

Good afternoon. My name is Bernard Weinstein, and I'm the director of the King College Oral Histories Project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Ann Kaplan.

We are privileged to welcome Marguerite Jeremias, survivor, presently living in Rockaway, New Jersey, who has generously volunteered to give us her testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Mrs. Jeremias, we'd like to welcome you. And I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us something about the place where you came from and about your early life before 1939.

OK. I was born in Heidelberg, Germany, and lived in a nearby village, Hoffenheim. A small place that had about 1,400 population. Most of them were Protestants, some Catholics, and to my time, we were about 20 Jewish families.

To my mother's time, who grew up there as well, they had about 100 Jewish families, a Jewish day school, a matzo factory, and a mikvah. It was an Orthodox community. But as these young people grew older and became secularly educated, they moved to towns. Therefore, in my time, there were only 20 families left.

We had a beautiful synagogue still that has had an apartment adjoining the shul, and school rooms, where we had in the afternoons Hebrew school. I went to a public school. I was the only Jewish girl my age at that time. And therefore, my only friends were non-Jews. It was very nice living in that environment at the time. We lived in a big house.

What did your father do for a living?

We had a dry goods store. And that was adjoining the house with a separate entrance. I have a sister. We were four in the family. Oh, at that time, when I grew up, we had all the modern facilities for Europe at that time. It was unusual. Electricity, hot water, whatever. We had a maid at that time, a sleeping maid, as well. So life up to age seven was pretty nice living there.

Can you recall some memories of your early childhood that are particularly precious to you?

Well, it was a very nice way of living. My house was always open to another company. All my mother's cousins would always come and visit. Any stranger that would come to this village was welcome by us, fed by us, housed by us.

Did your extended family live in Hoffenheim also? Or did they live in other places?

No, most of them lived in big towns. And as I said, they came quite often to visit us. So I knew all of my mother's-- more my mother's family than my father's. He came from a different part of Germany. Did you celebrate holidays together and Shabbat?

Yes, we did. Yes. We did. My mother had an uncle living in Mannheim and one in Stuttgart. And we were together at my-- the one from Mannheim came every week. Every Sunday, I would go to the train and pick him up. And he would spend the day with us. My other uncle with his family was there every holiday.

Can you recall anything of the relations between the Jews and the non-Jews in your town?

It was very good in earlier years. Our next door neighbors would come-- the children would come in on Hanukkah when we light the candles, and they would get a present from us. And then on Christmas, we would go to their house and would get a present. So the relationship was good between the non-Jews and the Jews at the time.

Were you the oldest of the children?

No, my sister's older. She's 4 and 1/2 years older than I. And we had only non-Jewish friends, because we were the only Jewish children of that age.

Was there a cheder, or was there any kind of a Jewish school nearby where you received religious education?

Well, yes. We got the religious-- we had a Jewish teacher in the town. Not so much for me, my sister had. And because at that time, when I was old enough, they were already not there. And they had afternoon Hebrew school.

And the rabbi from Heidelberg would come I think twice a year to test the children to make sure that they got the proper education. And that was-- I remember this was done in the synagogue. And it was always a very important thing when the rabbi would come to test the children.

When did things begin to change? In 1933. Things began when Hitler started to get to power. The first thing they did, they came to close the business.

When you say they, who do you mean?

The German-- I don't know if there was an SA already. I don't exactly know. The German government. I don't know who it was.

It wasn't men in uniform, it was--

That I don't remember, just don't forget I was seven years old at that time. I remember-- I can still see the business being locked up and closed. The seal, I can still see. But I don't know who did it.

Your father's business? My father's business and everybody else's business was sealed. You could not walk into it. It was sealed for weeks. They took all the weapons away from you. You were not allowed to have any weapons. In our case, we had a big dog that was very precious to my parents. They shot it. Just because this was to show-- we hate you, so we shoot your dog.

So this was right at the very beginning of when Hitler came to power. I think it was spring in '33, right? So the business was closed for, I don't know, many weeks or maybe even months.

Things started to get bad in school. I was put into the back of the classroom. And the children were told not to play with me anymore. I was sent home two times a week, three times a week because they had racial hour, which meant that they taught the children that the Jews were bad, and how to actually hate us.

And each time I came back to school after such an hour, another child would spit, another child would throw a stone. And little by little, I was actually very isolated.

These were children who had been your friends?

That I played with--

That you had played with?

--up to that point, every single day. They were in my house, I was in their house.

This may be a somewhat difficult question for you to answer, but perhaps if you think about it, you can. What was your-- at this time, what was your perception of what was happening to you? What was your understanding of what was happening to you?

I was very hurt. I was frightened. And basically, could not understand why the friends that I have had all this time would get so nasty and would be so mean to me. And it was a very difficult thing to digest, that all of a sudden you lived an isolated fear for life.

This happened to your sister and your other siblings, too?

My sister. Yes, it happened to my sister as well.

At the same time.

Yes. Yeah.

And did you hear of it happening to other Jews as well, to other Jewish children?

Well, to all the Jewish children that were around. I saw even in other parts. I heard that my cousin in Stuttgart, for instance, this happened to all the Jewish children at that time. Some more, some less. I guess I felt it more because I had had only non-Jewish friends. And I was completely isolated at the time then. So I guess for me, it was even worse than if you lived in the city and you did still have other friends that you could be with.

So there was no one-- there were no people to share the sense of isolation?

Not in that sense, no. I happened to be lucky. I liked to read, even as a very young child. And I spent most of my time reading.

At this time, your house was intact, even though they closed the adjoining store?

Yes, at that time, the house was still intact. But from-- in 1935, we were no longer allowed to have the maid. The people would not come to shop anymore in the store, even the store was reopened.

In 1936, we had to take in a non-Jewish family, because we had a big house. But there was actually no facilities for these people. It was not a separate kitchen or anything. But we had to give them the upper store, where we had a bathroom with running water and a bathtub. And this is what these people used for their kitchen. And I presume they themselves bought a stove. I don't know if we had to.

Let me go back just a little bit. When your father initially was ordered to close his business, as were the other Jewish business people in your community, was he then allowed to reopen it for any period of time?

Yes, after a certain-- I don't know how many weeks or months, he was allowed to reopen it. And he was allowed to have some business. But the people were told not to buy from us. So even though the store was open, there was no business.

What was your parents' feeling at the time? What did they communicate to you of their feelings then?

Basically, they felt this would be a passing thing, that Hitler could not last. That was in the very early years. That Hitler-- because there were very German. My father was in World War I and had the Iron Cross. And they felt that this is a passing thing. It cannot last. After all, this is an educated population, and this is a passing thing. So they did not, up to '35, did not think that poorly. It was after that.

What specifically happened in '35 that you can recall?

I just know that we had no more maid at the time, that things in school got much, much worse, that we had to take in this other family.

When you say things got worse in school, can you recall?

Yes, the teachers were nasty. They were mean to us, to me.

What did they do?

I was sitting in the back of the classroom, I got poor grades, I was not called upon. And they just gave me poor grades,

because-- and the children were nasty and mean to me. They would throw rocks at me, would spit at me, would not talk to me. And things began to get very, very bad.

So in 1937, the beginning of '37-- the school year in Germany lasted from the spring to spring. So by '36, it was so bad, I could no longer tolerate it. In the meantime, there was a German day school in Heidelberg that started. So I was sent there in '37, which meant that I had to take a train. I was in the train for one hour each way.

This was a Jewish day school?

A Jewish day school. At that time, the professors could no longer teach in the universities. They were teaching us in the Jewish day school. I had to take a train to go to Heidelberg. There were several other Jewish children on the train. And many times there were grownups who would molest us, because-- and we were always looking for a car where these particular-- one particular man that I remember. We always tried to avoid him.

How were they able to identify you as Jews?

I don't know.

You didn't have to wear anything at that time?

No. I don't know how they knew. They may have been people that just knew these were-- because we were young. It was unusual for a child to take a train to go so far to school. There was a closer school of higher learning where I lived, which was where my sister used to go to when things were good.

What happened to the synagogue in your town that you said was so active and--

Well, during this time the synagogue was very active yet. We went to shul every Friday night, every Saturday. And the teacher left after a while we had-- and the cantor. But the people were determined by the service. I mean, there was no problem in synagogue at that point. We went all the time.

As I said, the reason they probably knew how to identify us was because it was unusual for such young children to going to school to Heidelberg. There was a school close by of higher learning. My sister went there, I think, until 1936. She, by that time, was no longer in school. She was elsewhere. She was in Mannheim by that time already.

Did you have access to newspapers and radio?

Yes. We had radio, we had access to newspapers. My parents knew what was going on. And whatever the German newspapers would print.

Did they speak to you about what was going on?

Excuse me?

Did they speak with you about what was going on?

No. In those days, parents did not speak to the children the way we speak to them today.

What was the age difference between you and your sister?

4 and 1/2 years.

So they didn't speak to her either about these things.

I don't rightly know. Which they did speak to her much more than to me. But how much I don't know.

They didn't-- excuse me. Then you didn't have a sense of what was going on from radio, or newspapers, or adult conversation? It just--

Not that much, no. I just knew what was happening to me and to the community. But in the outside world, I did not know that much. I was kind of young. And in those days, as I said, parents did not-- they tried to shield their children rather than to tell them what was happening. Which we don't do today. I personally believe it's the wrong thing to do.

To shelter?

To shelter. You cannot shelter, because people sense-- I have had, later on, experiences where I was sheltered. And it really was bad, because I knew what was happening anyway. So as I said, going to Heidelberg-- oh, we were Orthodox. I was not allowed to travel on Shabbat or any such thing.

But when things got bad and that's the only company I had going to Heidelberg, my mother would let me go on the Shabbat to Heidelberg. So I had some kind of social life, at least, with my Jewish friends there. And I would spend time with the families there. So this was from '37 and '38.

Then came the Kristallnacht. We, where I lived, did not know anything that night. I woke up in the morning, I took the train as I always did at 7 o'clock in the morning, not knowing what had happened. I got onto the train, and immediately, I heard from the people in the train what had happened, that all the shuls were burned.

And they were very proud what they all were able to do to the Jews. That they went in and demolished their homes, that they burned their synagogues. They were all very proud telling each other what they did.

I was very scared. I covered in that corner, hoping nobody would at this point realize that I was Jewish. I went to Heidelberg. As I got there, I got met by the shattering of the glass, by the shouting of the people, down Jews. And I could hear they were so thrilled on what they were doing and all the shattering of the glass.

I got out of the train. I tried to get out of the station, where I was met by an elder Jewish man, who said, do not come out. And they burned the synagogue last night. They are demolishing-- they're in everybody's home, demolishing everything. They're in the school. Try to get a train back to your home immediately.

It took an hour for me to catch another train, during which time I had to listen to all the this that was going on. I can still hear it. It was terrible experience. And you get frightened. Of course, I was very frightened. What would happen when I get home?

I got home, I got out of the station, and I walked to our house. As I was walking, I saw my father was-- at that time, we only were six Jewish families left. Because the people all left as they could. Which was very difficult, because the countries closed up, they didn't let us in.

I saw my father with the other five men carrying furniture from the gabbai's base house, which was adjoining to the synagogue to somebody else's house. And they told me that they demolished the synagogue. And they took all the sefer torah and all the [INAUDIBLE], and everything that was in it.

Did this happen while you were en route to and from the school, from Heidelberg?

Yes. This happened while I was gone. I came at the end, when they carried-- they let the gabbai move out into somebody's house, and let the men carry the stuff. I came at that time. I was home when they burned all the sefer torah. They took it into an empty lot and they burned it. Of course, again, with a lot of shouting, and a lot of hooraying, this is what we are doing.

But that was a little bit later. I went home and dropped my books. And I was so upset, I fainted. And then I went to the other people's homes, where they took the furniture, to where this family would move into. As my father and the other

men walked in with the last piece of furniture-- there were six men.

12 SA men came-- these were the brownshirt people-- to arrest the men. For each man, they had two SA men. They arrested them right there in the courtyard. They marched them to the mayor's office. One man in between two SA men.

How many men were being arrested?

Six. There were only six men left.

Your father among them?

My father among them. They were taken to the mayor's office. We did not know what would happen and what would be. I again went home, told my mother. Again, I was so upset, I started trembling and fainting.

And in the evening, we were told we could go see my father. And I believe we could bring him clothes. But we were not told where he was taken. We later on found out he was taken to Dachau.

My father was in Dachau for five weeks, during which time, my mother did the utmost. She traveled to Counsel, to-- I don't know what she did. Again, as a child, you were not really told. To see to it that he was released, being that he was in World War I. And he had the Iron Cross. She was able to get him out after five weeks. And he came back at that time.

From that day on, as I said, it was-- I was a nervous fright at all times. I would not sleep alone. I slept with my parents in the room. I would not go to my room. These other people lived upstairs. Also, we had to take in another Jewish family. We gave-- they had to go where the business, where they were sleeping. And we shared the kitchen with them. Because they took away their home.

This is how we lived from '38 on, with fear every single day what would come next. And usually they struck during the holidays. This was their thing. One day, we were home in the afternoon, it was summertime. And one man just decided that he was going to take a gun and shoot one of the men. And that's what he did. And nobody said anything, nobody did anything.

We had neighbors. And I have to track back to '38, of Kristallnacht. They would not give us any food. We were not allowed to do any shopping. So our neighbor, who grew up with my mother, went to the mayor's office and said, what's going on? Do we let these people starve to death now? So they said, no, you can sell them-- he had a bakery.

But this man then after that, would not say anything anymore either, because these people were afraid of their own children. Their children were taught so much to hate and to denounce their own parents if they were helping Jews that they wouldn't dare do so anymore.

Oh, this wife of his-- so I could not buy clothes or anything. And on a rare occasion, if I needed something, she would buy it and hand it to us into the window from their yard when the children weren't home. And these were children that I grew up with, that when I was sick, I was in their house.

Even, I remember having had the measles. And their child had the measles. And so that neither one of us was alone, I spent time in their house. This is how close we used to be. And now, they cannot even talk to us because the children would denounce them, their own parents.

The parents were afraid of the children.

Right.

Did you ever experience any kind of-- I don't know, sense of sympathy from anybody? A look--

No.

--a word--

No.

--a nod of the head.

No.

Nothing?

No. Except from this family next door, the older people, none of the children would have sympathy or nod or anything. None of them. They were very well indoctrinated with this racial hour. Two hours, two, three hours every week. I was all of a sudden a young-- a nobody.

They were brainwashed.

They were very brainwashed. They didn't even have sympathy. None of them.

You mentioned about a man being shot at random.

Yeah.

Was--

A Jewish man. And he was at home. And somebody, who I presume from what I guessed later on, this man must have-- this was a butcher shop. He had a kosher butcher shop. And he had a butcher store. And presumably, at one time or another, maybe due to business, he wasn't happy with this man. So he just went in. He marched in and shot him. He didn't kill him, he just shot him.

At this point, did you feel yourself, or did your parents feel in danger of their lives?

Yes.

Up to that time, up to--

At that time already--

Kristallnacht.

--we felt, my mother and I, my father-- my father had to go to do road work. They took him to [GERMAN], I don't know what the word is.

Labor.

Labor, forced labor. Yeah. He had to do forced labor. In fields, he had to work. So he was not home. My mother and I, we locked ourselves into a room. Because we were afraid next they would come to us. We were at all times afraid.

Was your sister with you then, too?

No. My sister, I forgot that. My sister left in 1938, before Kristallnacht. We had relatives in this country. And they gave her an affidavit. But not the whole family. They did not want the burden of many people. So she came. She was 17 years old.

And they made very plain that if she comes, they did not want to have to support her or have anything to do with her. She came to this country and she went as a maid. I had an uncle here as well, my mother's brother, who had come I think the year before who she was with. But he could not support her.

So she, that summer of '38, when my sister left, was a terrible summer for me. Because my mother was very upset having to see her daughter leave. My cousin, whom we were very close with, left the same year, also during that same time. So that most of the family had gone. We were the only ones left.

You mentioned that there were four children. What did the other children--

No, we were two.

Oh, just the two, I'm sorry.

Four family members.

Four family members.

Four family members.

Yeah, just two. Just the two. And when my sister got here, of course, my father was hoping that she could get us an affidavit and we could come here. But this was not easy. Besides, this country was closed, and you needed a quota number. We had number 33,000. That was, I mean, never coming up. So we just-- and there was no other country open to us. So we could not leave. No way, no how.

Prior to the closing of the borders, was there any time when your family felt that they might want to emigrate, they might want to leave Germany?

In '35, my mother felt she would like to go to what was then Palestine. My father would never hear of it. He felt that nothing can happen to him. Again, the same thing that he was German, he was in the war, and nothing could happen to him. He did not believe it at that time, like many other German people.

And I guess it was very difficult when you had established yourself to just go out and leave. Because up to that time, they were all hoping that it would pass. After '37, I think, people were still in a dream world, hoping that it would pass. From '37 on, there was no way that anybody could feel that way. By that time, it was too late.

When the war broke out, were you surprised at what happened? Or were you prepared for what happened? Or did you know what was happening?

I knew the war broke out. I don't know if I was surprised. As I said, as a child, you lived in a different world in Europe as you do here. We had a radio, but still, it wasn't like today, that you heard much news. The papers I didn't read, I guess, as a child. It was a different world. Children didn't know as much.

So I knew the war broke out. And I was visiting with a relative at the time. I was sent home immediately. He would not let me stay another-- an hour, because he was afraid of what would come next. In 1939, on Yom Kippur, and they came into everybody's home, took all the radios away. And again, they were every so often searching for weapons.

In '38, they took the money away. They took all the jewelry away. Also after Kristallnacht, we had identification cards. Every female was Sarah, every male was Israel. And you had to have these cards on you at all times. It's a little thing I forgot.

So things really went from bad to worse. Every month, something happened. Every month-- if you didn't-- if it didn't happen to you, I heard it in Heidelberg, I heard it from other children. In that sense, I did know what was going on.

And of course, a lot of people went away. All the professors that we had teaching us went away. In '38, we had eight grades and two teachers left, because all the other people had immigrated. A lot of children had immigrated. And so little by little, you did know what was going on. Because it was all around you.

Where did they immigrate to if there was--

Well, some people who were lucky and had relatives in this country that gave them affidavits in time. Because I think the quota number only started in '38, if I'm correct. And other people went to Palestine. Other people went to South America. Other people went to China. We had a relative of ours that went to China. So they went wherever the doors were open. The people would go.

Also, they had many children's transports that they started in '38, where they would ship children to Holland, to Belgium, to France, to England. I was supposed to go on one of them, but somehow it never came to be. Because all these things took a lot of time and a lot of preparation.

They had a chance to emigrate rather than being shipped out to what came later. There was still time for them to get out.

Well, these children transports were done by the Jewish community through Jewish organizations. And I think many of them were placed with families or in different children homes in the various countries. France had children homes at that time.

That was 1938.

I think so, yeah. That was in 1938 when they started, that they took children transports. So but with me, it just never worked out. I was supposed to go to a city called Cologne to learn-- I always wanted to become a baby nurse. I was supposed to go there. I was registered to go there. And that never materialized, because-- I think, looking back, it was probably lucky for me.

Because right-- and that was right after that they came to arrest us and take us to a concentration camp. And this way, I was taken with my parents. This was in 1940 on [HEBREW] Sukkot. They came the night before to tell my parents not to let me go to school.

Of course, we knew something was up if I'm not supposed to go to school. Somehow, our house seemed to be the center of the Jewish-- again, there were six families left. So everybody came to our home that night. And we sat down in the living room debating, is there anything we can do? What's there to be done? Or what's going to happen? But there was no place to go and nothing to do.

Where did you go to school at this point? What kind of school?

I still went to Heidelberg every single day.

Oh, after Kristallnacht, you still went to Heidelberg.

After the school reopened. Oh, there, I don't know how long it was closed. I don't remember that. But I still went every single day to Heidelberg. I went longer than I was supposed to go, because I was at that time 14. The grades were only up to eight grades. But I had nothing better to do. And better than sitting at home, I went back to school.

Who came to you with the information that you should not go to school?

The police.

Oh. The German police.

The German police came that night.

The next morning, at 8 o'clock, the SA men came, two of them, telling us, you are being taken away. You have two hours to pack two suitcases for all of you. You can have no jewelry, you can have a certain amount of money, very little. And get yourself some food for three days. That's what we were told.

I had to go and buy food, because we didn't have enough in the house. As I went to the store to get food, one of the children that used to be a friend of mine-- and I will never forget this-- ran after me and said, thank god we get rid of you dirty Jews now. This was the parting words that day.

The SA men stayed in the house while we were packing to make sure nothing was taken that they didn't want us to take and to make sure we couldn't escape. It's no place to go anyway. But they stayed there all the time.

We gathered at the mayor's office. And there, we were met by a bus. Full of other Jews already. And we were put into that bus and driven away, not knowing where. I haven't been exceptionally sensitive by now and afraid. Was sure that they were going to drive us into the river or some such thing.

They took us to Heidelberg, where they had several trains waiting for us to board. Before my parents were allowed to board the train, they were taken I don't know where to sign over all the property that we had. Because at that time, we still had our home. We still had land. Being that you lived in a small place, you had also land. And all that had to be signed over.

In the trains, there were the Jews from all around the whole area there. Because everybody was taken at the same time. We were the very first German Jews to be taken to concentration camp in our area. Because we lived near France. We did not know where they were taking us.

In the train, they kept on announcing, every five minutes, anyone who has jewelry, anyone who has money, anybody who's looking out of the window is going to be shot. Again, I guess I was just me. I made my father, who had jewelry and who had money, throw it out the window. I was petrified throughout the whole time.

We were in the train for three days. And then we realized we ended up in France, where we were taken to Gurs, which is a concentration camp. That camp existed because originally, it was built for the Spanish Jews during the--

Revolution.

No, no. In '35, when--

The Spanish--

Oh, the Spanish Civil War.

Right, civil war, right. That's how. These camps were already made for the Germans. That's where they took us. That's why we were the first ones. We got out of the train, we were loaded into trucks. The men separated from the women.

They had [? plaques. ?] They called it a [? plaque. ?] You know, it was surrounded by barbed wire. I was put into a children's barrack. My mother was in a different barrack. And my father was in a completely different, they called it [GERMAN].

We had burlap sacks with straw to sleep on. And I guess we had a blanket. I don't even recall that. And there was all the children in one barrack. The facilities-- the bathroom facilities were a big wooden structure. And there was holes in the middle. And that's where you had to go to the bathroom. There was a cold water faucet outside in a central area, where you could wash up.

Food, we got three times a day. A dirty soup, basically made with turnips. One piece of bread. Every couple of days, a piece of meat. A cube of meat.

They were standing guard at all times. You were not allowed to move out of your [GERMAN]. We as children sometimes dared. So on occasion, if I dared, I would slip through the barbed wire and see my father. Didn't happen often, but it did happen on several occasions.

What time of year was this?

That was in October 22nd and into the winter. So things were pretty cold. It was very muddy there. If you walked in the mud, your shoe would stick in the mud. We might lose a shoe.

Were you issued-- were you issued uniforms also?

No. We had no uniforms at that time at all. Just don't forget, this was in 1944-- ah, in '40.

'40.

One day, I and three other children managed to get out of camp into the near village. We did not speak the language, but we did not know where to go once we were there. We marched right back. It was the weirdest thing, you know. And we were afraid-- there was a German commandant. He was always there. But somehow we escaped. But we marched back in again.

There was a children's choir, we had to sing. And on Christmas, I don't remember where they took us. But they took us someplace to sing Christmas songs. And I can't visualize anymore where it was. So this was life there.

Were there non-Jews as well as Jews in Gurs?

Not in our [GERMAN]. I don't know of any where we Jews, where there were none. I was there until April '41, at which point, my parents were told that people with children were taken to a better place and we should all go. So we were taken again into a train. And again, a few days' train ride.

And we ended up in another concentration camp by the name of Rivesaltes. This Gurs was in the [FRENCH] Pyrenees. This was near the Atlantic Ocean. And we were very near the sea. You could see-- on a clear day, you could see the sea. Was very, very windy there.

Conditions were worse. People by now were very weak, many of them. Many had died already in Gurs. At this point, the ones that survived, the elderly people were very weak. On occasion, if the wind was strong enough, it would lift up these people and just carry them away. It was a frightening thing to see.

Were both your parents with you at that time?

Yes, we were. But we were not in the same-- again, I was at that time in the same barrack as my mother. My father was in a different one.

This was in France. This was-- they both were in France. Both concentration camps were in France.

Were you near the channel? Were you near--

The Atlantic Ocean.

Yeah.

I don't know how-- we were near Pau. I don't know if you're familiar with the geography. Things were worse there, because they would-- at one time, all the men were taken to work camps. They were all taken away except the old people.

They just would molest you. Not very seriously, but they were there and you knew it. And you were afraid at all times to do anything other than what they let you do. Conditions were very bad there.

How did you pass the time?

Strangely enough, as a child-- and I presume other children felt the same way-- having been isolated from other children for the years before, we got together, we started singing, we started dancing, and we did have a little life there, which for me was better than when I was home all alone. And I presume the other children felt that way, too.

While we were in these camps, the French Jews were very busy. They started children's homes with the help of Rothschild, they gave there Catholics for children's homes. So they took the children out, little the younger ones first, and the Germans let them go.

I was able to get out in 1942, in April '42. I went to a home, a Jewish scout home for girls. That was in Beaulieu. German let us go. We were 20 girls that went.

This must have been very hard for my mother to let me go. Because while I was in camp, there were lice, there were all these things. I did take care of my mother. I deloused her every night. I took care of our clothes every night to look for the lice. Because people were literally eating away from that.

And if you did not go after this every single night, you could not control it. So I did that every single night. And I stood there for hours and I went through my clothes, my mother's clothes.

You were now about 16?

By that time, I was about 16, yeah. And so I did not want to leave. My mother pushed me to be-- to go. Because I did not want to have her be alone.

To what age were they taking the children?

Well, at that time they took even 16, 17-year-olds. Anybody they let go out, they took.

Yeah.

At that point. That was already, by that time, they had all the little ones. So then they started with the bigger ones, whoever they let go. I was in this home for three months, where I got mail from my parents.

At this point, Auschwitz was ready. That was in the summer of '42. The home was told that we all have to come back to Rivesaltes, because we were going to be taken with our parents to a better place. So all this was a better place.

Better, better.

The home, of course, would not permit that. So we started hiding. But being that this was a scout's home, we started out by-- we were not told anything. Again, in those days, children were not told, even older children, what happens. We were taken to camp as a scout camp. And we were there maybe two or three days, when all of a sudden, those of us-- the whole home was taken.

Those of us who had come from the camp were woken up in the middle of the night and were told, you have to get dressed immediately. We have to leave. And we had one-- there, we were 10 girls that came from camp. And one of the leaders.

So from then on, we were starting to hide. At night, we would go from place to place. Into the woods. Would sleep in the woods on the floor, we would sleep in huts. One night, we were in one of the Rothschilds' places. But it was going

from place to place. And we did that for about five weeks.

The food we had was that at night, some SS scouts we left a trail for a while would come and bring us some chocolate and some bread. One night, we were in a hut, and we were sleeping, and all of a sudden, somebody comes and shines the light. And I, of course, wake up. I was always the one. Questioning what are you doing here, who are you, and so on and so forth. And our leader answered.

The minute these people left, we woke everybody up, and we took off. Because we were sure the next morning the Germans were there to arrest us. So that was a very narrow escape.

Again, during that time, these leaders-- who meant very well-- did not tell us what happened to our parents. I was extremely sensitive to all these things. I knew I had no mail. And I kept on questioning. And she kept on saying, she didn't know. One day when she was out looking for food for us, I went through her belongings, which I had no business doing.

I found all the mail for all the kids. And I handed it out. She came back to a chaos that was terrible. But she was very understanding. And she explained to us that she didn't want us to be worried, because we had enough to worry about. Because we went barefoot at night from place to place. And this is how we found out that our parents were taken away.

During the time we were hiding, again, the same group of people were looking for places to place us. Because winter was coming in already soon. So I was taken with several children to a convent in [? Brive. ?] That was a very fancy girls' school. This was before school started. I was there with several other children for about three, four weeks.

When school started, they could not keep us. Because they were afraid that these children, by children, would know who we were, and we wouldn't be safe. They kept one girl who then converted. This was basically an aim. I guess they could tell which one was a good candidate.

From this convent, I was taken to a different convent in Ussel. It was a small place in France that had basically the farmer's kids there. But it was a school. And two other girls and I were taken there. We were doing menial work there. The organization had to pay money every month. They had to bring the ration cards for us to be kept there. And were supposed to go to church and so on and so forth.

We were there for a while. And one month, no one came with our cards and with our money. The sisters got very upset and said, if no one comes next month, we can no longer keep you. Of course, we were very worried.

And finally, somebody else-- again, the same lady that was with us hiding, she was much part of my whole time in leading us. She now is a very well-known psychiatrist in France.

Was she Jewish?

Yes, yes. And as a matter of fact, I asked after the war, I said, how could you tolerate what I did that day? And she said, well, I could tolerate it easily. And I now know this was not the thing to do. She came, and she told us the reason nobody had come before was because this man who was-- these were all people in the late teens, early 20s who were these leaders who did that.

He was taken by the Germans. He was caught. He had our papers. He ate them. So the Germans would not find us. And he was consequently killed. But they did not find us. This is why this one month, no one showed up.

After a year in this convent, it became unsafe there, too. The nuns saw that we weren't quite ready to convert. We were too old for that. So it was no longer safe there. And so they found a French family for me to go to.

I'm going to have to stop at this point just for a few minutes to change the tape.

OK.

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