

When did you leave Vienna?

I left Vienna in the end of October 1938. Up to that time, I was hiding, and I had to decide how to leave and how to get out, especially as a stateless person. And I thought that the borders that probably would be the most closely guarded, because I was at the borders of Austria, would be the borders into Switzerland and Italy and so on.

So I decided to avoid that, and I thought, well, what would be the most unlikely, the most unlikely way to get out of Austria, to get out of Vienna? And my answer was, the most unlikely way would be to cross Germany and to try to get across the Sigfried-Maginot Line into France. That would be the most unlikely way, and that's what I decided to do.

And I had a strong relationship with a young girl, a relative of Professor Adler whose name was Suzanne. And she was 17, and she decided to come with me, which I didn't want to do. I said that's dangerous, and once I'm out, once I'm back in France, I'd arrange for her to come. But she said that if she wants to live with me, and wanting to live with me then she also wants-- she wants to share my life then she also wants to share dangers.

I thought I would have an immediate ally in her mother. And so I talked to her mother. She was the only child, and her mother answered me that such a question in normal times and in normal circumstances would be outrageous. Not even to be discussed, but we don't live in a normal time.

We live in a very abnormal, a very extraordinary time. And extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures, extraordinary responses. And she said, this is her response that she has arranged for what one called majority for her daughter so that she wouldn't be a minor.

How old was this girl?

17. And then she gave us her blessing, and I was disarmed. And we both left. Took the train through Germany to Saarbrücken. And in Saarbrücken. I had a friend, who lived in Saarbrücken at that time. I later found out, after the war, that he was in Switzerland. He called himself a flying professor living in San Garland and teaching at different universities.

His name was Rothschild, Rothschild. We stayed at his place, his apartment and then went to a little place which is called Reutlingen. From there, had studied the whole geography and tried to find out the patrol, the German patrol, and the relief of the patrol. And when we leave, how to get through. And had it well figured out, except that we got caught and turned over to the Gestapo in Saarbrücken.

In other words, Saarbrücken Gestapo came to get us and drove us through a rainy night, a lonely road, through the woods. Until they stopped. There was a building in the woods off the road which was the Gestapo headquarters in the woods. And there, we were interrogated. And destined to be sent to Dachau from there.

I'm not going into all those scenes that happened. But after that, the two Gestapo officials from Saarbrücken were to drive us to Dachau. So we were loaded into the back seat of the car, and they drove off. And I want to-- they didn't talk about before that. How we tried to escape, and [? thought ?] shouldn't I? And I was screaming at them, but why don't you do it? You don't want the Jews so I want to get out.

But regardless, they drove through a lonely road. I see that lonely road along through the woods. And at one point, they had a talk with each other, and they stopped the car. They turned around and said to us, we decided to let you escape. Coming from the Gestapo, to me that meant immediately [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Shoot you as you're running in fright.

Yes, this was the usual formula. That immediately popped up. But they continued and said, there's a path here through the woods. We will show you how to get across and keep your ears and eyes open. Because after you get out, we will sound the alarm. You will be pursued. If you make it, you're lucky. We'll show you. They asked us to get out. One of

them got out of the car, took us across the road, and into that path across the woods.

Asked us to go, and I refused. I said, no, after you. I didn't want to be shot in the back. He [INAUDIBLE] to see him. He understood, smiled, proceeded. And we followed to a clearing. The end of the woods. And there he starting saying, yeah. It was a large plain. And he said that all the way down there, there were three road lamps.

He said one of them is on a French road. The two others are German. And across the plain it was a little hilly, and there was a railroad track. He said, well, when you get to the railroad track, you have [INAUDIBLE] to cross it. By the time you get on the other side, you will have lost the lights. It's over there, but there are other lights too. If you find the one light, and you make it, fine. In the meantime, we'll sound the alarm. And again, he said, keep your ears and eyes open.

And he went back. And exactly what he said. We made it over the tracks. After that, we didn't know what was what, which lights was-- because there were too many. We finally made it to a road. We got up there. It was raining. And now, we marched along that road. We didn't know whether it was a French road or a German road.

And it was about 1 o'clock in the morning. And there were people also walking on the road as we were coming closer to a village and to a town, which was very unusual. What was unusual is that this happened to be one night where for us to be on the road was not unusual because it was All Saints day.

And on that night, people come from different areas to visit cemeteries. That was the one night, the one night in the year probably when it was not unusual. So now, we got into a little town. And I wanted to somehow get some vehicle. I knew that we couldn't get to a train. Train station, they ask for documentation. Bus, documentation. And at that time, the French would turn everybody over to the Germans. I repeat. The French in Alsace-Lorraine would turn everybody over to the Germans.

This was before the German occupation of France.

This was before the war.

Before the war, yeah.

But what the French did during the war is another thing which I would like to talk to you about.

Now, when you say they would turn everybody over to the Germans, did they mean all German nationals or Jews alone or who?

Those who did not have legal papers, entry papers or visas. Neither of us had that. Though I was a resident of France at that time. But my residency was taken away in my Polish passport by the Poles. I was stateless. So we had to get out of Alsace-Lorraine. How?

I asked some people on the street at 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the morning. Whatever it was. I asked them for whatever name I said. Mr [? Durang ?] or whatever it is. And I said, no, there's nobody here by that name. What does he do? Oh, he rents out cars. He's in the car service. No, there isn't anybody here that town. No, I don't know anybody. There's one in the next town, but that's not his name.

I said, but what is his name? That's how I got the name of somebody who had a car in the next town, and this is how we got into the next town. I woke him up and asked him to drive us to Paris, which he did.

He drove us to our cousin, to my cousin in Paris, who lives now, incidentally, and who still has the apartment in Paris and lives in Tel Aviv. [INAUDIBLE].

And what and why those two Gestapo officials let us out, whether they had the feeling just hunting-- yes-- to see if we can be caught or not, whether they had other plans, whatever it was, of course, I could never find out. I was sometimes wondering later on, especially after the [war when I was so specialized in catching Gestapo officials and war criminals,

when I was with the United States Army counter-intelligence, I said, what would happen if I catch one or both of them? How will I treat them? I was wondering. And it didn't happen. But I thought that I would treat them for what they did.

I know there was one Gestapo official in Munich. I felt though he wasn't even part of Gestapo. I couldn't find anything. He was really a bureaucrat. And himself, he didn't do any-- with all my investigation, didn't do anything.

Therefore, I had him work for me, a Gestapo official, which worked very fine because whenever we had people arrested and they were waiting to be interrogated, I would put them in there. And of course, they-- and after a while, it was his turn. So he came and then told me he was there and gave me the history.

Later on, two years later, I had a note from him that he was put away in a camp by some [? CSC ?] officer. I went and got him out. But that was a singular case, a singular case.

I remember also a singular case-- no, not so singular, but the case of the first war criminal I met. That was shortly after I joined the US army in combat in the Vosges. I captured an SS colonel. I still have his picture.

And the first thing, when you capture somebody, is you ask them for [GERMAN]. All Germans-- I don't know whether you're familiar with it-- unlike Americans, who have the dog tags-- name, serial number, and that's it, and rank maybe-- with Germans, they have a military passport. Every one of them carries a military passport called [GERMAN].

It was with a picture, and with the whole military history, and promotions and everything. [GERMAN] So you have a prisoner. You ask for their [GERMAN].

And then if you know the history, the German military history and units, you get a good picture of what they did and where they were. And then they had also, sometimes, the decorations there. Very often-- I never found out why-- practically all of them had pornographic literature, which they carried-- very pornographic.

In this and in the case of the SS colonel, as I went through his [GERMAN], there was a-- and I saw his decorations, there was one sheet of citation, decoration, which stated how and when he was to head up the Gestapo in Katowice. He rounded up the Jews-- men, women, and children-- and how he not only did he order the execution, but how he, himself, participated in shooting them, for which he received the decoration. This is what I read in France in the Vosges.

It affected me. I started ordering him to do things which I remember what has-- waht has been done to me, unto me. I used to be tortured. But I asked him to do exercises and bending and [INAUDIBLE]

And I was saying-- and with a picture of Hitler to say, [GERMAN] I thank. For all this, I thank my fuhrer.

Can we come back to where you were arriving. Did you come to Paris?

Yes. In '38.

'38, after you had escaped-- or gotten away from Gestapo.

Gotten away from the Gestapo, yes. And this was just a few days before Kristallnacht, when I arrived in Paris. And from there, we went to Nice. And as I said earlier, we lived in Nice when the war broke out.

Maybe I could talk about what happened in France, what happened in France and the Vichy. In a country that was officially neutral, Vichy France was a neutral country, like Switzerland, or Sweden, whatever, meaning with the of embassies from all over the world. The United States embassy was in Vichy. The United States consulates, and Marseille, and so on, and other countries.

In neutral country of Vichy had established concentration camps, like La Vernet, where I was, which was-- which was run by the French, on a total starvation diet, there were some prisoners who had been there from Dachau. We said that there was no comparison. Much was in the French camp, La Vernet.

The conditions in La Vernet was once described in a book by Koestler called the Scum of the Earth. But that was at a time when the French confined so-called enemy aliens, like Jews, who were refugees, from Germany were thrown in there. Notice that they didn't call it a concentration camp but just a detention camp.

Were these camps are established right after the German occupation, or were they [INAUDIBLE]?

Actually, these camps were established in-- I think in '38, before the war, before-- to keep Spanish refugees and refugees from the Civil War. That was French hospitality to those who had fought against Franco, to put them into camps.

But when the war broke out, then those camps became detention camps for so-called enemy aliens. Mostly, they rounded up, the French rounded up, the Jews who had lived in France since 1933 as refugees from the Nazis-- rounded them up, took them out of their homes, and threw them into camps, parents of those young men who were there who fought for France. After the collapse of France, some of those camps, especially La Vernet was turned into a concentration camp.

Did these camps later become holding camps for Auschwitz and extermination camps?

These camps later became emptied and not as holding camps, but when was deported to Drancy.

And in some cases, here, you have, for instance, a man and in France by the name of Bousquet And I think that he was responsible for the deportation of tens of thousands, of thousands of men, women, and children who had asked the Germans, what do I do with a few thousand children, Jewish children, whose parents already are deported? Could they deport them separately? The Germans hadn't done that yet. [INAUDIBLE].

Nothing is being done yet. He's indicted now for crimes against humanity and doesn't hear about it.

Who indicted him? The French, or the Israelis? Or who?

There was somebody else by the name of [? LeGuey, ?] who was responsible for the same deportations. And for years, he was not even indicted until this year. He conveniently died in Paris.

After his death, the French courts finally decided to indict him after his death for crimes against humanity, in which case the Serge Klarsfeld jumped on it, and said now we have a case and used it as an indictment against Bousquet for crimes against humanity. But very little is happening in France because there's so much, and too much still kept under the rug by the French.

But to get back to Vichy France, in July and August of 1942, the French carried out huge raids on Jewish homes, rounded up Jewish families-- men, women, and children-- all over Vichy France, out of their homes, out of hotels, a lot of hospitals, out of surgery rooms, out of cafes, and restaurants, and on the streets, all by the French-- there was not one German there-- all under the very noses and the ears of the representatives of the so-called-- so-called-- so-called "civilized world," like the United States embassy and consulates.

They were rounded up by the French in a neutral country, thrown into a so-called deportation camp called Les Milles, right next to Aix-en-Provence It's practically part of Aix-en-Provence now, near Marseille.

I was brought in there at the time in chains-- in chains-- to that camp. And there, cattle cars were brought in, and they were loaded and deported to Drancy and Auschwitz, never to come back, carried out by the French and only by the French-- there was no one German there-- in a neutral country.

The only ones I remember were tried-- tried and showed some human interest in what was going on with the representatives of the American Friends Society, the Quakers, in Marseille. They went into the camp, especially one lady. I wish I could remember her name.

Was she American?

Yes. Yes. Eventually, after my escape from that camp, after six weeks of having survived all the deportations, each time, a different story of how to [? have ?] survived, but they couldn't find me inside the camp until I finally escaped. And it was a dramatic escape.

I went to see her. And all I had on me were my documents. I wanted her to keep a safe-keeping until the war was over, if I could make it. And she said that it's against the law for her to accept it, but she did make an exception and took my documents.

I gave her the name of my relatives here in this country. We had uncles, aunts, and cousins, my cousins-- first cousins in Los Angeles. My uncle and aunt had come to this country in 19-- way before World War I, the only ones, only relatives on my mother's side.

She took my papers. But not long after, the Germans occupied it, they went into the-- they raided her offices and took everything, including all my documents. That was France. There was no reaction, no reaction on the part of the United States or other countries, in a neutral country.

Did the free French do anything to help the Jews? They helped those who joined and fought.

Is that why you joined, because you thought that this was the only way that you could be saved yourself?

I beg your pardon?

Is this why you joined?

I joined to fight. After my escape from that deportation camp, I became very active in the French resistance.

May I ask you a question first? I'm sorry. What happened to the girl that you--

That's a long story.

Maybe.

She was, at the end of the war, caught-- no, not at the end of the war, at the time of the invasion in southern France. She was with an agent, a German agent, but an allied agent, driving down to meet Americans-- got caught by the last-minute resistance people right north of the Riviera.

They took everything away from her. They shot him right on the spot and put her in jail. I found out about it. And at the end of the war, I went down-- there was a niece-- and got her out.

Coming back to your, to when you joined the resistance-- I

After my escape from the deportation camp, I still had my run-in with Bobby. I got away from him. I'm not through with that fear yet.

A week ago, I saw the prosecutor about it. I wanted to know what he meant by saying that. It's unlikely-- unlikely though true. It's something that has been totally misinterpreted in subtitles by [INAUDIBLE] in his film. I have no other choice but suing them right now.

What did they try to do? Did they try to cover up what he had done, or what?

What?

When you say that one of the prose--

That's a different story. OK. How did you encounter Barbie?

It has something to do with your question before. At that time, I was already very active in the French secret army. I was successful, also, in recruiting French young people into the French-- into the French secret army in the name of French patriotism. They called me a patriot.

It was a favorable time because the Vichy government had promulgated the law of what they called a STO-- STO, which was a sort of draft, sending young French people to Germany to work and to relieve Germans so that they can go fight. So anybody who wouldn't go would be AWOL.

And we were able to give them and tell them that they had an option. If they go to Germany, if they follow the draft, then they choose to fight with the Nazis. The other option is to fight with us against them-- one of the two.

And many joined us, many whose parents well pro-Nazi, French parents, and still joined us. So I was very successful in doing that. I wanted to be more successful in doing it with young Jews.

I went to the Jewish, to the Zionist Organization in Grenoble. Though I had quite a few friends who joined me. And they wanted to stay here escaped from a deportation camp hiding, is risking being caught and deported.

It's better to fight. To be deported means death. If one wants to die, it's better to fight, to die fighting. The Zionist Organization in Grenoble, at that time, understood it but no, we cannot separate families. We cannot do it.

I tried to do the same thing in Lyon. I went on a date when everybody wanted to get relief from the committee, a Jewish committee, the UGIF, Union G n rale des Isra lites de France. That place was raided. It was the first big raid by Barbie, and his Gestapo, and that committee. I got caught there.

I had a strange premonition, strange premonition, for somebody who never believed in premonitions, for somebody who never believed in anything that couldn't be rationally explained. I went to that building. I walked up the stairs. And walking up the stairs I had a strong premonition, a strong feeling not to go. It stopped me. I couldn't understand it.

And I kept going. I dismissed it. And it became heavier, and it stopped me again. I looked around to see if there was anything-- anything that could have made me think that way. Nothing. It was quiet. Nothing-- everything normal. I kept going.

Then it stopped me sharply. And I had that, inner feeling-- should I call it a voice-- of, don't go. The Gestapo's there. For those who feel the way I felt up to that point in my life-- and hear me now-- it may sound like nonsense. But I still have to tell the story. That is how I felt.

And that didn't make any sense to me because I thought, if there's any danger-- there was no talk about Gestapo yet. The Germans had now occupied Vichy France in November-- again, November of 1942. This was February 9 of 1943. And I hadn't heard from the Gestapo yet.

If there was any danger, it would have been the French-- French police, the [? guardmobile, ?] or the Feldpolizei, or the SS or whatever, but not Gestapo yet. So I ridiculed it.

I thought, well, what's the matter with me? Well, that doesn't mean that I should turn around and go away and then I'll come-- I'll come back and tell my friends, well, I went to-- to talk to the young Jews to join and to fight, but I didn't make it because I heard voices-- this is how I talked to myself. So I dismissed it. I ridiculed it.

I walked up. I came to the floor. I didn't go in. I was listening. And then I felt like a coward. I said, well, all right, I'm not going in. I'll just listen and just go to the door.

I went through the door, listened. Nothing. Nothing. So now I'm standing in front of the door and said, all right. And I'm going, I'm not going in. I'll just open it a little bit and peek. If there's something, I will run.

I felt-- again, I felt completely like a coward. And I thought that this is a scene. If I start listening to voices, I may as well give up what I'm doing. I opened the door a little bit. As the door's being opened from inside, an arm-- I see those boots. The arm reaches out, grabs me by the neck, pulls me in, and says, [GERMAN]. And there was [? God. ?]

It was a lesson to me. After that, the very few times I had premonitions, I never ridiculed them again. In some cases, I may have acted [INAUDIBLE].

And I didn't bother finding proof whether there was danger or not, but I didn't find. In some cases, and especially during the war it happened. Premonitions have a strange way. Strange ways.

We have a cliffhanger here because we're at the end of this tape. And I would like very much to continue at another time to tell the rest of the story. Thank you very much.

Thank you.

We'll continue.