

[Interview conducted through a translator]

[0:00:00]

- Robert Buckley:* We're in Pfastatt, France, which is near Mulhouse in Alsace. And we're doing the interview with one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Louis Arzt, who was taken as a young man because he was one of Jehovah's Witnesses or the Bibelforscher. Would you please have him tell us his full name and when he was born?
- Louis Arzt:* His was born 1930, the third of November and his name is Arzt, Louis.
- Robert Buckley:* And just have him spell his last name in case the paperwork should get lost.
- Louis Arzt:* It's A-R-Z-T.
- Robert Buckley:* OK and what was the name of the town that he was born and his parents' names.
- Louis Arzt:* In Mulhouse. The father is Charles Arzt, Ann Mueller.
- Robert Buckley:* And what was his mother's maiden name?
- Louis Arzt:* Mueller
- Robert Buckley:* All right and how many brothers and sisters did he have and would he name them in order of their age?
- Louis Arzt:* The oldest one is Charles Arzt. The second one was Peter Arzt and the youngest one, Louis.
- Robert Buckley:* Very good and what was it like in France from what he remembers here in Alsace in 1938-39 before the Germans came into France? What was the atmosphere, the attitude of the people?
- Louis Arzt:* He said he doesn't recall anything of this period of time. He was too young. And in reality, he only remembers what happened once the Germans were here. His parents became Jehovah's Witnesses in 1941, and that's about the time when he started to have memories about the situation.
- Robert Buckley:* OK and what began to happen to him and other Jehovah's Witnesses because they were Jehovah's Witnesses, as a result of the German control?

- Louis Arzt:* He said the situation was one that started after they got in contact with the Bible. They had the feeling that the war situation may speed up because it was wartime, you know. And so they took a stand very fastly [sic], quickly, with no study. I mean, they only had contact in two or three weeks.
- [0:05:00] And they became Witnesses under this condition. And then suddenly, from one day to the other, they took a stand of neutrality in school. So this showed up because before they were not neutral. They became neutral suddenly, and that's why the situation came up so quickly.
- Robert Buckley:* OK, now does he have some pictures there of his family? *[Phone ringing]* All right, so you took your stand in regard to neutrality. What began to happen to you then, and what happened to your parents?
- Louis Arzt:* They took a rapid stand. They went up and spoke up to the teacher saying, "From today on, we don't salute anymore and we don't participate anymore."
- Robert Buckley:* What was the attitude of the schoolteacher when he approached her like that?
- Louis Arzt:* She was very negative and said, "We will get in touch with you later on."
- Robert Buckley:* Was she a sympathizer with the Nazi movement?
- Louis Arzt:* Apparently, yes. She was German. She was a German teacher. Apparently, she was Nazi-inclined. But anyhow, she didn't like the Witnesses. This was obvious.
- Robert Buckley:* And what began to happen to your parents at this time?
- Louis Arzt:* The Gestapo would come to the house to search for literature from the Witnesses, and they even took the Bible away. But his father told them that they had no right to take the Bible away. There was a German law saying that every house could have a Bible. So the SS was throwing the Bible back on the table and saying – showed him and saying, "You know the law's very good." And he left the Bible and took everything else.
- Robert Buckley:* What type of work did his father do and did it impact his father's work?

- Louis Arzt:* He was working in a factory as a worker. And the day when the three children were taken away, the same day they took the three children away from the house, he got tremendous shock. He got sick, and then he only was able to work part-time for the rest of his life.
- Robert Buckley:* Well, now, what happened to the father?
- Louis Arzt:* He got a shock, a nervous shock. No, no, a shock.
- Robert Buckley:* A nervous shock.
- Louis Arzt:* Shock, a nervous shock, and so he had only the capacity of working part-time.
- Robert Buckley:* And then what happened to your mother?
- Louis Arzt:* She took it better. She didn't get sick on it. But, of course, she was suffering a lot because three children are taken away the same day. It's not easy for a mother.
- Robert Buckley:* How did you feel? Try to remember back how you felt as a young person being taken.
- [0:10:00] Were you afraid, nervous? What was going through your mind? Can you remember those thoughts?
- Louis Arzt:* He said you have to take into consideration two different things. They had a strong love for Jehovah but it was also the obedience to the parents. And since the parents insisted of the neutrality, they took a stand, you see, because of – well, true - God was there, but it seems that the impact of the parents was stronger.
- Robert Buckley:* What happened to him the first day when he went into – when he was picked up? Let's put it that way. Does he remember the events of that day? Did they come at school and pick him up, or did they pick him up from home, him and his brothers and sisters?
- Louis Arzt:* Three days, three or four days before the day set for the departure, the parents got the news that they have to get the children ready for that day. And the particular day the Gestapo would come and pick [up] the three children, the three boys, and bring them down to the station. There was a judge with them for children.

- Robert Buckley:* And what did the judge say? How did the judge feel about them taking away the children?
- Louis Arzt:* He said the judge was human. He had human reactions. He did it against his will. He couldn't do it otherwise. And that same man sometime later helped the father to get the boys out of the place again.
- Robert Buckley:* What was the law or the reason the Gestapo used to take away three children from the parents? Was there some type of a law that they tried to enforce?
- Louis Arzt:* They never found a law that gave them the right to do that. But when they came to arrest the three boys, the father would say: "Don't do that! Take me! Take the parents and don't take children because they are only children."
- And the Gestapo said: "We are not interested in older people. We are interested in the younger ones. The younger ones we want to have."
- Robert Buckley:* Now, how did they treat you on the way to the special school you went to?
- Louis Arzt:* It was correct.
- Robert Buckley:* Was it by train?
- Louis Arzt:* Yes
- Robert Buckley:* And how long?
- Louis Arzt:* About two hours time from here. It's Karlsruhe. It's north of Strasburg.
- [0:15:00]
- Robert Buckley:* Is it in France or in Germany?
- Louis Arzt:* Germany
- Robert Buckley:* In Germany. And when you arrived that day, do you remember the events of what happened to you when you got off the train, if you can tell us that story when you got off the train? Who picked you up? How did they treat you when you got to the special school?

Louis Arzt: It was in this time the same ones that took him from Mulhouse to the train were with him until the penitentiary home in Karlsruhe. And there the director took them in, and from that moment on, they got very bad treatment.

Robert Buckley: What was it like the first day there, if you can remember that?

Louis Arzt: He doesn't recall his feelings.

Robert Buckley: What were some of the things that he had to go through? What time did his day begin in the morning? What were the activities? What type of food did they get, if he could sort of describe that for us?

Louis Arzt: Two and three hours schooling per day, and most of the time was Nazi education. The rest of the time they would work in the field. It was penitentiary home nourishment. It wasn't the best one. There's where the picture comes in because he has lost a lot of weight under this regime.

Robert Buckley: Hold the picture up. OK, if you could bring it closer to the camera lens, much closer. And who is on this picture? If he could explain who the people are on there.

Louis Arzt: There were children who were in the penitentiary home because of misbehavior. And he's in the front of the picture, the same one too. In the back you have the home.

Robert Buckley: One more picture?

Louis Arzt: No

Robert Buckley: Does he remember where these other children were from?

Louis Arzt: Different regions around the section.

Robert Buckley: Now, when it came to Nazi education, what were they trying to indoctrinate you with?

Louis Arzt: He said in the morning at 7 o'clock they would assemble in the courtyard and have the salute, the flag salute. And then they would have _____ information about the front, how the military forces of Hitler went on. And then they would go to work in the field.

[0:20:05]

- Robert Buckley:* Did you receive any beatings, any harsh treatment?
- Louis Arzt:* He said he recalls one day he was – the director, his name is Baumgartner, saw him. He was not saluting the flag. And he called him in his shop. He had a carpentry shop and was beating him up so badly that at noontime he couldn't sit while eating. And all the children would laugh at him because he couldn't sit down. It was blue and red and crushed and awful condition. And the following day, the same man came, put his arm around him and said: "You see, little boy? If you only say once 'Heil Hitler' you will be back at 6 o'clock this evening on your mother's lap. I sign you up, and I put you on the train. You'll go right back to your mother." He said that made him suffer more, even more than beating.
- Robert Buckley:* What happened to your brother and your sister?
- Louis Arzt:* Two brothers.
- Robert Buckley:* Oh, two other brothers rather, excuse me.
- Louis Arzt:* No, they were separated about 30 kilometers away from different homes. They were not together.
- Robert Buckley:* So he was alone, by himself. What were some of the other things that the other children had done in order to be put into this penitentiary home?
- Louis Arzt:* They had not much contact between the children. The only one to whom he really could speak was a young boy who he used to throw stones, and he had hit a person who got blind because of he was hit with a stone, so he came into the penitentiary home for that. But most of the time it was due to this kind of situation.
- Robert Buckley:* Would he explain what the document is he has in his hand? Have him turn in around.
- Louis Arzt:* This is the grades, the grade school book which he has in his hands.
- Robert Buckley:* If he'd open it up and explain?
- Louis Arzt:* So the whole story started off with this remark, which is on the bottom,
[0:25:00] and who says that the schoolboy does not salute the German salute. That is 'Heil Hitler.' This is the first time it's mentioned _____
first the number – the year '42-'43. And this was written the sixth

of February 1943. Then comes the second one a little bit later, which goes on that 'the child continues not to salute and doesn't recite German poetry, doesn't sing German national songs, and doesn't participate in any political undertaking, **national undertaking**.'

Robert Buckley: Can he show the other pages that were in the book, so we can see each of the pages? We'll go from page 1. And this is all describing the fact – these are his grades and that he wouldn't salute?

Louis Arzt: Yeah, these are the grades and on the bottom here you have – on the bottom here is a statement, which I just translated, you see, that he doesn't sing and no poetry and doesn't participate in any German undertaking, national undertaking.

Robert Buckley: And next page, please?

Louis Arzt: Next page, there's nothing there anymore. That's afterwards. It's later '44, 1944.

Robert Buckley: And the last page? Let's see what's on the last page. It's blank?

Louis Arzt: Nothing is mentioned. Only the blank. It's the end of the war. That's why it's blank.

Robert Buckley: As the war began to turn against the Germans, did he notice a change in attitude of the teachers and those in charge at the school, that they became a little bit more lenient?

Louis Arzt: He was not in the penitentiary school anymore by that time because the judge who had brought him over against his will had worked on the case and found a law saying that they were not allowed to bring children in a penitentiary home when they were not 14 of age. So since he was only 13, he was working on it. And after nine months, he could get him out of the place. So he was not in the penitentiary home at the end of the war.

Robert Buckley: Very good. When he was in the penitentiary home, were there occasions when he got together with his two other brothers?

Louis Arzt: Never. Parents came twice.

Robert Buckley: How did he feel when he was released, when the judge was able to get him out? How did he feel when he saw his parents?

Louis Arzt: I was very happy, of course.

- Robert Buckley:* What are some of the other papers that he has there? Could he explain what those other papers are?
- Louis Arzt:* Those are documents that prove that he has been in a place. Please show them the other.
- Robert Buckley:* This document is ...?
- Louis Arzt:* This document is a certificate, which says that he has **freedom**.
- [0:30:00] It's a French document, which was written in 1949 and mentions that he was in the penitentiary home.
- Robert Buckley:* And the other one he has there?
- Louis Arzt:* No, nothing special, no. This is when he came back to France. He had to undergo a medical – this is when the French came back here. He had to undergo a medical investigation, and they found him so tired, they sent him four weeks in the Savoy in the Alps, the French Alps, to recuperate because he was very weak. That's the papers he has there.
- Robert Buckley:* Would he show that?
- Louis Arzt:* This is it. Yeah, it's the result of the _____
- Robert Buckley:* OK, very good. Is there anything that he would like to add and to share with us?
- Louis Arzt:* He would like to convey what he feels about it. He says a child of 13 years of age has no possibility to stand by himself. If he was able to stand up for Bible principles, it is because he got the strength from God, which is a strength which is above human strength. And when he consider[s] this past and things, it is a faith upbuilding experience he had because he learned how to walk with God, and he felt God during this period of time.
- Robert Buckley:* Very good. What do you think today when you hear about the Nazi groups today beginning to grow in number and some of the mistreatment that they're giving other minority groups? What goes through your mind?
- Louis Arzt:* He has a feeling that concerning physical possibility of going again through physical experiences doesn't bring up any troubles in his mind because he has learned in the past how to have faith in God

and in God's help. When he sees what's going on in the world, he brings it back to the Bible principles that in the last time will be hard to deal with, according to what the apostle Paul said to Timothy. And he realized that the Bible is true, that only God's Kingdom can change that. Man cannot change it.

Robert Buckley: Very good. Well, we would like to thank you very much for sharing your childhood experiences with us. The museum, the purpose of it is to help teach other people to show what can happen under forms of government which become oppressive.

[0:35:00]

Louis Arzt: He said he was happy to share and give to the museum this opportunity. It's a privilege for him.

Robert Buckley: And the museum thanks you very much.

[End of Audio]