget, in trucks. Again, we looked how we can jump off that truck, but that would have been of foolishness because the guards were right on there and anybody who would jump would be shot at. And people -- we, my friend and I, when I say “we,” had a, an advantage, namely that we were not with family. A husband would not jump off the truck and leave his wife and children there. That's for sure. Or a young child that is without parents will not try to run away because he or she was told that where you are going, you are going to meet your parents, and vice versa. Parents were taken and were told where you are going you're going to meet your children. Because the kids were taken out of the school and brought in and the parents, again "tohoo va-vohoo." And we were taken to the train and put into the trains in the evening. Now it could have been 5:00, 6:00, or 7:00, somewhere around this time. November it gets dark early. It was a, a sort of a misty type northern France fall, raw day. Put into the trains at 50

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[24] Eight (French).

per cattle car. I understand from other people who were in the east, in those cases, they even had a hundred per cattle car. Fifty per cattle car which was bad enough of a, what I like to call, microcosm of humanity abandoned by the world. Everybody, old and young and from all professions, from all walks of life, from all economic strata, from every segment of the Jewish population. Children alone. Crippled people. People on stretchers. Counted out 50 per car. Now, Linda, imagine yourself in a situation where you and a husband and two children are at the end of rifle butts pushed into a cattle car, counted out, ", 48, 49, 50. In!" Fifty-one would have been the other child. This other child does not go with his parents and sibling into this car. This child is at this point separated and put into the next car, counted out as number one going into the next car. You might say they are separated by one car length but in fact they are separated by an ocean. They are worlds apart. And a good chance is -- a bad chance -- is that that child will never see the parents again, and the parents will never see that child again. And the trauma of that family is indescribable. I can say words; they are not answerable. I can express thoughts; they are unthinkable. Even to express them is almost a ludicrous endeavor. Dehumanization to the worst degree!

02:54:01

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

02:55:30

Q: You're in the cattle car. The doors -- tell me what they did with the doors.

A: They shut them closed, yeah. These sliding doors, they were closed shut. And from the outside, just latch-locked -- heavy metal latches. And that was in the evening. Now, the good thing would have been for this train to leave. But it didn't. It did not leave until next morning, about 12 hours later, 12 or 14 hours later, in the early morning. As I see the report in the Klarsfeld book, it was something like 8:05. Because there was a precise schedule. But to be all night in a waiting standing train is much more torture than being riding. When you are riding, you, you see progress, you see something is happening. Sitting there is like being the expression "sitting ducks." And, of course, in that particular confinement you have a whole gamut of emotions running their course. You have resignation, you have despair, openly expressed; a lot of crying, a lot of moaning, some praying. A young man with a gangrenous leg and knee attempting to make love to a young woman in the train. He did that in the camp, too. Call that an expression of life. Call it an expression of, perhaps, resignation of what else can happen. Call it whatever you will. It was an act, perhaps this was the, because perhaps this was the one human act that really happened there. He didn't force that person. She didn't cry or shout or resist. But it points up that what happened in that train was, all privacy of a human being was, had been taken away. There's no more privacy. How can you, with one bucket in the center of that car, of that cattle car? Everybody relieving themselves in that one bucket -- man, women, and children -- because you had to. You had reached the common denominator of dehumanization. There was no such thing as "I am a man, I can't show it," and, "I am a woman, I can't do that." And people were still thinking that there was something of humaneness ahead of them. We recently saw that film about one remembrance. The one stark scene that I -- my family didn't want me to see that at all, and I only saw glimpses of it, like snitches of it. But at the end, I saw that one scene where the woman open, stands in the open door of that cattle car confronted by the SS officer at the arrival in Auschwitz or Birkenau. And she said to the person, "We have seven dead people in that car." And he laughed and said, "Well, these are the lucky ones." That points it all up. That that woman speaking to this SS officer thought she was really confronting a human being who could understand this tragedy. And this is why people throughout the transport were trying to talk us out of running away. We had decided to make our getaway.

03:00:00

Q: Who is "we"?

A: My friend and I.

Q: And you are still standing. You had not yet began to move?

A: We hadn't moved. We were squatting, standing. We moved in human waste. The stench is still up here, and it's, it's powerful. There were three of us who planned, but two only escaped. And some tried to talk us out of it. "Look what can happen to us if they find you escaped. They will kill us all!" And our answer at this point was, "So what do you think awaits us, anyway?" They were some in previous transports who tried to escape. And one man was caught under the wheels and was then thrown back into the car with two legs amputated to bleed to his death. And people died anyway. Malnutrition. Maybe some suicides. There was this woman in crutches in that train, pointing her crutch at me in, in, in weapons style, like a weapon, like a dagger -- pointing it and telling me, "Que Dieu vous garde!" -- "Let God keep you! You must go. You must do what you want to do. Don't let anybody talk you out of it." You be-- To her, we were a symbol. We were a symbolism. Perhaps it will succeed, and then we can tell something about it. A woman in crutches. Every bit in her 70s, with streaky gray hair and deep, sad, dark, sad eyes, actually consoling a child that was there without a parent. I don't know whether that father or mother was along. The child was there crying, and she was in charge of that child. And Tony was there -- a distant cousin of mine -- and her husband. She was the one that had sewed on my star in the camp. And under the star, I had a half a pound note of Irish pounds. Under the star, under this star, there was a half a Irish pound note that I had salvaged over the last several years, sent to me by an aunt who had immigrated from Austria to Galway. She had sent me that to Belgium, periodically, and I saved that one. Didn't want to spend it or exchange it, just for an emergency. Didn't even know what the value of it was. But it was something to hold on to. Tony sewed that onto me; said, "Why do you want that there?" I said, "I want it under the star. Sometime when I tear this star off, if I do run away, I would like to have that. Maybe I can buy some bread or some -- buy a train ticket with it, or what have you." But it was some, something. And we planned on our getaway.

Q: What did you do?

03:03:24

A: I have repeated that so often, and I don't want to over-dramatize. I don't want to be pleading any kind of heroship or anything like that. But the kids, when I speak about it, to them this is like an adventure. We are not heroes. I don't even exult in the word "surviving" because it speaks of something so, so exclusive. You survive. How many did survive, really? So, it's almost like you are putting down those who couldn't survive, and you exult in that. It was fear, utter fear, that prevailed upon us to do that. Two little words: fear and luck. One has to motivate you, and the other one is there to hopefully let you succeed. Luck, you have. This is luck. And it's only --

Q: What did you do?

A: First, I would like for people to understand that if the hero that they, somebody whom they call hero -- whether they look at a person tells about it, or a monument that that, of some hero of years gone by --only that person knew really how scared he really was, you see. You make a hero of somebody, but that person knew deep down that there was a lot of fear. Heroism isn't something that comes sort of at the spur of the moment. How did we do it? There was only one way of doing it. Other than having tools to cut out the bottom of the train or cut out the ceiling, there was only one way -- the obvious way -- a window. And these windows were squares. Perhaps 24 by 18, something like that. But you see, in cattle cars they are normally called "huit, quarante"[25] -- eight horses, or 40 men, in military terms. Both windows had bars, straight bars. Two bars: the one on the one side facing the other track that runs parallel had barbed wire. That would not have prevented us from using that window, because a barbed wire that's rusty can easily be bent back and forth and can be eliminated. A barbed wire can be cut by bending back and forth a few times, and then you have just the bars to contend with. But that window was not in our plan, because that was the window that was next to the other track and you don't want to jump when you jump onto a track. Especially from a moving train, because you can't really take that big chance. I mean, you want to succeed. The left side -- the north side, as it were, because we were traveling east -- was the one that faced the ravine, the bushes that are alongside and the telephone post, and so on. That's the window we chose through which we will make our getaway, we hoped to make our getaway. And as soon as the train, we had all night to think about that. We were walking in, in, around in miserable conditions.

03:06:57

I mean, we were sliding back and forth. So the only way we tried in the morning to move these bars, but it wasn't possible. We decided the only way that we could possibly do that is by trying to twist them or to bend them forcefully or forcibly.

03:07:20

And we dunked, we took our sweaters and we dunked them in human wastes, made them wet, to create a tensile cloth. Dry cloth you cannot wring too well. A towel, for instance. But a wet cloth can be wrung and wrung and wrung, and it twists and twists until the moisture has dripped out entirely until it's dry. That sort of principle is applied in a tourniquet style when you use it on an arm. We used that as a tourniquet. So if you figure that two bars, you twist that sweater around the bars and then you go twisting, twisting, twisting until you can, We helped each other. We tried that several times. It was no give yet. There was no give yet. But we hoped that something will happen. And then we moved in the side and see maybe it gets loose a little bit. But after a while, when we twisted again, again, we gave up for five minutes to catch our breath and we were perspiring. We were working under pressure. This was our getaway. This was life. There the countryside flew by us, that bucolic countryside -- France, the fields. And this was -- we were approaching champagne country, you know. The area of lusciousness. But here we were going to certain death, which now we know. At that time, we only speculated. But I am glad we did speculate. It didn't let us fall into some sort of lethargy, like a lot of people were. And we twisted and twisted, and then finally we saw that glimmer of hope where the bars in the frame started to move ever so slightly, ever so slightly. And rust came out falling from that fitting that it was in, the hole that it is set in. Rust came out. Now, we never hoped to get the bar out of there; because they are set in like an inch or so, half an inch. But we hoped to, them to be bending. We worked for a while, and we saw them ever so slightly bend inward. Then we used our hands to move them apart again, so that they should start loosening. And it did that! We moved them back into the proper position. We went back and twisted again and this time, the bending inward was ever so slightly more of a bend. And we put that again, did that. We worked all day, being mindful of the fact that if the train would have to come to a stop, these things would have to be put into proper position. Because then the guards would walk out of the first and the last car. They were in the first car--that was a passenger car--and the last. These were Gestapo, and these were the German guards. And, of course, French police. The French police, French collaborators.

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[25] Eight, forty (French).

03:10:38

That's a chapter by itself. Towards the late afternoon, those bars had moved apart, through our efforts, enough where we could see our way squeezing through it. And we put them back into the original position, just again in case the train would come to a stop and the guards would come up and inspect. One time the train stopped at a station, and the people there seeing it wanted to reach me. We shouted "Water!" The -- they didn't let them get close because these people were aware of three transports going by there every week. Some of the people were aware of that, and sometimes that awareness helped communicate simply because some of us. And I didn't do it, because I didn't leave family and friends. But some of them, husbands or wives or children, whoever had left families behind in Drancy or hiding out somewhere, they would drop envelopes, and the people would pick them up and would put stamps on them and mail them. Or just notes: "We are going away. We are going away. Don't forget us." Cryptic notes like this, you see. But they didn't let them approach. We only made one stop. In hindsight, I see exactly the time when the train -- because it's in the book -- when the train would arrive at the German border, and the German guards would take over everything by schedule. But we did, Finally, under the cover of the darkness -- it could have been begin around seven o'clock, and it was dark at that time already. We did climb out of that cattle car. My cousin Tony, distant cousin Tony Gutefreund handed me my rucksack through. I was the first one to step out. I dropped down, held onto that bar, and then reached my way to the back of that cattle car to the coupling. Reaching for the coupling with my foot, and standing and holding on to this, and then holding to that metal iron -- wrought iron -- stepladder that leads up to the roof, holding on to this, and stepping on those. I was already half free. I was standing there reaching my rucksack around, putting it only with one strap on my shoulder, and my friend came next. He did the same procedure. In fact, I told him already, "Now reach for the coupling -- la coupler."[26] I stepped over to the next one, and he used this one. Our third friend that was going to go with us either never had the, the, got up the nerve to do it, or perhaps he was noticed by someone that he was reaching out, because at that very moment or just seconds later, the car, the train went into a slight curve on the north side. That's the side we intended to jump. And the curve is like a concave curve, which serves the guards as a means to inspect the whole length of the car, the train. They are shining their flashlights up and down from the back and the front, and they cross somewhere in the middle, sort of a floodlight effect, to see that everything on the outside of that car is -- or those cattle trains, cattle cars, is still under control. It is possible that they noticed that, because at that moment when the car, the train had come into that curve and somewhat slowed down--let's say, from 75 to 60 miles an hour or whatever, my friend standing on this coupling was the first to jump. And I jumped right after him.

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[26] Coupling (French).

03:15:18

But at that very moment, we heard whistles and shots fired. Up to this day, I think that one or two things happened to our friend. He was caught in the crossfire of these beams and just didn't get out of the window. He was attempting to, maybe he was a little heavier than us. Whatever the case. Or they may have caught him. Those shots, however, were fired before the train came to a halt, because a few seconds later, the train came to a screeching halt and we heard more shots fired -- probably in the air. Warning shots. I don't think it was at our friend because I don't think he really ever made it out of the window. But that's conjecture. And voices: "Let's look for…Let's search…Run up and down." We were lying there in that ravine and that wet, tall grass, holding our breath together in a moment that seemed like hours. But it was just a few minutes. And it wasn't until we heard no longer any voices and we heard the train being set into motion again that we let our breath out. For the first time in so many weeks, we were what you might call "free;" but at least -- if not entirely free, at least away from the train that was taking us to certain death. Because only 72 hours earlier, 48 hours earlier, we were there in utter despair, put into a train. This was a total metamorphosis in a few minutes. We tried to make our way, and did make our way, into a village nearby. By that time, everything was closed. And because of blackout -- war time -- the windows were blue and blackened out. And we went to this big shop, rapped on the door, and an apprentice, a young man, came to the door and told us that there was no bread, they are closed. And we said, "Yes, we do not want bread at this moment. But we would like for you to tell us where does the priest of the village live." And he said, "Wait a minute." -- "Un moment." "Just a minute." And he went in and got his jacket, came out with us and took us to the priest of the village, to his residence -- like a little house sacristy. We rapped, rapped on the door. We walked in, and the priest wanted to know, "What brings you here?" The baker said, "These young men asked for your house." Then he walked off. "Qu'est qu'il se passe?" -- "What's going on?" At that time, we had torn off our star. We didn't want to walk there with that. And we felt later that this priest, that as good as he was and the shelter that he did give us, would have probably be a little more reassured if we had the star. He would know we were escapees rather than maybe agents sent there to find out if he is really into helping people. We told him we escaped from the train. He said, "Ah, oui. Trois fois par semaine."--"Three times a week," he said. Unfortunately, we never knew his name. But names didn't matter at that particular time. He didn't know ours either. So, he said, "Oh, yeah, three times per week. And you did escape from that." "What we want is, can we stay for the night?" He said, "What you first want is, is make yourself clean a little bit."

03:19:18

We came in. We were -- smelled to high heaven. We were infested. "You may also be hungry," he said. He put a pot up to warm some milk, give us bread and cheese. And he says, "Une nuit seulement." -- "Only one night." "Parce que les patrols, le matin ils sont ici. Toujours tous les matins a six heures." -- "Towards six o'clock in the morning we have the patrols here. I will let you stay for the night, but you have to be out of here before 6:00." He gave us, let us wash up, gave us this warm milk and bread and cheese, and put us into a bed with white, crisp sheets, wishing us good night. Where just hours before, we were thrown into a car at the end of rifle butts. And in no time we fell asleep. Exhaustion! We let ourselves just fade away into a dreamland. Next morning -- and that night went so fast -- a tender tap on the shoulder. He says, "Les gars,"[27] -- "Hey, guys! Hey, guys! Hey, guys, it's time to get up." Can you imagine a voice speaking in nice terms, like it was just like somebody, an angel, had just come down? We hated to leave that bed. But he had breakfast prepared. He gave us a note to a colleague of his, a priest in another village. He gave us some francs and food for the road. And we were walking, walking, as we bid him goodbye and thanked him. As I said, unfortunately, we never knew his name and he didn't know ours. But again, this was not a moment to dwell on that. And on the road we, we took advantage of one of those farm trucks that went back, a horse-pulled truck, a farm wagon, hay wagon. And he took us into a next village, where he was then. We walked again; we wound up into that village where that other priest lived that he gave us the address to. And, you know, the priest wasn't home. This was Saturday morning. He was out at Mass somewhere. And we asked the maid that was there, "When will he be back?" She said, "Shortly." So we walked into the cemetery to just visit graves, so we shouldn't be noticed by anybody in the streets. The cemetery is a safe place. The police doesn't go there to search for people walking around. We had our berets on, because we had our heads shaven. Then we got back to the priest. And it was about lunch time, and he gave us lunch because he had the recommen-- he had a note from that other Reverend Father. He gave us lunch, and when he, when he stood there, saying his prayer, his blessing over the meal, we being Jewish had no ideas as to what, we just bent down and moved our lips. That night, he let us spend the night in his stable of cows. We slept between cows on straw, fresh straw he prepared. But that odor of the cow and that odor of the stable was perfume. And the coziness, the warmth of the cows, the animals chewing the cud, was almost as if you hear rain drop dropping on your windowpane when you try to fall asleep. It was a cozy sound and a good, good odor. Again, I am coming back to that odor.

03:23:44

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[27] Young men (French).

When I -- today when I go through a farming country and I smell the odor of cows and stable and dung, it's, it's a perfume -- it's Chanel No. 60, or whatever. But it is a perfume. And next morning, he again urged us to leave, gave us an address of a farmer with whom we spent the next night. And that farmer, in some way -- he put us up in a barn - -had to be connected with some underground because next morning he came to us, took us to the railroad station and gave us two tickets to Paris. And Sunday, the eight, two days after our escape, we landed in the Gare de L'est[28] in Paris, got off the train in Paris. Again, carrying our star in our pockets, not on the lapel. Hair shaven. And when we were in that train, or was it on the road that I mentioned to Fred? By the way, it was Sunday. He would not have let us go on that train if it was Monday because during the week there are patrols. "On Sunday, there are, there are, it's a day off, even for the inspectors for the soldiers for the Germans. It's easier to travel on Sunday. You should be all right 'til Paris." And he said, "If something happens want you to escape from a train there, you will be able to do something in this case." But I mentioned to Fred, "Fred, 30 years from now when we will think about this, we will think back of it as a dream. We wouldn't even believe it happened." So he said, "Are you crazy? You are a fool!" I said, "Why do you say that?" "How can you think of 30 years from now when we don't even know what tomorrow will be?" I said, "You know, now that we are out of that train, nothing will -- nothing is impossible any longer. I look forward now to, to surviving and telling about it." That was my spirit. And a lot of them later, again, didn't make it, and it could have happened to me, too, because I had so many instances and so many situations that I got out of that were only too, too close to call.

03:25:44

But at that moment, I saw the future. And he berated me for it. He said, "I know what you mean. But we don't even have papers. We don't know where to go from here." "We go to Paris. We going to seek my Aunt out who lives in Paris." Her son at that time was hiding in the mountains somewhere. She was hiding also with a priest in Paris that was recommended to her by a police captain who liked the family. And he has known her from before, before she was a widow yet. And he prevailed that this priest take her in. The concierge that I went to on Rue St. Mort (ph) to look for my aunt wanted to know who I am. "I am her nephew." "What is your name?" I said, "Leo." She said, "I can't tell you where she is, but I can go and see her." She realized that I was a nephew. I look a little bit like my aunt, too. We have the same coloration. She's my mother's sister. And she brought her back a half an hour later. And there, of course, she held us for several days in her place, and went to a Jewish committee that was engaged in producing false ID cards. And she made some of those, two cards for us, and with that card we crossed into the unoccupied zone of France near Tours across the Loire River. But once across the Loire River, we were arrested. We were arrested trying to get a bus. At the bus stop the police examined our papers, took them away from us, took us into the police station. Did not make much of a fuss. We told them that we escaped from the train. "Yeah, but you are now in free France." You know, another ploy. But we did not want to tell them, "Yes, we came from here."

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[28] Railway East (French).

03:28:06

We didn’t want to let on that we may have some footholds or people that we know. “Well, here’s some ration cards.” They gave us ration cards. Within 24 hours, with this ration card, they gave us a Laisser-passer -- safe conduct. "You have to register. You have to appear and register at Centre d'Acceuil," --whatever the camp was called -- "Centre d'Acceuil." Again, Center of -- Reception Center. "And present yourself there with these papers." Now why did they not take us there, but let us do it by ourselves? Because their administration was so geared on collaborating with the Germans and inspecting everything that they thought that for us to think to not do this would be ludicrous. Also, by them telling us, "Oh, you escape from a train from, " We told them outright, "We escaped from a train, then we went to Paris, we got these papers." "Who made these papers for you?" I said, "I don't know. I don't know. We just had a friend up there who knew about somebody gave us paper." And he doesn't worry about that, simply because that is in the other zone with the Germans. He is only concerned with his aspect of law enforcement. And by telling us, "You are now in the Free Zone of France" -- not knowing that we were in that so-called "Free Zone" before but we're coming from the north -- that he will give us that confidence, inspire confidence or in any way con us into thinking that everything is fine. "And you are going to a Centre d'Acceuil." You see, that euphemism again. But we knew better. And instead for the Centre d'Acceuil, my friend and I went to the town where he last lived in the south of France and saw that everything was all right with him. We exchanged addresses, because I told him, "I will go somewhere where you can get in touch with me."

Q: What town is this?

A: Bagnères-de-Bigorre. I left him there to his devices. That was the last time -- no, I saw him one more time, and I will tell you that later. I left him to his devices, he left me to mine, and I went to Bagnères-de-Bigorre. I arrived in Bagnères-de-Bigorre at night, after eight o'clock. And, and coming out of the train station, there is a gendarme inspecting everybody who comes out of there. And I have no papers! They were inspecting people, not to catch them in any way, in some, in some situation of having run away or escaped. I looked French pretty much at that time, spoke French very well. I am dark. In the southern France part, people look a little bit like this. With my beret, I could strike the pose of a Frenchman very easily. But what he was interested in, to look into my rucksack. If I am not carrying anything contraband. Eggs were rationed, and wine was rationed, and bread was rationed, and butter was rationed, and meat was rationed. I could have easily come from the country bringing all that into the town to do some black market. So he -- here's the comical part: I told you there's some comical parts to my escapes or escapades. Isn't that interesting, that the word "escape" is really contained in the word "escapade?" "Une minute," he says to me. "One moment. Wait a minute." There was another gendarme a few steps away, like near the other exit. Two exits are the, the train station. Who was inspecting a lady with a rucksack with some baggage. This gendarme wanted to inspect my rucksack, but didn't have a flashlight on him. He says, "Une minute." He trusts me, right? Had he known me, he wouldn't have, you see.

"Un minute."

02:32:18

He goes over there. In a minute goes over there, and wants that flashlight. By the time he came back with the flashlight, I was gone, got to the Spira's house that they rented. A big, like a villa-type thing, and the gate, lo and behold, an iron gate with stakes is closed and locked. I am not about to ring the bell, because they might come out so quickly, the owner of the house who lives in the same building. By that time, nobody knew that I had escaped from Drancy. All they knew, by me having written from them from Rivesaltes that I was going to Drancy to be deported. What did I do? I climbed up that fence, and there are these concrete posts at the side of the fence -- you know, some of them have vases or figurines up there. These had two lions, two smiling lions, one on each side, sitting there, looking at me. And I climbed up that fence, reached over to that circle to that pillar on which the lions were sitting, climbed up to the lions and let myself down, jumping down. In the process, moving that lion close to the edge of that pillar so that the bottom, the base of that lion was slightly overlapping the bar, the, the pillar. Had I held on to it maybe a little more and dragged it with me, this thing could have fallen down and made a lot of noise and really given me away. But it just stood there this way. The next morning, when Spira went out and looked at it, he said, "You were lucky. This lion could have fallen on you." I proceeded in that -- there was a garden in front and a pathway, a paved pathway, to the house -- proceeded to walk up there, to their door entrance, rang the bell. And they opened the door, and they almost fainted. Agape: "How, how, how? Where, where were you?" Well, I started telling my story. "Well, Leo, you are going to stay here until we decide on something. You will not leave this place. That was close to the eighth of November, eighth of November. This was close to the beginning of December, already, of '42. I stayed in this place for about a week or 10 days. And I got, in Yiddish, you say you have shpilkas.[29] On pins and needles! I had to move. And against the advice of my friends, the Spiras, I went to go out and get bread. I had lived in Bagnères-de-Bigorre many, many months, you see. And I knew this baker, Mr. Broca -- B-R-O-C-A -- very well, who always treated me good. When I came with a coupon for a half loaf, he gave me a little more than a half a loaf. I became very friendly with him. He always gave me a little more. He, young kid and so on, I went to get bread, against the advice of Spira. On the way back from Broca, walking back to the Spiras, two gendarmes on bicycles recognized me and shouted and pointed at me. And I started running. But against the bicycle, I wasn't fast enough. And they arrested me. That was on the sixth of December, 1942. I spent one night in the gendarmerie. They wanted to know where I spent the night since then, that they sensed that when I ran away at the train at the station. And I didn't tell them. I said, "I was here in the woods. I was walking around. I was out of town, and I came back." "But you have friends here. We know who they are." "Oh, yeah, I knew a lot of people here," I said. "But they are already gone by now, like I was." "Abandoné de residence,"[30] that was the, that was the, that was my indictment. The Southern French Vichy Government were the, the police and the authorities were, again, not concerned with my escape from the train in the north. Only that I escaped, that I left originally my assigned residence in Cauterets. That was what they, that was against the law. So when they arrested me, put me in that cell, the next day on the seventh of December I was taken to jail in Tarbes. Tarbes is the seat -- Prefecture, to you. That's the seat of the, of the Department. And I waited. They assigned a lawyer to me from the Vichy Government, Maître Laouie_(ph), and on the eighth of May, 19 -- I am sorry. Eighth of January, 1943, I was taken back to Bagnères by jail authorities to face trial.

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[29] Worries (Yiddish).

[30] Abandonment of residence (French).

03:38:15

On the eighth of January I was tried and sentenced to one year in jail. On the behest of the lawyer, he said, "If you are in jail, you will be in jail. They cannot deport you while you are in jail, except if there is an attack on a German position in the town or something. If there is a -- some underground or resistance action that they want to retaliate against, they can take hostages then. In jail you are not in the safest place, but it's safer than being on the streets, on the roads, and being arrested, taken to Drancy." Because they would take the political and the Jews out of jail as hostages. That has happened quite frequently. Sentenced to one year in jail--which means, if you get one year and one day, that means you serve the full year and one day. But if you are sentenced to one year, that means you are entitled to quarter off for good behavior. So you serve actually nine months. Lo and behold, after my sentencing on eighth of January 1943, I escaped from the gendarmes. They went into a bar, a bistro, and I conned them into taking off the handcuffs, off their hand, because I have to go to the bathroom. You see, they were cuffed to theirs and mine. And they figured they can do that, because, after all, I have my handcuffs on. Where can I do? "Can you let me go to the bathroom?" But instead of going to the bathroom, I ran away. I had seen Drancy, and I didn't want to ever have to go back to Drancy again. I had seen it. I ran away from the gendarmes. It was a very emotional thing, at the time. I went to a grocery store and asked them to get in touch with the Spiras. Didn't want to go back to the Spiras. I wasn't going to jeopardize them. Because the Spiras had come to the trial, and sit there and watch my trial. And other people that I still had known there went to that trial and watched.

03:41:14

And they went to the Spiras and told them about me. And the girls came to the grocery store, the daughters, to see me and to tell me that the gendarmes had been there already to want to find out where I am. "Because he is probably your boyfriend," they said to Suzy. Because Suzy, when I was incarcerated in Bagnères, after they had called me, after that incident that I had went for bread, they had put me for one night into the gendarmerie before the took me to jail. Suzy and her sister came to visit me there. But they could do that, because they knew that the Jews knew each other. But in this case: "Where is he?" And they went to their house and they said they don't not know. All they know is that they saw me last time at -- in the courthouse. And in no uncertain terms, they told them that "If he will come here, we will not let him stay. In fact, if he will come here, we will have to let you know, because we don't want him to be running around and be caught again. He's probably safer in jail." They played it that way. I ran away. And they told me right there at that grocery store, "Do not come to us. It doesn't pay." With a hacksaw, they cut my cuffs off and left them there. And I meandered for 48 hours in the -- at night. It became night by that time. On a rainy night, into the direction of Toulouse. I wanted to get somewhere to get -- I had hidden some money away that they were not able to take from me in jail. I had hidden it in my anus. And when I left that grocery store, my first stop was again to the baker, Mr. Broca. He gave me some bread. He told me that already the radio had said that the fellow who lived here before in the -- in Bagnères-de-Bigorre had escaped, to be on the look out, and your name was mentioned. So he said, "You know, you cannot stay in Bagnères." I said, "I know. Can I have some bread, please -- to, for the road?" He gave me that, he gave me 20 francs. And also, in the courthouse, one of the friends that I had, when I went to the bathroom -- my ploy was always to go to the bathroom--had stood next to me in the bathroom and also had handed me 10 francs. So I was pretty much equipped, as far as money goes, for a little food and that sort of thing. Couldn't make many, couldn't buy a train ticket or something like that, but I figured maybe a freight train, or pick up a, hitch a ride or something. I wandered all night in the rain and again slept under a tree in the forest, leaning against the tree. And the next morning, I arrived in a little village. I forgot the name of that village. In the same area. But I must have gone in circles at night, because I had not been that far away from Bagnères-de-Bigorre. Went into the restaurant and ordered a platter of beans, and sit down to eat it. And my collar had, the coat collar from, of the rain coat, a gabardine rain coat in blue, had this collar upon my neck. I had a blue line around here.

03:45:14

And I was sitting there, ragged as I must have looked --because I had shaved hair from jail-- and the owner of that restaurant went to the telephone. I saw him go to the telephone and whisper something into the telephone. And at that point, I was resigned not to run because I was really tired. I was really worn out from the night. I was really exhausted, and emotionally, I was really down in the dumps because I hadn't wandered that far from Bagnères. I thought I had made more headway. And in a few minutes, two gendarmes walked in, come up to my table. And they said, "Finish the beans." And I said, "No, that's for the boss. I leave that for him. He probably needs that food much more than I." I made such a sarcastic remark. And they found money on me. I spend the night in the gendarmerie, and the next morning I was picked up by the gendarmes from Tarbes. The same gendarmes that had accompanied me to the courthouse. The same two men from whom, whose custody I had escaped. Now, you can just imagine how they felt toward me. They beat me real good, fists, key reinforced fists. Then they took a stoking arm from a, from the chimney, and they had a little a little chimney -- what you call it? A fireplace. In the police station. Had took that poker and beat me on my back and on my legs. They wanted to know why I did that. That's bad for them. I put them into jeopardy. They will be fired. And I apologized. You see, in France, you do not sentence a prisoner for more time because he escaped. The prisoner gets the free time that he spent away from the jail just added to the sentence instead of nine months. And still, given good behavior, I was going to serve nine months and two days. It is -- the onus is on the guardians. The onus is on the gendarmes to make sure that that prisoner does not escape. That's their job. In America, it's different. When you escape, you get punished for that. But in, in military training, the soldiers are trained to escape. They are going through training.

03:47:56

Q: Let's bring -- we have 10 minutes. I want to bring it up and I want to move to Toulouse. How did you get, how long did you spend in jail?

A: I spent in jail nine months and two days. I was taken on the ninth of September 1943 out of jail, and transported to a forced labor -- not forced labor camp. A hard labor camp in Septfond, Department Tarn-et-Garonne. I was one of hundreds of prisoners there. In that camp, my friend with whom I had escaped had found out where I was taken. He came to visit me, and he gave me an address that I can write to in case I manage to become free. My correspondence to that camp, which I was entitled to receive for a month, I was sitting there banging stones, rocks, making it into small stones. My correspondence that I got there, I found out later, was kept and censored and not given to me. The correspondence that I sent out went out, but was also read and censored. So my friend came and gave me an address, and I memorized it. I didn't write it down. On the 15th of October, 1943, was the Yom Kippur. And the Germans have a knack for doing that on a Jewish holiday. The day before, on the 14th, we were informed that the next day we were going to be taken to Organization Todt. That is the, the organization, German Organization Todt. They were building fortifications named after Todt, who was the armament minister who was later replaced by Speer, and when Todt died Speer took over. Organization Todt was supposed to take us to the Atlantic War building. And there was 14 of us to be taken away for that. And again, we discussed: "Will we really go there? Is this just a ploy? Will we wind up in Drancy again?" And there was a guard by the name of Kaufmann. He was an Alsace-Lorraine native -- spoke Germany fluently and French fluently.

03:50:01

To me he spoke German. And sometimes also spoke French. He said to me, "Bretholz, Morgen begleit Ich Si."[31] -- "Tomorrow, I will be accompanying you," and then there will be no more running away. And you know what I said to him? "Mr. Kaufmann, " Or, "Kaufmann, " Because prisoners and guards get sort of chummy there; they develop a relationship. "Kaufmann, you want to know? It is true you will accompany me tomorrow. But whether I run away or not will not depend on you. It will strictly depend on me." That's what I told him. The next day, we were taken to Toulouse. A friend of mine in the camp befriended me in this month, you know. His wife lived nearby. She was going to come to the railroad station to bring him some food. They allowed that to happen, bring him some food for the trip. She brought the two kids along, too. I said, "When you wife comes there, will you please ask her to buy me a ticket for Toulouse?" He said, "What do you need a ticket for?" I said, "If I run away." He said, "You are not going to run away." "If I run away, I want to have a ticket." Because on the stations, out of the railroad stations, in France, you have to present your travel ticket, to see that you haven't traveled for free. He said, “What are you doing?” I said, "Can she do it?" He said, "Sure, I'll tell her." She bought a ticket. I gave them the little money that I had. He gave it to her. She bought me the ticket. When we arrived in the railroad station of Toulouse, and the train was standing -- this was a passenger train with those individual doors leading to each compartment -- when we were lined up there to be, to be prepared, ready to get into that train, I asked Kaufmann if I may go to the bathroom. He said, "Oh, come on. You don't mean that." He said, "You don't mean that. What do you think, I am crazy?" I said, "Well, I can't blame you. Okay, fine. I can't blame you. I'll wait until I am in the train." That was to placate him. But when I saw, not a cattle train, but a train with doors and windows, I saw freedom. But I placated him by saying, "Oh, I go in the train." Now, these foolish guards, We have about eight guards for 14 people, seven guards. Instead of going with us into the train, at least a couple of them, all seven were standing in front to see that we don't get out. And nobody watching what was going on in the inside. So I said to my friend -- the one whose wife had bought the ticket for me -- "I am ready to go. Do you want to go with me?" He said, "No, I can't. My wife is there. My children there. I don't want to jeopardize my life. This is -- okay." I went to the back window, inched to the back window, and says, "You just stay there and see if Kaufmann and his cohorts are coming. You just stay there. When you see them come, then tell me." I went to the back window, lowered the back window, dropped myself, lost a shoe in the process, one of those loafer-type sandals, that I put it back on. My beret fell off my head. I picked that up. My rucksack I still had, that steady companion. On the next track, there was a freight car parked on the, on the track. In standing position, I went under that freight car, went to the subterranean exit -- because I knew the train station of Toulouse -- walked up there. I had a ticket, but I never needed it. I showed that ticket into the luggage room. I went to the luggage room, and I made out that I am looking for luggage. "It just arrived." I said, "Where?" He said, "Well, you have to have a, a, coupon." You have to have a ticket for your luggage." I said, "Well, maybe my friend, my friend, maybe my friend has it, because we came together. But here's my train ticket." I showed him the train ticket. He said, "That is okay." I walked out from the luggage room right into the street. There was no friend waiting for me. But I said, "My friend has it." I walked out there. And I had friends in living in Blagnac near Toulouse, and I made my way to Blagnac and showed up at Jacques Estrajch’s place. And guess what he told me? "I got your card you are going to the Organization Todt. Did you get mine?" "No, I didn't get yours." He said, "I wrote to you." Then I knew that I didn't get the mail. And I also knew that as soon as I escaped in Toulouse, the first place they will be looking at will be Blagnac, because that's the nearest place to my escape. He said, "Go upstairs and take a rest and sleep. If somebody comes, I'll tell him you are not here." I slept two hours, I came down, and guess what he told me? "The gendarmes were here to look for you, because they know that you had written to me. And I told them yes, you wrote you are going to Organization Todt. But otherwise, I don't know anything." He said, "Leo, you have got to leave. They told me that if they find you here, they have got to take me also."

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[31] Bretholz, tomorrow I accompany you (German).

Q: Where did you go?

03:55:02

A: He took me to an elderly couple that was living there from, originally from Paris. They were living there in the southern zone of France. They kept me for a couple of weeks. Kept me for couple of weeks. I wrote to my friend whose address I had memorized. He sent me my false birth certificate, with an address where to go to and on the first of November, I joined an address in Saint-Vallier on the Rhône River south of Lyon with the French underground, presenting myself with my birth certificate. And from that moment on, I was Max Henri Lefévre. I was four years younger. I was born on the 25th of October in Saint Jouin-sur-Mer. I knew the name of my father and mother, and legalized, regularized my situation with French ID papers under the name of Max Henri Lefévre.

Q: All right. Leo, thank you very much.

A: You are out of breath, and so am I.

Q: Yes, that is quite a story. And we are done. And it's only half of it. Now I want the whole other half in the underground. What we are going to have to do is to do that. If you did not have the appointment now, I would go for another hour.

A: That is all I do in the underground.

Q: Yes, and I want to do that. Let us talk. Would you mind coming back?

A: I can do that.

Q: Because all that in the underground is important.

03:56:08

Conclusion of July 31, 1989 interview

September 27, 1989

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Tape #4

01:00:43

Q: Let's take it back. You had arrived and you were being placed with an elderly couple. Tell us where you are, and tell me something about that.

A: This is a village called Blagnac -- B-L-A-G-N-A-C -- in the area of Toulouse, one of the major cities in the south of France. That's the town I had reached in that convoy that I escaped from on that afternoon. It was from a standing train in the train station of Toulouse, as I explained previously. So I am in Blagnac; my friend, Jacques Estrajch, takes me to this elderly couple, just con-- suggesting, or hoping that they would keep me just for a week or two until I can make arrangements for the future where to go. And they were very amenable, friendly. I spent two weeks with them. The evening hours filled with -- the time of the evening hours was filled with listening to Radio London, was broadcasting the news from the front, war fronts, and all other news that pertained to the French Resistance and the war going on. And I contacted the friend with whom I had escaped in November of 1942. I had memorized his address and sent him the information where I was now located.

Q: How did you do that?

A: Meaning what?

Q: Meaning, can one simply post a letter and expect it to get to its destination?

A: In France, you could just post a letter. In Southern France, that was in the, what you call Vichy Zone. If we're writing to the northern zone, past the demarcation line, there were special post cards that were printed in the post office, preprinted with, "I am well. Please do this." This was almost like a form letter. Between the occupied and the Vichy Zone, there was this controlled correspondence. But within the Vichy Zone, yes, they had the Vichy stamps and the Petain stamps. These were not the same that were used in northern France, in the occupied zone. And I thus wrote to my friend that I was at this address in Blagnac, and a week or so later, I received in the mail a birth certificate which was made out to the name of Max Henri Lefévre: I was born in October of 1925, four years younger than what I was really was; and my mother's name so and so; and my father's name. And I had to memorize all of this. And with that birth certificate, my friend, when he sent me this, sent me also a instructions as to where to go. His brother had been -- had joined that particular group that he was sending me to, sometime earlier. And this was a, an underground group in the area of -- south of Lyon, in Saint-Vallier in the Department of Drôme, south of Lyon. A little town on the Rhône river. And I joined with the underground there in November of 1943.

01:04:00

Q: Would you describe how you got there and what the group was like?

A: The group was composed of a microcosm of, of people who were resisting the Germans or the fascist regimes. There were some people that were still hold-outs from the Spanish Civil War that had come to France -- this was seven, eight -- or six or so years later -- and had joined. There were a couple of German deserters. There was -- were one or two of Russians, Georgian Russians or Russian Georgians, who, who had been incorporated into the German army after the Germans entered Russia, took them captive. They incorporated Ukrainians and other nationals from Russia into their armed forces. So these people may have been hurt or may have been wounded and sent to France for recuperation. A lot of German soldiers came to northern France to recuperate or ride out their injuries in some way. Well, a couple of them then ran away and joined with the French underground because they were really against the Germans. There were some people from Alsace-Lorraine, who traditionally were either violently anti-German or very much with the Germans from their nationalistic point of view. But there were many Alsace-Lorraine citizens who were deeply nationalistic French. These people resisted the Germans just as well. And there were a few of those in the -- in that group, and a lot of Jews. What was that group? It was really a group called the, the Vichy French had a youth movement which was called Companion de France. These people were prepared -- young people from age 17 on -- were doing crafts and, and trades. Learning crafts and trades, like masonry and carpentry and plumbing and building, and that sort of thing, to prepare them for service in Germany for the new order, to be incorporated into the new order. This was a Petain youth movement called Companion de France. Their uniforms were blue. Their berets were blue. And they sang the Petain nationalistic songs in training. This group took on the semblance of a Companion de France camp. When we -- when I presented myself to the camp chief -- Chief of Camp, “Chief de Camp,” Maurice Bardin -- B-A-R-D-I-N -- I showed him a note that I had from my friend, showed him the birth certificate, he did not ask me any questions. He says, "Welcome to our camp. We will call you 'Henri.' That's what we will call you." And they made out the ID for us, and I was accepted as one of the, of the group. This group was mainly engaged in sending messages. Messages from the mountains of Savoy to Lyon, or sending emissaries up to Lyon with certain instructions as to what to do when the next German column comes by. But on the surface, ostensibly, we were learning carpentry and agriculture. And in the morning, we would get up at 4:30 and it was cold. And I have a picture here shows the snows. And we would take cold showers, because there was no warm water. And after that we would have breakfast. But before the cold shower, we would run a mile or two. All part of the youth movement -- exercise before we start the day working. But there were carpentry shops and all kinds of other. So if someone would come in and observe the camp, it was a camp of Companion de France. And when I circulated, I had the Companion de France uniform and ID, so that I could take a train anywhere and also not have to pay with my ID, because I was part of the Vichy government Companion de France. But 80 percent of us were Jewish, hiding out; but this was a cover, and this facilitated our movements. It was not until sometime the end of the year -- December, the beginning of January - -that overnight we had to clear out the facility.

01:10:00

The Mayor of Saint-Vallier had notified us that word has come from the French Milice -- the militia, the Vichy France collaborators with the Germans; and they were vicious, they were probably as much, if not more, vicious than the Germans -- that they will come for an inspection of the camp, of the Companion camp. Evidently word had come out, or the rumor had been circulating, that there is something fishy going on there. They wanted to have a firsthand view. Well, when they came later, 24 hours later, the camp was empty. We received our walking papers. I have them here. The release papers from the camp. We got tickets to go into various directions. I and a couple of other people was assigned to Châlus, near Limoges. And we took a train to Châlus, and we arrived in Châlus and joined another underground movement there. And in Châlus, in connection with the Jewish hiding out community in Limoges, we were engaged in producing false identification cards and to help children go get to the border so that they should be able to cross into Switzerland to perhaps Spain and further on to Portugal. This was our main endeavor, except also putting up road blocks and doing communication between the various underground groups in the area.

Q: Was there -- with the first group and also with the second, you talk about extensive Jewish participation, but it's also mixed clearly with non-Jews. They obviously knew you were Jewish.

A: It was never spelled out. It was never -- it was never spelled out, the original. In Limoges it was, because there I joined a group which was called "A.J." or Armée Juive.[32] So there, the majority belonging were Zionist-oriented Jewish, although there were non-Jews who also worked with us. And the Rabbi of Limoges, Abraham Deutsch, he was from Strasbourg originally. He in his office was a great liaison center for all these operations, and of course, the French authorities were not aware of it at the time. And in Limoges, I lived with a lady, Madame Bergot, who was hiding me and renting me an attic together with my friend, Eugene Bass, who was shot on the 10th of June, 1944. And we sometime had in this attic room 12 or 15 or 20 young people staying over night, just squatting on the floor, lying down on the floor. There was only one big bed, and sometimes we laid across. We were lying across three, four, five people that came to Limoges just to spend the night and go on to other places. And was -- and Madame Bergot knew exactly who we were, but she is probably one of the real Righteous Christians.

Q: Tell me about her. She sounds very special.

01:13:40

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[32] Jewish Army (French).

A: Madame Margaret. Margaret -- Marguèrite Bergot was an elderly woman in her middle to late 60s, who in the first World War after only having been married a few months, became a war widow. She was a widow at 21 or 22. She never remarried, but she always did things for people. A gray-haired lady, whom I went to visit in 1970, when my family and I went -- no, I am sorry. In 1954, when for the first time I went back with my wife to visit France. We went to visit Madam Bergot, and later -- she was delighted to receive us and made us lunch. And later, when my son was born, whose initials -- his name is Myron -- his initials are M.B., she made sure that she sent him a silver spoon from her set of flatware that were engraved with her initials -- Marguèrite Bergot, "M.B."

Q: Lovely.

A: She was a good lady. She kept a lot of Resistance people in her attic. She helped out wherever she could. She made sure we had ration cards for those who couldn't get them. I could, because I was living under the name of Lefévre. So I got my ration cards legally and legitimately. But there were some of them who did not have false papers. They were hiding out, and therefore could not go to city hall and get their ration cards. But Madame Bergot made sure they had either ration cards or bread -- either ration cards or coffee, or, or clothing like handkerchiefs, socks, underwear. That was all rationed.

Q: Where did she get them? How did she get them?

01:16:30

A: Madame Bergot got them! She may have known somebody at city hall that knew her. She would never let on as to where, but there they were. When we went there in 1954, in that just few hours, my wife grew very fond of her, because you could see in that lady a -- what you might call in Jewish “eshet khayil”[33] -- a woman of valor. And that she was. A beautiful person from the point of your heart and soul, and reaching out and helping. That was Madam Bergot in Limoges. And, of course, I first went to Châlus, as I said, but later, I relocated to Limoges, which was only about 10 or 15 -- 10 miles or so, or 10 kilometers from Châlus. Although I went back quite often to Châlus to see friends and distant relatives there, I really spent my time in Limoges in 1933 into 19 -- I mean the end of '33, December -- from the end of '43 or beginning of '44, until the end of the war, in Limoges. In May of 1944, I was -- I fell ill with a strangulation hernia. You may recall in the earlier part of the interview that in Antwerp, I was already in the hospital to be operated on in 1940, and that never came to pass. But finally, with all my escapades and all that, the, the hernia just -- a hernia doesn't heal by itself, and the hand-made truss that I had just didn't do the job anymore. So one day -- one evening, walking through a park on my way to actually an orphanage to deliver some documents or papers, I -- or a message -- I just was caught by one of these attacks and lay down on a park bench and started throwing up violently until there was nothing left but bile. And it so happens that a woman walked by in a nurse's hospital sister-type uniform, Red

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[33] Woman of valor (Hebrew).

Cross-type uniform. And she came over and wanted to know what it was. Perhaps she thought I had been drinking. "You don't feel so good." -- "Vous ne sentez pas bien." I said, "Je sais ce que c'cest." -- "I know what it is. This is a hernia, and I can't push it back. Normally you can try." She said, "Well, what you need is a hospital." And I said, "I don't think I can do that." Because you go to the hospital, you being recognized as circumcised. I wasn't going to take chances. She says, "But at this point..." And she tries to touch my stomach; there was this tenderness and the pain with it. She says, "This is an emergency!" And she called the ambulance, and I was taken to the hospital. And I cannot remember them actually taking my clothes off. That's how fast they put anesthesia on me. Already starting in the ambulance. And then when I got in the operating table, I was sort of half away already. And the next thing I knew was waking up the next morning in the hospital bed.

01:20:15

And a very nice, young religious sister -- it was a Catholic hospital by the name of Saint Joan of Arc -- bending over me and whispering in my ear after she had put a hot brick to my feet. And I had a drain in my stomach, in my belly, because it had begun to almost, you know, to be infected. You know, there is the situation with the strangulation hernia creates these emergency conditions. Whispering into my ear, "I am in charge of this ward, so therefore you have nothing to fear." Later, when I needed my documents to make a claim with the German government for certain restitutions and disability-type compensation, I had to gather papers as to all these events. So I wrote to the hospital to send me a copy of, of what I had undergone, what operation, just attesting to it. Well, in the letter I wrote to them, "And if Sister Joan of Arc is still with you, please tell her that I will never forget her kind words nor her cheerful whistle when she walked by the bed." She was always whistling a tune. A very young, attractive cheerful person. And they wrote back to me that she is in Normandy, did they write? Or Brittany? I don't recall. And if the chance will present itself, they will send her my regards and tell her how I, how I remember her. I wonder where she is today. Really. So there is a lot of reminiscences, and there are also nice bright moments in that period of darkness.

01:22:48

Q: Let's pull it back. You were released from the hospital. I would like you to describe -- you went back to your Resistance work. Can you describe in detail what it meant to have to take letters from one place to another? What were the kinds of risks that you ran? What kind of messages did you bring? Where did you travel, and who did you communicate with?

A: I went to the hospital on May the 8th, and I was released on the May 25th. That was just several days before the landing. The landing took place in June -- on June the 6th, 1944. In my little diary that I also have, I wrote, sometime before my release from the hospital, "I hope I will be released before the landing."

Q: How did you know about the landing?

A: Because, sometime in April or early May, we had already had in the underground, through the Radio London, messages that indicated that sometime in June, in the first couple of weeks of June, there will be major events happening, which at this time could only mean a debarkation. Where it would happen, we did not know. But we knew it was going to happen. I did not feel that I would like to be confined when that happens, because there'll be a lot of turmoil out there. There'll be a lot to do, a lot to see, a lot to be part of; and that was always my urge, to be part of something. So that between that time and the actual landing, there was very little time to do whatever we had to do. However, how did we feel, coming to your question about transporting. First of all, we had to produce the cards. We made them with false stamps and seals. And we, we were counterfeiters, you see! That's what we were -- just like when I escaped from that train. The emergency was there, but I did it almost like a natural thing; because the urge was to be free. So I did it, naturally, with all the trepidations involved. But there were also trepidations in transporting papers or doing communication. But at the time when we did it, the danger was not that apparent to us. It's in hindsight, as you look: "What did we do? My God, we were really young and...and dumb!" That sort of thing. But when we did it, while we did it, it did not occur to us that it was in any way endangering us. Yes, anybody was endangered who did not have proper papers. You could go into a restaurant as a French citizen. You could go into a restaurant to have a meal and the Milice[34] would come in and, like random, make, make inspections or certain searches. Well, if you were a Frenchman and you didn't have your IDs on you on that day and you were not involved in Resistance and you were not Jewish, you were a French farmer come to town, but you didn't have your -- any kind of ID on you; you forgot it; you neglected to take it along. Even that would endanger you, because everybody had to have an ID. So we were just part of a whole system of, of, of hazards and pitfalls and problems. But we did not consider our activity as something that would be any more dangerous than anybody else living under that regime. Although we were exposed a little more. We would have been exposed a little more to the punishment, if they had found us with the cards on us, because that could mean instant death, which happened to my friend, Eugene Bass, on the 10th of June 1944.

01:27:06

Q: What happened to him?

A: That was on the same day as Oradour was burned. I had been asked or instructed to go to Oradour on that Saturday to deliver some cards, and he had been instructed to go into another town that was a little further than Saint-Junien, another town nearby. The German Column advanced into that area. Eugene had de-- before he had delivered the cards had decided, "Let me go and visit my mother in Saint-Junien." She lived there in hiding. He hadn't seen her in a couple of weeks or a couple of months, or whatever. He's the fellow that boarded with me. Sort of blondish red hair, curly-haired fellow. Eugene Bass. He was from Alsace-Lorraine. He went on the nom de guerre, the war name, Bastinet -- B-A-S-T-I-N-E-

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[34] Militia (French).

T. He had gone to visit his mother in Saint-Junien. He arrived in Saint-Junien rather than go into town first to deliver the cards, which was a little further. Got off the train, through the station lobby, to the front door of the railroad station. And the advance column of Das Reich, the Germans, were there already. And everybody walking out was inspected. And he had a rucksack; and in the rucksack, he had the ID cards. Shot in the head! His name is listed in the book deportations under those summarily executed. Eugene Bass, his name is in there.

Q: How did you find out what happened to him?

A: He didn't come home that night. He did not come home that night. So a few days later we contacted, a friend and I, his mother. And she had found out from someone, some witness, that he had been killed. And it was through the mother that we found out that Eugene had been killed. And it would have happened to me, perhaps, and others in the train that we were in on that same day, on the 10th of June, 1944, going towards Oradour-sur-Glane from Limoges, when we saw the German column, Das Reich -- or one part of the, part of the rear unit. Because the advance unit had already been into Saint-Junien. And when we saw parallel to the railroad track the country road where the German motorized the motorcycles and the half-tracks were heading into the direction that we were heading, rolling up all that dust, so some of us decided, "If the Germans are going into this direction, we certainly do not want to go into the same direction." So before we got into Oradour, there was another halt, another station. There was an electric commuter train between Saint-Junien and Limoges.

01:30:31

So the station before -- there were a couple of halts, stops, before we got off the train. But the report on Oradour that I have on that particular sheet, the write up, says that anyone with a ticket to Oradour that got off that railroad station that particular morning was taken off and immediately machine-gunned -- just like the other 900 some citizens of Oradour. The men. The women and the children were taken to the church. They were told they were being photographed. They put bales of hay and straw around the church and put gasoline over it and destroyed the church, burned it down with the women and children in it. The moans and the cries filled the air. A couple of weeks later, we went back to Oradour to view the scene. And we stood there crying, with the tears. Tables had been set up with the remains of mementos: baby carriages, buckles, shoes, baby dolls, toys that the kids had taken with them. Oradour has been built up later -- about a quarter of a mile, a half a mile further away, a new little town. But the original area of Oradour is today still a shrine to be visited, to reminisce and to cry. Because it was really a stroke of luck that we even noticed that column. We would have gone in there. The mayor of Oradour at that time, on this particular moment, was arrested, put on a table and in front of his two sons, his two legs were sawed off. Reported right in the, in the, in the sheet that I have here. The sons, before that happened to their father said, "Please, take us! Do to us what you want to do, but not to our father!" They cut off his legs, and they shot the sons, too. There was just a handful of people surviving in Oradour out of 900-some people. There could have been many more, because those who were hiding out without papers, that will never be known. There were people hiding out. A lot of Jewish people. And this is exactly the place where we took some of those cards to. So that they should not be in hiding continually, and also be able to move a little freer, travel here or there. But at that particular time, all that was already moot because the landing had taken place, a lot of what you might call, in the Genesis terms, "tohoo va-vohoo"[35] happened -- a lot of tumult.

Q: Let's back up. I don't want to get to the tumult just yet. I would like to stay with Oradour for a minute. Did you meet any of the survivors? You had come so close, you were two stations away. You came after it had been burned. Did you meet anyone?

01:34:10

A: No. I had a call here when I wrote about this. I wrote a piece to the *Sun* paper, recalling the event of Oradour. It was in 1984, 40 years after the event, and I had a lady call me at home who told me that at one time she and her family had lived in Oradour. And when she read this she had to get in touch with me. But they had left Oradour before the town had been devastated. In fact, it was devastated in error. In the same area, there are two little towns Oradour. One is called Oradour-sur-Glane, on the River Glane, near Limoges. Another one, several miles away, not that great a distance, perhaps 15 kilometers or something like that. I don't quite have the distance in proportion. That was called Oradour-sur-Vayres. Oradour-sur-Vayres had a group of Resistance fighters. Oradour-sur-Glane had no Resistance fighters. They had people in hiding, yes. They had no arms caches. Oradour-sur-Vayres did. The German high command, going towards the front lines, coming from Toulouse, the Division Das Reich -- and by the way, they did a lot of damage in the town called Brive-la-Gaillarde, where they hung 90-some men from butcher hooks because of resistance activities. And their families had to walk, walk by to view that. That is in the Department of Corréze. Limoges was, and, and Oradour was, in the Department of Haute-Vienne. The German Division Das Reich had been informed, by the Milice or by some of their collaborators, that Oradour-sur-Vayres had a Resistance group, an arms cache there, and that they might hinder their progress towards the front lines. The advance column of Das Reich went there to clean out that nest of resistors, so that the main columns would then have easy travel. But all they knew was Oradour. They looked at the map, and they saw "Oradour" on the main road between Limoges and Angoulême or wherever, and picked Oradour-sur-Glane. And the Mayor said, "We have no resistance here. You can search the village. You can search everywhere. I give you my personal guarantee with my life." And it was by mistake that Oradour-sur-Glane became the victim.

Q: I want to take it back to events in which you were involved, okay, in which you know personally. Let's go back to D-Day, June 6, 1944. Where were you?

01:37:25

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[35] Chaos, disorder (Hebrew).

A: I was in Limoges, doing my daily whatever it is, communication or whatever work I did. And it was a day of euphoria. The papers reported it, and people were standing in front of the newspaper buildings to read the bulletins. And the Germans were running around like chickens with their heads cut off. Châlus had already been liberated by the Resistance; Limoges not yet, because Limoges had a main Gestapo headquarters. Châlus was a little town. I also have a little sheet here that shows the liberation of Châlus, and the appeal that was made by the, by the Resistance forces to keep calm and to go on about your daily lives as usual. You see, there were two types of Resistance forces in France. One was the FTPF. This was called Franc-Tireurs Partisans Françaises.[36] That was like a guerilla movement. And the other was called FFI, Force Français de l'Interieur -- French Forces of the Interior. They were under the command of the exiled French government -- De Gaulle, in London. And there was conflict between the two groups. The ones that listened to De Gaulle were the ones that went by the rules, when De Gaulle and the French exiled government would give instructions: "Do not attack such and such a building..." Because that building happened to be English property. So the FTPF would say: "Who cares? But in that building there is armament produced that goes to the Germans." So there was this conflict. The FTPF was also a more radical-type movement than the FFI. The FTPF, for instance, had some of the Spanish Civil War refugees. They had a communist-leaning group. They had more of the political activistic -- activist-type people who were fighting fascism wherever they can fight fascism, wherever they can find it. The FFI was picking their targets and was going by the -- what might be called "the rules." But in a unruly times, rules sometimes don't achieve anything, you see. So this was the thing. But we were in the streets, hoping that soon we will have liberation established in Limoges. And it happened not too long afterwards, you see.

01:40:40

Q: Which of the two partisan groups were you allied with?

A: The A.J. was independent, actually. But we were under the orders of the FTPF. Yes, we were under the orders of the Franc-Tireurs Partisans.

Q: How were relations between the two groups?

A: They were very cordial.

Q: They were.

A: It was a common cause. It is interesting that a common danger, how people's actions congeal, how a common danger becomes also a common denominator and an equalizer. I mean, you take the London Blitz, just to divert for a minute --

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[36] Free-Shooting French Partisans (French).

Q: Let's not.

A: Ok.

Q: I really don't want to get into that. Can we pull it back? Was there any feeling of antisemitism? Did the A.J. feel as if the FTPF looked down on them or treated them less well because it was a Jewish group?

A: I would never dismiss that aspect of a, of a, of a situation where Jews are involved, because our history tells us that. On the surface, it did not happen. We did not feel it. We did not see it in so many deeds or words. But it could very well have been there, because there was one captain of the French army who worked with us. He was a Viennese, actually of Polish origin, but coming from Vienna. His name was Prinz. And he was originally with the French Foreign Legion, then came into France to join the Resistance. And he at one time indicated to me that while our main job was to fight the Nazis, if he survives the war he will have to settle a few accounts with some people, that he knew among his unit, you know. And after the liberation, when the German soldiers had been arrested and interned and were in internment camps in Limoges, he took me to one of those camps to see because he was in charge of some of their units. And he took me in one of those camps and he -- I got great satisfaction to see this little fellow by the name of Prinz -- he was about 5 foot 4 -- had these tall German prisoner soldiers stand at attention and act like really like scared children once they were in custody. Just weeks before, days before, they were the strong, the strong masters, especially women and children. And then when the day of reckoning came, they became whimpering children themselves. But, no. We, during our work with the Resistance, did not see it openly, feel it openly. And frankly, for that nonsense, during this particular period there was no time for that. We had an enemy to fight, you see.

01:44:33

Q: Okay. The landing, June sixth, and the aftermath. What did you do? How did you help, if you did help, the invading American forces? Was your group involved?

A: We were involved in -- our group was involved a little later. A little later, with grave research and registration; because there had been -- for instance, we received parachuted provisions that came into the area of Limoges. Certain nights when, when the message, the message, the coded message would tell us to be at a certain place at a certain time, and then there would be… We were told to send a flare at a certain time, up in the air, and then few minutes later we would have a drop off of clothing or food items. The parachutes themselves would be gathered up, and the ladies would make shirts out of them. They were in khaki or white or pink. And in the process, in that execution of that particular parachuting help to the Resistance, some were shot down, some had to bail out for one reason or another, some were arrested. And then later on, in the area a little north of Limoges, there was, of course, there was the region of Cognac, and towards the coast there were evidently fatalities. After the landing in later weeks, some of our groups and us, we were involved in researching --

traveling and researching with farmers and with the countryside people who might have found soldiers, American, Canadian or British soldiers, also some of the Polish-exile forces. We helped in grave research. It was grave registration. That's what we did, we helped. Later, there were some USO[37] halls were established, which we helped out with. But right after the landing and when Limoges was liberated, a committee was formed in Limoges.

01:47:30

It was called COJDASOR -- Comité Juif d'Assistance Social et Reconstruction -- the Jewish Committee for Social Assistance and Reconstruction.[38] This was mainly geared to help refugees -- people who had lived in the area and hidden out, and could not do any kind of work during that period and really were penniless, to, to put them on their feet again. OSÉ was one of the organizations connected with this. The Organization for Secours aux Enfants.[39] A children's organization, OSÉ. You are familiar with that, and some of those Zionist organizations were involved, like WIZO[40] and Hadassah. And this whole program, that whole committee was supported by the American Joint Distribution Committee. So we had an office in Limoges at 15 Avenue du Midi, and some of us, from our group working previously with the underground with the false ID papers, became employed by that office. And as later, after liberation of Paris, which was in August of '44, and later the victory when people came back from the camps, again this Committee did a good job of, number one, helping them to get over the first hump, and later to establish themselves with a residence. Even helped them find relatives, because the Committee was in touch with the Red Cross and other organizations and institutions that were, after the war, spring up here and there to just see who had survived and who can be reached. And all these communication means were used to, whether it was by telegraph or radio or whatever. But the COJDASOR was that committee that was established afterwards, and I worked for that. But between the landing and actually the liberation, there was just a very short time. Because, because France fell pretty fast to the forces of Resistance, and then the Germans were arrested. And the rest took place in the north of France, of course, where the advancing Allied troops just entered Paris in August of '44. And had one major scare in the winter of '44, when after the Battle of the Bulge the Germans actually advanced far enough to pose a renewed threat to Paris. But that -- again, time took care of that.

01:50:26

Q: But you were in Limoges. Can you describe the day of liberation?

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[37] United Service Organization

[38] The actual name was: Comité Juif d'Action Social et de Reconstruction; Jewish Committee for Social Action and Reconstruction (French).

[39] The name of the organization is Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants (French), and is referred to as the Children's Rescue Network in English.

[40] Women's International Zionist Organization

A: As I said before, it was almost an unbelievable feeling to know that the day has finally come.

Q: Not D-Day, June sixth, but the liberation itself. When Limoges was freed.

A: Oh, the liberation, yeah. Limoges was freed, was just another normal day, except seeing Germans patrolling the streets and Gestapo patrolling the streets and being in charge here and being in charge there, you saw columns of Gestapo and Germans being led down the street by Resistance fighters. The great victorious German army led down the street by young people in rag tag outfits. That was the…that was the impact. Just a few weeks earlier, I was in a railroad station and saw a column...a unit of German soldiers, waiting for a train that they were taking to some direction. They were sitting on the platform, on their rucksacks, on their equipment, with their guns standing up, leaning against each other, bayonets drawn, you know. They have this triangular thing, arrangement there. One of the soldiers was opening up -- cutting open a can of sardines with his bayonet. Trying to open it up; and then he ate the sardines out of his -- out of the can, swallowing them all in all. And in his language, I recognized he must have been either an Austrian or a Bavarian, because having been born in Vienna, I knew what the Austrian accent was.

01:53:00

And he said, in German -- which I will not tell you in German, but I will tell you that in the English translation, "The people that are walking by here," he says, "those French people here. They will look at us and will say to themselves, 'Schön schaut Sie aus, diese Reichsdeutsche Armee!'"[41]--"She sure looks good, that victorious German army!" In a facetious way. And when we saw those German prisoners walking down the main street of -- with their arms raised on top of their heads, disarmed…that came to my mind. "You look good, you victorious German Army! Now that you are guarded by a rag tag outfit, you act like you are the victims." Or something like that. That was the main impact. And that picture, that -- imagine that scene repeated itself over and over in France in all the little villages and towns that became liberated, one by one by one. The collaborators were arrested, too. Unfortunately, there was also during that period a lot of spur of the moment, perhaps hasty, emotional reaction to those that we, the underground had perceived as being collaborators, like selling, dealing black market, or cohorting or fraternizing with some of the German officers -- including some of the people that we had known, our own people. And it was not uncommon for someone whom we knew who did black market, even if they were Jewish, to be executed actually without trial, without jury, without due process. But the emotions were so high that these things happened in I wouldn't just say a few cases. There were quite -- there were many.

Q: Leo, we have five minutes left. I think it makes sense to wrap it up in this hour rather than go to another tape. Tell me what, very briefly, I want to save a few minutes for pictures. But tell me, after the war, you were involved in this organization. How did you get to the United States?

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[41] "She looks beautiful, that German Army" (German).

A: I had an aunt in Baltimore, who already in 1941 had sent me papers to...the affidavit to join her here in America. But with the advent of the Pearl Harbor and America entering the war, those documents expired, fell by the wayside. In 1946, I received new papers, new affidavits, from my aunt here in Baltimore. I applied for the right to immigrate to the United States, and I joined here my aunt here in 1947. I have a sheet here that shows that I was on a preferential quota -- I was born in Austria. And also, one that my travel to the United States is in the national interest of the United States, simply because I worked for that group that did grave registration and I was also involved in the postal censor, postal censor service in Paris later, under the guidance of a army lieutenant, Sonja Beaumont. A lady. I was with the postal censor service for a little while in Paris. I spoke several languages, and so I was a few months there in that capacity. So I came to the United States in 1947.

Q: And you married?

A: I married in America. Married an American young woman in 1952, and we have three children. And in January of this year, we became grandparents for the first time, and that is the -- that's good ending to the story.

Q: Wonderful ending to the story.

01:57:49

End of Tape #4

CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW

Tape #5

DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

(1) Birth Certificate. The false one, under the name of Max Henri Lefévre. Made out five years younger than he really was. A document that every Frenchman had in his possession, and by virtue of which Leo became a Frenchman.

(2) Document of registration with French labor authorities, in the name of Max Henri Lefévre.

(3) Documents certifying to deportation of Leo's mother and two sisters from Vienna to [Izbica (ph)], Poland, in April 1942, and to the fact that they did not appear on any list of returnees.

(4) Wedding picture of Leo's parents, June 1920.

(5) Leo at age 8 with his sister, then age 6.

(6) Snapshot from Leo's Bar Mitzvah in 1934, showing Leo with his mother and sisters and an uncle.

(7) Leo with his two sisters, on the day of his Bar Mitzvah in 1934. His sisters were then 11 and 6. The snapshot was taken in the courtyard of the house where they lived.

(8) Leo's mother. Picture was sent to Leo by his mother in August of 1939, while he lived in Belgium as a refugee. His last communication with his family before the war broke out

(9) Summer 1940. Snapshot of Leo's sister, Henrietta, then doing Hachshara work with the hope of eventual emigration to Palestine.

(10) Leo's younger sister, Edith, holding a cat. She was then 14. Photograph sent to Leo in February 1942, just two months before the family was deported to Poland.

(11) Leo in Saint-Vallier in 1943, in his Companion de France outfit.

(12) Yellow star with the word "Juif" [**Fr:** "Jew"]. The "badge of shame." Worn by Leo, as required by French and German authorities, until he began hiding under his false identity.

(13) Leo's granddaughter, Andrea.