

-TITLE-PAUL NIEDERMANN
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00:00:00 I am Paul Niedermann. I am going to be 63. I was born in Germany, in the city of Karlsburg. I was born in "27, that is, before Hitler. (on the Rhine)

00:00:30 My parents were from that area. They were Jews, in a Jewish community, of about 3,500 people. My father's name was Albert, my mother's Freda (Frieda?)

00:01:00 We lived there with my grandparents. My father and grandfather were both employees of the Jewish community My grandfather was in charge of the synagogue and my father was in charge of the Jewish cemetery council.

00:01:30 At time, the city had about 150,000 people. Today, it is much larger, almost 300,000 people.

00:02:00 It used to be the capital of Baden. When I was six, in '33, Hitler took over.

00:02:30 Everybody was scared, but nobody imagined what was going to happen. As far as I was concerned, the real problems started a few years later.

00:03:00 In '35, the Germans started with the Nurenberg laws. For me it meant that I could no longer go to the German schools - I had started in "33

00:03:30 It took a little while, but the community organized Jewish schools. There was no problem with teachers, because Jews could not teach in the German schools.

00:04:00 Later, there were a lot of suicides - doctors, lawyers judges - they couldn't work anymore.

00:04:30 A little later the emigration started. But it was hard - countries didn't want to let them in.

00:05:00 People went to Portugal, to England, France. I know now that many people went to the United States, and to what now is Israel.

00:05:30 In the Jewish school, the teaching of foreign language was important -,Hebrew and English.

00:06:00 Running a Jewish school was not easy. In '38 was Crystal night when all the synagogues were destroyed.

00:06:30 Also stores, apartments. That was when my father was deported to Dachau.

Q: What was the thinking in the Jewish community as to why the Germans were turning on the Jews?

00:07:00 I was too young then to remember. But one thing I do remember. My father was in the German army during WWI. He was decorated, and he was heavily wounded.

00:07:30 He belonged to the veteran's organization, and they always heard that they deserved the gratitude of the country. He did not believe they could do anything to him.

00:08:00 He was wrong. Part of my family migrated in '38. But my parents wouldn't leave my grandparents alone.

00:08:30 Then, we didn't have the money, and after Crystal night, we didn't have the papers. The doors were really closed.

00:09:00 So the Jewish school did not run smoothly. After Crystal night, there was no place for the school. They kept chasing us all over the place.

00:09:30 All together, considering the interruptions, I didn't have more than two years of school. Then began the war against France.

00:10:00 Our house was only 4 miles from the border because we were on the Rhine. So we could follow the whole thing.

00:10:30 Then France surrendered. I saw the big parade in our town for the German army when it came back.

00:11:00 On Oct. 22, 1940, we were arrested by three policemen from the Gestapo; it was three o'clock in the morning. We were allowed only a suitcase to carry.

00:11:30 We were put in a truck and taken to the railway station. We were kept there, underground, for 24 hours. All day long, others were brought in.

00:12:00 Q: Try to recall how you felt, as a young person, when the Germans won that was against France.

00:12:30 We lived in Germany, but we were not Germans. They had taken our papers. How do you expect a boy of eight to know what the war meant?

00:13:00 I had to deal everyday with the Hitler Youth chasing us and trying to harm us.

00:13:30 I think mostly we had no choice. There was no choice.

00:14:00 It was really a police state. From '35 on, we didn't have any contact with non-Jewish Germans.

00:14:30 No one would play with us. In those days, there was no ghetto in German cities, but you lived in a ghetto.

00:15:00 No German could afford to talk to Jewish people. So we lived in a real ghetto.

00:15:30 To get back to Oct. 20, 1940, we stayed underground in that station for 20 hours. In the middle of the next night, we were told to climb up, and there were different trains.

00:16:00 We were packed into the trains. I did not know then, but on the same day, they arrested all the Jews in the provinces of Baden and

00:16:30 Nine long trains. And we didn't know where we were going.

00:17:00 Later on, people who had traveled, said that were travelling west, which was unusual.

00:17:30 We were going west to France. None knew why.

00:18:00 At that time, there were concentration camps in Germany, but not extermination camps. So no one knew why.

00:18:30 Now we know it was a rehearsal for the Final Solution. All the Jews in these two provinces were arrested. and no one knew anything about it.

00:19:00 So went all across France.

Q: How many people in a car' box cars or regular cars?

00:19:30 Both kinds. I don't know how many people; it was just jammed. No water, no nothing.

00:20:00 There were German SS on the tops of the cars. When we had to stop for coal, they shouted that no one was to get out of the cars.

00:20:30 Once in a while, the train stopped and nobody, maybe the Red Cross, gave us some water. After three days, the train stopped.

00:30:00 We had diseases break out there.

00:30:30 Dysentery, lots of people had it. Lots of bodies people died of the disease, or fell into holes and drowned.

00:31:00 We just had to sit there. Nothing to do, nothing to hope for. Things became organized.

00:31:30 Some organizations like the Swiss Red Cross tried to help but it was hard to do.

00:32:0 The following Spring, we were told that we would be moved to enable the reunion of families. But that was a lie, they just wanted to make it easy to get us on the trucks. So we were transferred to the other side of the Pyrenees.

00:32:30 We were transferred to another camp that had been built for the French army, but now there was no longer an army.

00:33:00 It was a huge camp. We met there thousands of people from all over.

00:33:30 There were some Germans there that we could talk to. And there was Yiddish - Germans don't speak Yiddish, but it is very close to German.

00:34:00 That is how I learned Yiddish. (Shows on a map where they camp was located.)

00:34:30 (On the map, he traces the trip from his home to the various camps.)

00:35:00 Continues to show locations on map.

00:35:30 There is one thing that happened in that camp.

00:36:00 We were introduced to young people from an organization, OSE, Ordre de Secours Enfants. Their purpose was to get as many children out of camp as possible.

00:36:30 My parents were contacted and they agreed to let us go, because no one knew what was going to happen.

00:37:00 Early one morning, a small band, eight of us, escaped with one woman, to where a van was waiting, and we left.

00:37:30 We arrived at a children's home, .They had to get us cleaned first of all, we had lice and fleas and everything.

00:38:00 My height was meters and I weighed at that time. Maybe I can get you a picture.

00:38:30 Shows set of pictures. I was able to steal these out of a box. My mother is in one of them.

00:39:00 This is a picture of me, and the others are pictures of the camp.

00:39:30 At the camp, there was a school, but instruction was in French. So I left to look for food - going through garbage cans.

00:40:00 Leaving my parents was pretty tough.

00:40:30 My grandparents were sent to a camp for older people. My grandfather died there, but my grandmother survived.

00:41:00 She survived because she had diabetes - she had nothing to eat, so she survived.

00:41:30 So, from that time on, we had something to eat everyday, which was something new.

00:42:00 About a month and a half later I had to make the first decision of my life. The American government had allowed the Quakers . . .

00:42:30 to organize five groups of kids to go to the United States. But the kids had to be under 12, and had to have family in the United States to take care of them.

00:43:00 So they came to me and asked if my brother could go he was 11 and 11 months. And two months later the United States was in the war, so this was the last chance.

00:43:30 Only four kids were able to leave, and my brother was one of them. I didn't see him again for 15 years. I was really lonesome.

00:44:00 But I knew that at least he would be safe. We knew the address of my uncle and aunt in Baltimore, and we gave it to them.

00:44:30 He had a long trip - he went to Portugal, to Morocco, I don't know where else, and he landed in New York and they picked him up there. From then on he had a regular life.

00:45:00 In the Fall of '42, the Germans entered the south of France, so these Jewish homes couldn't be anymore.

00:45:30 We had to move pretty often. There were the police, the Gestapo, and the French collaborators.

00:46:00 I would say the course I studied was general geography. We were in so many different places.

00:46:30 Q: How did you travel?

A: At the time, I couldn't travel alone. I spoke a little French but with such a German accent, anyone would know I was German. So the Jewish organization had people travel with me.

00:47:00 I owe my life to them. One of the ladies - she drove the van from Montpellier.

00:47:30 She agreed, I was 14, I had no papers, I could not go to school. He husband had a chicken farm, and I worked for that man.

00:48:00 That's where I learned French. He gave me a book and a dictionary, and I learned to read French.

00:48:30 He spoke only French to me. I had to learn it, it was a necessity. I think I do not have an accent in French.

00:49:00 In 1943, I got a letter from that woman and her husband. They had created another home for Jewish children near Lyons.

00:49:30 That famous home at _____ where Barbie had arrested 44 children and had them deported.

00:50:00 They needed help to raise food, because they had to feed these children, they didn't have coupons. My best friend from Germany and I . . .

00:50:30 agreed, and they sent a young women, she is still alive, to bring us. It was quite a trip.

00:51:00 We had to go about half way across France. We could never have done it ourselves.

00:51:30 It involved a lot of people -,anonymous. The girl who came for us, she was a daughter of a women who knew about the home.

00:52:00 They were normal, regular French people who wanted to help.

00:52:30 One day, a gendarme came up to me and said that someone had told them about a tall boy, that was me, and I would be arrested. At that time, the Germans had begun to arrest Jewish boys at 15.

00:54:00 So the manager said that I had better take my suitcase and go. Somebody took me, I don't remember who, by bike, by bus, to Grenoble.

00:54:30 There was an organization, Jewish scouts, they had a hiding place, in an attic, where there were eight of us, from different places.

00:55:00 We were inside all the time. They wanted to get us close to the border, to save us. We were all about my age, 15, and in danger.

00:55:30 So we had our bags on our books, like all the other kids, Scouts going to camp. We were brought close to the Swiss border, Geneva.

00:56:00 There was a Catholic priest who was helping with Jewish children and we had to stay in his church during the day until dark.

00:56:30 Then a Frenchman came, he was called a "pasteur" and he took us eight to the border, where he cut the barbed wire.

00:57:00 We went through the barbed wire, down a slope to a brook. On the other side of the brook was Switzerland.

00:57:30 We had to wait until the guards passed and moved away, and that was the time for us to go through.

00:58:00 It was dark, 2 o'clock in the morning. The pasteur had told us where to go. We walked to a small town, a suburb of Geneva, and looked for the police station. But everything was closed.

00:58:30 We knocked on the door; there was a gendarme living there with his wife. They took us in, gave us chocolate, coffee, and he called police headquarters. They came with a van and picked us up.

00:59:00 I spent the night in Jail. The next day they took us to a camp, but it had nothing to do with the camps we had before.

00:59:30 I was there for a while and then I was transferred to another camp - it was a big house. I was there for a while and then I was asked if I would go to a children's home.

01:00:00 It was run by the same people who had run the home in France. I stayed there until the end of the war. Then I had to make a decision - we couldn't stay in Switzerland. They didn't want us.

01:00:30 I could have gone back to Germany, but that was unthinkable. I had been in touch with my family in the States. I had written them, telling them I was alive and where I was.

01:01:00 I knew by that time that my parents was gone East. That was May or June of 1945.

01:01:30 I knew, through organizations, that my parents had been deported to the East, and that I would not see them again. My family in the States wanted me to come there, but I felt obligations to the Jewish organizations that had saved my life.

01:02:00 After the war, there were a lot of children with deported parents, and no one to look after them. The people from Switzerland, who ran the home, had come back to France. Most of the children were headed for Israel.

01:02:30 The children had to learn to do agricultural work because they were going to a kibbutz. The organization needed help from a lot of people, and I thought I should help.

00:03:00 I worked in the Paris suburbs. For the first year, we had to educate people my age about how to teach.

00:03:30 I was 20 at this time. I stayed on until most of the children were gone, in '48.

01:04:00 Q: I imagine you must have heard horrible stories from these kids?

A: O yes. They were from all over, from Russia, Poland and they had escaped, or lost parents.

01:04:30 Then it was time to do something for my own life. I settled in Paris. The friends I had, we had a hard time talking about our experiences.

END OF TAPE I

01:05:00 It was hard to talk about. It was time to forget. It was like most people who have been through a war they don't want to talk about that.

01:05:30 Then in 1983 Klaus Barbie was arrested and brought to France for trial. He was head of the Gestapo in France.

01:06:00 Q: Did you know about him when you were escaping?

A: No, I didn't know about him until after the war. I didn't speak French.

01:06:30 I was on vacation when he was arrested and brought back. A friend told me about it. He reminded me that I had been at where he was.

01:07:00 I drove back to Paris immediately and I tried to find people from the organization, O.S.E., that was still doing welfare work.

01:07:30 I volunteered to give any help. It took three years to prepare that trial.

01:08:00 I was asked to be a witness.

01:08:30 Trial began in '87. Shows newspaper with story of his testimony

01:09:00 The trial was important to me because I felt that if the survivors don't testify, in 20 years none of us will be here.

01:09:30 So now I feel I have to tell my story whenever I am asked.

Q: How do you feel about people who say it never happened, or people exaggerate?

A: I just keep asking, "Tell me where my parents are?"

01:10:00 That is the question I am left with. I have people who witnessed the death of my parents.

01:10:30 My mother was killed in Auschwitz my father in . Of the whole family, only my brother and me survived.

01:11:00 Q: How did you feel about the German people when-this was happening?

A: This is a tough question, because I have always thought that you cannot generalize.

01:11:30 I personally know Germans who were not Nazis, who saved Jewish people.

01:12:00 You have to be pretty careful.

01:12:30 I am doing interesting things with German people, in Germany. The young people, the problem is, they don't know about what happened.

01:13:00 When I have the opportunity, I go to German schools and talk to students. I do it because I think it is one way to prevent this from happening again.

01:13:30 How does your brother feel about things, since he has been divorced from the scene?

01:14:00 A: He has blanked out those two years. He remembers ,many things of our family life in Germany, but he blanked out those two years.

01:14:30 I took him back to places where we had been and he cannot remember anything. I have know other people like that.

01:15:00 He wanted to forget the whole thing and became an American entirely. Someone asked him where he was from and he said, "Baltimore." That's it.

01:15:30 He speaks German like a 10 year-old boy. He never read a book in German.

01:16:00 Q: As you look back at that part of your life, how do you feel about it?

01:16:30 (pauses) I'm not sure. I have had a hard time getting over hunger feelings.

01:17:00 If you get hungry between breakfast and lunch, it drove me crazy, for years. It is better now.

01:17:30 Its 40, 45 years later. There are other things. Rats, When someone talks about rats, it bothers me. We had to fight with them. These things are difficult to explain.

01:18:00 Q: Going back to the barracks in France, how many people were in them?

A: They were built for 100 people, but there were many more people in them.

01:18:30 The second camp, the barracks were huge. But it is hard to know how many.

01:19:00 Q: As a young person, can you recall how you felt about the way human beings were treated?

A: In those situations, the main concern was where am I going to find something to eat.

01:19:30 There is no concern with philosophy when you are hungry. As I said, I didn't go to the school at the first camp because I was hungary,

01:20:00 Its pretty hard to explain this to someone who hasn't been through it. One more part of my story. Two years ago, my native city . . .

01:20:30 They decided it was time to find out who was still alive and who wanted to talk with them.

01:21:00 They had big posters in four newspapers, in German and Yiddish. That thing worked very well.

01:21:30 We don't have a German paper here, but I heard of it from my aunt in Baltimore who saw it in a New York newspaper and sent me a copy. I wrote a letter to the Mayor saying I was interested.

01:22:00 I said, however, I wanted to speak as well as to listen. They said OK. They found approximately 350 people.

01:22:30 But about 95% were people who migrated before '38. Very few were from the 945 people deported West.

01:23:00 I learned that a few years ago. None of us knew what happened after we left. So we met there. I can say it was a major event in my life.

01:23:30 I never met one of my fellow citizens, German Jews. I know now there were two of us, in France.

01:24:00 They are scattered all over the world. The meeting was a major event for me.

01:24:30 We had a good connection with the mayor and the city council. None of those people is old enough to have been involved.

01:25:00 If it had been held 15 years earlier, none would have attended. There were still too many Nazis in charge of things. You look at an old man, who knows, he might have killed your parents.

01:25:30 They are all younger than we are. The only thing I want is that they know what happened. We are still 12 who are alive from my class.

01:26:00 Q: Did you tell them what happened to you?

A: O yes. They all know. And we keep in touch. this last summer, I had old friend from school here.

01:26:30 Q: What did the people in your home town think of your story?

A:They knew the main outline.

01:27:00 But they didn't know the details. For example, they didn't know I was the one local kid who testified at the Barbie trial.

01:27:30 Let me show you something. This is a history of the Jewish community there, which is not unusual.

01:28:00 The second was done by a journalist. The story is not that different from other cities, except that we had been deported West.

01:28:30 He has done a tremendous job. It is full of documents. It tells the story from 1933 to now. I learned a lot about what happened before we were deported.

01:29:00 I learned a great deal that I was too young to know. Stories about what happened to half-Jews; other terrible stories.

01:29:30 They think they didn't sell enough volumes because it was too expensive. But now, for the 50th anniversary of our detention, they are bringing out another edition.

01:30:00 They are bringing out a paper addition, and will send it to the schools. Now, if you have any other questions.

01:30:30 Q: Can you capsulize your story for us?

A: Certainly, if life in Germany wasn't what it was for Jews . . .

01:31:00 I wouldn't be living in France, I wouldn't have had to learn a new language, a new culture. It affected my whole life. And my brother would not have become an American.

01:31:30 He served in Korea, in the Marine Corps. Don't tell him he is anything but an American.
.END.