United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Werner Goldsmith
June 6, 1990
RG-50.030*0084

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Werner Goldsmith, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on June 6, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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

WERNER GOLDSMITH
June 6, 1990

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: To start off with, uh we would like for you to give us your name and where you were born and when you were born, and tell us a little bit...OK...name, address and where you were born…

A: OK. Name and address, where I was born. My name is Werner Goldsmith. Originally it was Goldschmidt (ph). That's the German equivalent of Goldsmith. So it was Werner Goldschmidt in German and of course I've anglicized it to Werner Goldsmith, shortly after my arrival in the United States in the uh fall of 1941. Uh I was born in the city of Erfurt, E - F - U - R - T, which today is in what used to be the German Democratic Republic, soon to be the Reunited Germany. It's the province of Saringia (ph). Uh major city in Saringia (ph), the major city in Saringia of about over two hundred thousand population. Uh about one-third the size of Washington, if you will.

Q: And tell us a little bit about what…

A: Oh, my date of birth...I was born on the 13th November, 1928, in the city of Erfurt.

Q: And then tell us a little bit about what you remember from your youth.

A: Quite a bit from my youth. Now the early years, as I say, the infant years and the toddler years, naturally who can remember those years, which means the first four years one doesn't remember anything or hardly anything. So my remembrance starts roughly in 1933 I suppose which is also the beginning, as chance would have it, of the Third Reich and uh so that's when my uh thinking starts, and as I think back on 1933 and 1934, I cannot think of anything unpleasant that happened to me in those early years.

Q: Do you remember going to school…

A: No. In '33 and '34 I wasn't in school yet. This was pre-school. I mean this was...

Q: Let's go on to where your parents…

A: Uh I was in kindergarten and I had no unpleasant experiences in kindergarten. This would be around 1934. In 1935 I started school in Erfurt, a school called the Schiller (ph) Schule (ph) or the Schiller School on Schiller Street, Schiller Plaza, and this is where I started school in uh around Easter time, 1935. Uh what do I remember there? The first year, 1935, not too unpleasant. 1935. 1936 uh things started to deteriorate as far as Jewish people were concerned and the Third Reich and it became less pleasant in the classroom. I was the only Jewish boy in the in the classroom.…

Q: Do you remember any incidents that…you say it became less pleasant...

A: Well, there were a few times when I was hit. OK. But uh it wasn't assault and battery exactly. I mean I was dealt with in a rude, crude sort of fashion but I wasn't actually uh beaten to the ground or anything like that, but there uh were some very curt, unpleasant behavior. My parents decided to take me out of public school and put me in a private school, which they did, and I spent uh 1937 to '38...anyway in 1937 I was in private school. I never got a chance to really attend gymnasium which I qualified for, the German college prep school, because in 1938 all Jews were driven from the schools...be they faculty, teachers, administrative personnel, students, pupils, young, old...all Jewish people in in the school system was removed so that ended my official schooling in in in Germany, in the Third Reich.

Q: Did...how...how about during this period...can you tell us a little about your family life, your father, your mother...

A: My father was a wholesale salesman, textile salesman. Did a lot of traveling in the province of Saringia and the province of Hefner (ph), which adjoins it to the west. He was gone a lot of the time, so I was really...it was my mother really that was in charge ninety percent of the time, as I remember, because he was gone on his uh business, and so she was running the home and she was running me and very nicely I might say. I had no complaints. I was an only child and I would say I was spoiled, at least the landlady in in in my building, who's still alive, she considered me very much a spoiled child. Spoiled brat.

Q: Do you remember any of your friends or…

A: I remember a few, very very slim few little children of which I was one of them and uh these were friends. In fact in my in my family album there are some photos of myself and a few of my childhood friends. My mother took photos and uh so they survive in pictures to this day. But uh I can't remember a hell of a lot. It uh...what I remember wasn't...my home life was not unpleasant. I I can't say...I, in my memoir I pointed out that I had a...my my my mother and my father both tried as much as possible within within their human means to insulate me from the increasingly unpleasant situation for the Jewish people in Germany in the Third Reich which became with, year to year, came in a descending spiral and they insulated me as much as possible and gave me a fairly normal home life and fairly decent life and so I, until 1938, things really were not too bad. I do remember quite vividly though on a number of occasions going to school, still to the old public school. There were the Hitler youth, uniformed Hitler youth, and these were of course the advance, the advance guard of youthful Hilterites and they were were just only too anxious, to willing to beat up on a youngster who was not in uniform, because a youngster not in uniform of a Hitler youth or a Young Pioneer meant one of two things. Either he belonged to a family that was anti-Hitlerean (ph) and didn't want their child to be a Hitler youth, or he was a Jew or gypsy, and if they say a child who was not uniformed, he immediately was to be attacked. So I remember as much as possible of keeping clear of the Hitler youth (laughter), even seeing them a block away would usually mean that I would walk in the opposite direction and so I I managed quite well uh to keep out of their, out of their uh clutches as much as possible.

Q: You mentioned this wasn't until 1938...

A: Until 1938. By 1938 of course I no longer was in school, since all Jews were out of the school, German school, and by then also, early 1938, my father died. Heart condition, very ill for his final six months and so on. Luckily he died because he never would have survived the trip to uh Buchenwald concentration camp and so on. So he died and uh my mother and I then moved shortly thereafter, not immediately, shortly thereafter we moved to Berlin, which as things proved to be a very sensible move. Had we remained in Erfurt neither she or I would have survived the Holocaust. By moving to Berlin we moved into a milleure (ph) that enabled her to make contact which enabled enabled her eventually to place me with a children's transport for France, and enabled her as a widow eventually to get to England and so we both survived by probably for two reasons, moving to Berlin, number one, and her incessant efforts to get us out of that. You see, my father, as I remember him, always was like many other German Jews...he felt that these these uh wild elements, these Nazi elements, would never be able to capture the whole power. They would never be able to descent to what they descended into. And so he always had this optimistic view, and he couldn't get himself to leave Germany. To him Germany was his home and he had no intention of leaving. My mother would have left Germany in 1935 if he had been willing. But anyway, we remained in Germany, and finally she was a widow in '38. We were in Berlin. Her incessant work finally enabled me to get to France with a transport of kids and she, as a widow, eventually to England and thus she saved both our lives.

Q: So then in 1938 you were separated from your mother, is that when it happened?

A: In 1938 we moved to Berlin from Erfurt. I was not separated. In 1939, in 1939 I was separated from my mother, when I was associated with this transport of children. All the children said goodbye on the train platform. For many, for all the children in fact, it was the last time they saw their their parents, because all these married uh folks, these married couples, they couldn't get out. That's it. Most of these children saw...for most of these kids on this transport, around thirty-nine children, thirty-eight of them said goodbye for the final time to their parents on that train platform, taking us to France. By mother being a widow managed to get to England. She survived.

Q: OK. Now let's go back to 1938. You moved to Berlin.

A: Right. We moved to Berlin.

Q: Now...once you're in Berlin...let's, let's go over what happened there. I'm a little little unclear.

A: In Berlin my mother had me placed for those months...I don't know whether it was at the very beginning, but I know I was there for a number of months to the end in Berlin, she placed me with an orphanage called the Awerbuch (ph) Orphanage. Awerbuch. OK. And uh …

Q: Was it basically a Jewish orphanage?

A: Oh it was a Jewish orphanage. Oh yes. In in '38, Jews were not permitted to associate with Aryans. Oh no. That would have been abso...oh disaster for the Jews. And uh so uh this was a Jewish children's home. I can't say that all the children there were orphans. I wasn't an orphan, yet I was accepted by Awerbuch and there were other children who had families...uh par...parents, both parents alive and they were accepted by Awerbuch. In other words, I think this Awerbuch home accepted children whether they were orphans or not, because it was felt that in this orphanage they had some kind of a refuge from what was happening on the streets of Berlin to Jews who were being beaten and trampled on and kicked upon, and with the police looking the other way if they happened to be there. The situation by 1938 was getting out of hand. And late '38 you had this infamous Night of the Breaking Kristall (ph), Kristallnacht it was called in German, and uh that's when they really went went amuck, ran amuck, the Nazis. When they attacked the synagogues and set uh fire to the synagogues, smashed the Jewish shops, vandalized everything they could lay their hands on, beat adults and children when whenever they found someone because by that time adults and children above the age of ten I think or twelve, I'm not sure, had to have a Jewish star so you immediately could identify who was Jewish and who wasn't. So you were living in in a terrible uh nightmare by 1938, but us being in that home, around the clock, we were spared these outrages on Kristall...Kristallnight, which was right in late November...uh, not not...early November, early November 1938. Uh…

Q: Shortly after that you were put on a train...

A: Well, uh then it was 1939. Another month more passed. Months more passed, and again I was in this Awerbuch home, with lots of other kids, Jewish kids. And as I say, Nazis did not invade this Awerbuch home. We found ourselves sort of living like in a, like on a plantation, sort of immunized from the outside, with the outside being a jungle, a developing jungle and we were in this Awerbuch home and uh so we were there during the early months of '39. Things uh like I've read about the pa...you know, looking back upon things, things got from bad to worse and from worse to even worse and but in the Awerbuch home things were relatively quiet and safe because we stayed in that home. We didn't set foot outside for very sensible reasons. And uh finally in the summer of '39, the transport was formed. My mother had succeeded in getting me admitted to this transport and uh that's how I, along with thirty-eight other children, one fine summer day left on this train ride to France. I should also point out that in the year 1938 to '39, my mother lived with a Jewish lady as her uh sub-tenant. In other words, she lived with a Jewish lady on Hector Strasa (ph) in Berlin, West Berlin, un the western part of Berlin. At that time, of course, Berlin was a unified city and on Hector Strasa 21 my mother lived with a Jewish lady whose sub-tenant she was. I can't really tell you what work she did. I really can't tell you.

Q: OK. Then you were put on the transport…

A: Yeah. The kids went on the transport, said goodbye to their parents on the platform and for all of them except one, my mother, was the last time they saw their parents, because they all died in the Holocaust, these these parents. Children left for France and then we arrived in a

place called Cassie (ph) _____, maybe fifteen to twenty miles southeast of Paris, where a French nobleman, Count _____ formed a uh children's home for us thirty-nine children. He had previously formed a home for probably an equivalent number of Spanish girls from Republican Spain. Spanish Republican refugee girls were also quartered, not in the same building but in a near-by building, also one of _____'s charitable enterprises. And so this is where we lived and it seemed at the time that this was our refuge, our port in a developing storm. Of course, like history tells us, things didn't remain so quiet and the port in the storm wasn't a port for very long. For for less than a year it was a port uh a port in a storm. While I was at uh this this home of Monsieur _____ in Cassie, just a few weeks later I got a letter suddenly from England. I didn't know a soul in England. I, but I recognized the handwriting. A letter from my mother. She told me she had arrived in in in England and and was working for a family in Leatherhead (ph) in the outskirts of London and and so I knew at that point that she was out, I was out and things looked pretty good at the time.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your life in this French place?

A: Well, was...we were all Jewish children, but it wasn't a Jewish life. Uh our counselors and teachers were not Jewish. Our benefactor wasn't Jewish. Uh we were not...we had no kosher cuisine. We had no Jewish rules and regulations. There was no Jewish instruction or anything. We led a uh totally non-Jewish assimilationist (ph) type of life. Uh and I, like I state in my memoir, my guess is that most of the kids in the transport to this home came from assimilationist uh German-Jewish homes. There were no religious people that I can remember there among the kids. We all seemed to take to this secular type of life at Cassie rather easily. We seemed to fit in very very nicely. I should also mention in in retrospect that my own parents did not have a very uh...did not run a religious home. My father came from very deeply religious parents, but he himself did not follow a deeply religi...religious life although he did go to schule (ph) on the religious holidays and participated in the services. My mother not at all, and so I remember not living in a in a really Jewish type of home. We were living a assimilationist type of secular home...

Q: What activities did you have there? Did you have classes? Did you...

A: Now we we are back again now in Cassie...our activities were...we had uh French class. We learned French. I remember very well one of our teachers was a White Russian who pounded us (laughter)...verbs and syntax. I remember very well...Madame Richter, R - I - C - H - T - E - R, a Russian uh émigré from St. Petersburg for all I know. Maybe even a member of the uh royal courts for all I know. Uh anyway uh maybe an instructress to some of the uh Russian uh noblemen, one-time noblemen in St. Petersburg, and uh anyway Madame Richter, she really pounded French into us. I remember that to this to this day and uh we had other French teachers and uh émigré teachers and uh...how shall I put it...uh teachers and uh counselors...that's the word I'm looking for, counselors...and none of them Jewish and so, as I say, it was a secular atmosphere and we played and we had our instruction. We had our three meals a day. If there was anything lacking it was parental love. That that was missing.

Q: OK. That's an important ingredient...

A: Yeah. That's one of the tragedies of my life...at this key period of my life, suddenly in 1939 my parental link was cut off, because receiving an occasional letter from my mother in England is hardly a substitute for really living in one's home with one's parents.

Q: Now how long were you in this area, in this camp?

A: In this children's home...it wasn't a camp...children's home? From uh summer of '39 until the fall of France in the summer of '40. Roughly a year I was in this Cassie _____, children's home of Monsieur...the Count of _____.

Q: Tell me what happened after the fall of France?

A: Well, he was a high French officer. Was taken prisoner. The last we heard was that uh he was somewhere in Germany. The finances of the home went from mediocre to bad, from bad to worse. It became obvious that the home had to be closed, and that's when the Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants of France, this Jewish welfare organization for children, entered the picture. As the Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants...well that's...I translate that as the Child's Welfare Organization...Children's Welfare Aid Society...there are any number of ways you can translate that name. In French it's O -E - U - V - R - E, that's one word...D ª E, is another word...S - E - C - O - U - R - S, is another word...uh A - U - X, still another word, and the final word, enfants, E - N - F - A - N - T - S, which by the way means children. OK. So this uh...oh, by by the way...it was always called for short by it's acronym of OSE, OSE, by it's initials... O - S - E.

Q: So OSE took over at that time...

A: OSE took over as this uh enterprise failed, went...I mean went bankrupt. Uh prior to its bankruptcy of course, we tried to flee south, and we fled south with thousands of other people...we were on the road...as the German armies approached Paris from the northeast, we were on our way to the southeast, by coal barge and then on foot traveling south, trying to go south. Everybody, lots of Jews on the roads I would imagine, but also other Frenchmen, all, everybody heading south to evade the approaching uh Teutonic hoard. Uh in other words they had broken through the marginal (ph) line, the so-called impregnable marginal line which held on for months and months in the so-called _____. They had broken through and were rapidly approaching Paris, and that's when you had this helter skelter rush to the south. And we joined the rush. Our teachers and counselors told us we'll go south and hopefully we'll get there. Well, we didn't get there. We were (laughter)...

Q: Do you remember something about that trip...what happened…

A: Everything down to the last detail…

Q: Well, tell us, tell us more about that...

A: One night we spent on a coal barge going up the Seine, not down the Seine, but up the Seine. And if you know the Seine, it meanders like that and going up it is not only slow, it was painfully slow, extremely slow. We made very little progress and and finally during uh one fine morning, the fine morning after a night on the barge...the barge was empty and we and the other people were on that barge sleeping, or trying to sleep...and one fine morning, uh the fine morning afterwards, after having boarded it, the barge, came upon thousands or hundreds at least other barges all stuck in the sand. They were barring each other's way. There were barges and barges and barges, so we simply got out of our barge and continued the trip south on foot, carrying our our belongings like thousands of other people. Traveling on foot the road south.

Q: With your teachers and...

A: Everybody along, on foot, carrying belongings, our belongings...suitcases, knapsacks, you name it.

Q: How how long did this go on?

A: All day long. When we got off the barge in the morning to to...it was evening time. We got to this farmhouse. We uh on on this...I call it the famous road that where I came face to face with the face (ph) of _____, because uh we were on on the road between the town of Corbeil, C - O - R - B - E - I - L on the north, and the town of Melun (ph) in which direction we were moving or walking, M - E - L - U - N, between Corbeil and Melun on this on this third-rate country road, maybe second-rate country road...it certainly wasn't a first-rate highway...walking south and we came to this farmhouse and we decided, or our counselors decided...we didn't, kids didn't decide anything... teachers and counselors decided we were going to spend the night at the farmhouse and that's where we spent, in the barn, in the straw, we spent the night in the farmhouse and I remember vividly all night long there was pounding of cannon fire in the forest of Fountainbleu (ph), in the well-know forest of Fountainbleu, cannons were firing and bang, bang, bang...all night long. It was very difficult to sleep. I got very little shut-eye. And so in the morning it finally got silent. Suddenly the the the firing stopped and and uh things got very silent. Also I should mention some French troops, maybe a platoon of Frenchmen, uh joined us in the hay in that uh in that French farmhouse and slept there or tried to sleep. Early in the morning they packed up and left to the south I guess. (laughter) We stayed on for breakfast. As I said, in the morning it had gotten very quiet, eerily quiet, eerily still, and so as we finished breakfast some of us went out to the road, to the shoulder of the road and there were some, some farmers, French peasants standing there talking. The big crowd of people, the masses of people that had been the previous day walking, cluttering the road up, walking with their belongings down the road...all gone. The road was empty. Nothing moved on the road. Just a few farmers on the side of the road and a few children finishing breakfast early, moving to the shoulder of the road, and I heard one French farmer yelling into the tiny village down the road, north, uh what's going on now, what's what's happening? Words to that effect. And then the answer was shouted back, _____. Translation...the Krauts have arrived. And that's what, that's what it was. Well, you can see already the tension was was rising among us. We didn't know what to expect. Anyway, the farmers stayed there on the shoulder of the road.

The kids stayed on the shoulder of the road. A few minutes later, noise. Motorized troops of the German Wehrmacht were coming down the road, zooming right by us. As they zoomed by us, our hearts once again grew lighter and we began to breath again. We had no idea what would face us because there were rumors from the east, that is eastern Europe, that the German Wehrmacht could be brutal as they were in the east, but in France, in the west of Europe, at this stage of the war, they weren't so brutal. They simply zoomed down the road and left us people standing there. They had no idea who was standing there...kids, some French adults, farmers...zoomed right along down the road and we were once again within the confines of the Third Reich. Our flight to the south had ended, so what we do our counselor decided, counselors decided to move right back where we came from, back to our home at Cassie _____ and so slowly we mar...walked back on the roads (laughter), the way we came, only this time not by barge, simply on foot and we mar...uh walked and the whole place...as I remember France at that time was in a state of total discombobulation...you didn't know what was going on. (Laughter) I mean everything was in a state of uh suspended animation. So we walked home. Nothing befell us. I mean we saw Germans along the road, supply, supply troops. Nobody bothered us. To them we were just some French kids walking along. Nothing. No problem. French civilians. Nobody bothered us. We just walked back to our home and uh and that's the way our flight to the south ended, exactly nowhere. We were right back where we came from...at at Cassie and the home was, as I say, going from bad to worse financially and then, as I also pointed out previously, the OSE stepped in and then there were about thirty-nine kids and then they moved a number of kids here and a number of kids there, a number of kids there. We were divided all over the place.

Q: You were disbursed.

A: Disbursed. Precisely. OK. And with three other kids, with three other kids, four of us, were disbursed to the Rothschild Orphanage in Paris. Four of us wound up in the Rothschild Orphanage in Paris. Others wound up in Charbon (ph) at that time. Others wound up in _____, which were at that time Vichy France, the unoccupied zone, and uh various other places. I have no idea.

Q: So then you ended up in...

A: I ended up with three kids at the orp...Rothschild Orphanage for nine months, a period which I remember very clearly. I got older by this time. (laughter) And uh I found myself in a French Jewish orphanage, run by the Rothschild organization. OSE took us there but they weren't involved at that time. It was the Rothschild people.

Q: Tell us what happened while you were there, at the Rothschild home.

A: Well, at the Rothschild home, once again we were learning French uh because the Rothschild orphans, French orphans, had uh French instruction by counselors there, by teachers, and uh so once again I found myself getting school instruction, which had been kind of spotty because of these events that were taking place, the flight and the collapse of the home and so on. Uh our instruction was beginning to get kind of uh sparse, so once

again at the Rothschild orphanage I was in a regular schoolroom, classroom atmosphere again learning French again. And uh that's what took place there. We...I remember that our food was regular, three meals a day, but very sparse. I must say that I never could say after getting up from a meal at the Rothschild Orphanage that I was satisfied. I was counting the hours, the minutes, to the next meal. From meal to meal, you lived from meal to meal and neither meal, not one single meal left us really full. It was always hungry before the meal, still hungry after the meal, looking forward to the next meal, but everything otherwise went perfectly normal, stable. Nobody bothered us at the orphanage and ____ we were cut off from the outside developments and uh I can't really say that I had any uh unpleasant uh experiences at the orphanage.

Q: What about your other activities, uh other than school at the orphanage?

A: At the orphanage...kids played in the yard and that's it. Among themselves the kids played and had school. That's about all we did.

Q: Come back to the...

A: Occasionally the counselor or teacher would take us to the near-by uh _____, that's the _____ uh wood. In other words that's a city park if you will, city forest, city park and uh it's a very well-known uh park in Paris...

Q: You mentioned that this was a Jewish orphanage...

A: This was a Jewish orphanage...

Q: Were you treated differently than in previous Cassie...

A: Not not really. Not really. Although our teachers at the uh orphanage, there must have been some Jewish teachers there. I couldn't say who was Jewish and who wasn't, but again it was not kosher. It wasn't that there was no religious services and this was a Rothschild home. A Rothschild orphanage, which had existed for who knows how many years. It was not a...I did not it a a religious Jewish atmosphere.

Q: Chronologically we're now in 1940...

A: We are now in '40 and uh '40, right. We are now in in summer of '40 when I wound up at this...with three others from our home in Cassie...wound up uh in Paris at the Rothschild Orphanage.

Q: How many people, how many children were, would you say were at this Rothschild home at this time?

A: How many? I couldn't say for sure, but I would guess that maybe...well, sixty at most. I couldn't say whether there were more more than sixty. I didn't have the impression there were more than sixty.

Q: OK. And you weren't bothered in any way by the authorities?

A: No. I couldn't say that either. While I was at the orphanage, one fine day a gentlemen appeared and wanted some questions from me. And so I answered him whatever I could and he identified himself as working for the International Red Cross. What had happened was that my mother had gotten very worried about what happened to her son during the fall of France, obviously. And she had gotten in contact with the International Red Cross in Geneva and tried to find by hook or crook what happened to her little Werner. And so uh this gentleman finally found his way to the Rothschild Orphanage in the summer of 1940, or maybe it was by that time autumn of 1940, and he asked me questions about myself and so forth and I answered and at this point my mother once again had for her own incessant activity found out what had happened to me, where I was and that I had found a safe port in a storm, once again, so once again she she knew where I was. But of course there was no way of writing to her because France was occupied, most of France was occupied except for Vichy France, allied to the rest of the Nazis and and so England at war and so there was no correspondence between us. But at least she knew that I had safely survived the fall of France and that I was at the Rothschild Orphanage in Paris on the Rue La _____ in southeast Paris. That's where I was. Four of us.

Q: Let's go from there...what happened to you subsequently?

A: That's when the OSE, thankfully, entered the picture again. In uh...sometime in the summer or maybe it was spring...I would say late spring of 1941, the four of us, these four German-Jewish refugees among the rest of the French Jewish orphans who were not, not affected by this move of the OSE...the OSE entered the picture once again and pulled us out of the Rothschild Orphanage, after having...us having spent nine months there. Suddenly the OSE entered the picture and pulled us out of there and moved us to southern France, to Vichy France...

Q: This was just the four Germans...

A: Just the four German-Jewish refugee kids. You see, we were the ones most at risk. The German, that is the French Jewish orphans were not at this point most at risk. Their turn came later, as we shall soon see, but we were at most risk and the OSE took us four out of there and moved us to unoccupied Vichy France. Two of us four went to Marseilles (ph), one of the OSE homes there and the other two went to Charbon (ph), another one of the uh OSE homes, and so that's uh what happened to us in the spring of '41. At that time I had no idea why we were being moved, what really was the significance of that move, nothing of the kind. All I knew is we were moved. In 1952, finally, long after the war, seven years after the war, I found out on my own...I was stationed with the U.S. Army in West Germany and I took a three-day pass to Paris. I wanted to find out...wanted to make a visit to the orphanage, find out what had happened. I made my way to Paris. I made my way along the Rue _____. I found the grey walls (crying ?), the iron gate, the concierge opening, the little portal (crying?) and I identified myself. She told me that the orphanage was closed, no one here, just the walls, the grounds and so I identified myself that I had been there seven years...no, more than seven years...back in 1941, uh eleven years earlier I had been one of the children there for a while, so she told me that uh in 1941 when the _____, in the

summer of '42 took place, about a year after we had been removed from the orphanage, the _____, when the French police under the urging of the Gestapo, descended upon any Jewish child, especially orphans and and refugees and others too, descended upon them on the 16th and 17th of July of '42...they descended upon the Rothschild Orphanage and the old concierge lady there, the gatekeeper, building keeper, grounds keeper...told me that during that summer of '42 the entire orphanage, children, staff, you name it from Monsieur Cohan (ph), the director, on down, deported to Drancy, the holding camp and the only destination after Drancy by cattle car was to the extermination camps in eastern Europe, so what had happened was that the children left, the French Jewish orphans left at the Rothschild orphanage, were deported in 1942, the summer of...July of '42. Had the four of us stayed another year, little over a year in the Rothschild Orphanage, I wouldn't be sitting in this chair here. We would have been...who knows...gas chambers.

Q: OK. Let's come back, let's come back...

A: I left that Rue _____ really shaken because at that point I knew how close I had gotten to being exterminated. Anyway that was 1952. That's getting ahead of our story.

Q: Uh I want to pull you back to 1942, so you you left the Rothschild home and you were taken to...

A: Yeah, two of us to Marseille (ph), where once again we found ourselves in in a large home of of kids, Jewish kids, refugee kids, orphan kids, maybe some French Jewish kids. I have no...I have no idea. I was too young to make a a survey at that time. This kind of thing I can do easily in retrospect but at the time I was a youngster and this is not the kind of thing that uh I could do at the time, or did do. And other, two other kids, the other two from the orphanage wound up in Charbon (ph). They too subsequently survived the war. But I can report that the other fellow from the orphanage and myself who went to Marseille, both of us survived the war in 1941. Uh that same year we arrived in Marseille, we were both lucky enough to be assigned to a transport destined ultimately for immigration to the United States. Why? Because we had relatives living in the United States. This was the decision that got us into the transport for the U.S. Had I not had relatives living in the U.S. I wouldn't be sitting here perhaps. No guarantee that I wouldn't have come here ultimately uh because the other two kids at Charbon, the other two from the original four, didn't have relatives in the U.S., and they also survived the war, one of who is in the U.S., the other one in Canada, so I can't say that if I had not made that transport to the U.S. in 1941, once again with OSE taking an important...playing an important role in that, uh I can't say that I wouldn't have survived the war, but chances are fifty-fifty, but this way my my problems were soon to be over.

Q: Did you know you had relatives in the United States?

A: Oh yes, yes, yes. Vaguely. I mean I I didn't have the details but I...

Q: Did you know who they were?

A: I didn't have addresses, but I knew that I had some relatives. I knew I had an uncle there and and so on and as a...also a cousin. I also had a cousin who was a physician uh living in in New York, and so I knew vaguely about their presence but uh it wasn't a close relationship uh...

Q: OK. You...so this is 1942. Now you said...

A: No, 1941. In '42 I was in the U.S. safe and sound. (laughter)

Q: You, you...how did you...you got on a transport and who put you...

A: Well, this OSE home and the two of us at this OSE home in Marseille at this time still unoccupied Vichy France which within a year was also occupied by the Germans. In November '42 they occupied the rest of France. And anyway, so in 1941, that is summer of '41, we, we two, the two of us...Zomie (ph) was his name and myself, Werner Goldschmidt, _____, to give our full names, we found ourselves added to this transport of kids, many of them refugees from Germany, with relatives in the U.S. I can't say that we all were refugees from Germany. There may have been some refugees from Austria, from Holland, who knows. I couldn't say. Anyway, once again it was a transport. I I couldn't tell you how many...maybe twenty-five, thirty children...

Q: When you say transport, you're talking about ...

A: A group of children. A group of children being taken under guided escort uh guided escort to Marseille where we waited for quite a number of days to get our emergency uh uh visas to the U.S. We waited there in Marseille uh and finally we got them from the American Consulate General in Marseille...uh we got our immigration, non-quota immigration visas, all of us kids got them, and then our journey continued by train. Once again guided, escorted by train and finally through the Pyrenees and under the Pyrenees, the tunnels, and we got to Spain which was just shortly after the civil war had ended and I remember a very down-trodden, down-beat uh poor Spain. We got to _____ and there we changed trains in _____ and took the train to Madrid and uh then we spent one night in Madrid and the next day we continued on to Portugal, and then we got to finally to Lisbon. Lisboi (ph) to the Portuguese...

Q: On, on the train you had counselors or somebody...

A: Always guided by people in charge. These kids, I mean us kids...we were kids. You didn't put these kids, you know, alone on a train. There was always someone, adult, in charge. I couldn't give you the names and addresses but there were also, always throughout from the time I was at Cassie to the time I got to Lisbon, always adults, be they teachers, be they counselors, be they people temporarily put in charge, always guided, people guiding this group of children, in charge. We were never on our own.

Q: Werner, can you tell us a little bit more about the train and the trip itself...

A: Well, we traveled through _____, the famous medieval city with the Roman wall around it, and we traveled to _____ and in ____ I think we changed trains and then from _____ we went by train...now we are really in the deep south of France, southwest of France and from the city of _____ we took the train underneath and through the Pyrenees, partially through tunnels, partially winding through uh narrow passageways, went through and to this poverty-stricken Spain which really looks like a like a disaster area just shortly after the civil war was ended there, and this was just two years after the Spanish civil war...

Q: How how were the other children reacting with you on the train?

A: Oh, we were all very happy I would say. How were we reacting. We were all very happy to get out and you know America was in our future. I would say we were all very happy. I can't say that...I can't report anything negative about the train ride. It was a very pleasant ride I would say and the and the the overnight time in Madrid and the uh ten days at least we spent in Lisbon, I would say there was nothing unpleasant about it. By the way, at that time we had enough to eat. We didn't get up hungry from the table in Lisbon. We had enough to eat. We were fed. Again it was the OSE which had uh charge of us, but I cannot guarantee the OSE had charge of us through this trip into Spain, through Spain and into Portugal to Lisbon, because other elements entered the picture. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt became charge, was charged with permitting five thousand Jewish children to get to the United States from Germany and central Europe. A special bill had been passed or special legislation passed by Congress. Uh Mrs. Roosevelt was put in charge of this organization to help the children survive, to get five thousand kids out of France, occupied France and unoccupied France, Vichy France, get them to the United States. Five thousand emergency visas apparently had been made available. And so this was one group it helped. Another group that played a big role, in fact they paid for the actual boat trip, the ship trip, was the American Friends Service Committee, the Quakers. They...in fact we carried a a tag on our...around uh around our neck indicating that the American Friends Service Committee Headquarters, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was was in charge of the trip, so they apparen...uh so anyway...

Q: How long were you...I don't mean to interrupt...how long were you in Lisbon?

A: I would say ten to fifteen days. We were supposed to go originally with a Portuguese freighter named Nyassa, N - Y - A - S - S - A, but the Nyassa never arrived. Instead eventually the Serpa Pinto, S - E - R - P - A, the first word, Pinto, P - I - N - T - O, the second word, the Serpa Pinto arrived and uh this is the ship we finally embarked upon. A freighter converted to refugee vessel. And on this ship we embarked upon for the United States in uh early September it was, uh for the United States. A very slow trip. I remember the ship very well. The accommodations...we were in the hold, the children were in the hold. There were lots of adult refugees on board. Uh there was nothing uh (laughter) nothing fancy about it, but like I put out, like I point out in my memoir of my childhood in refugee years, it was my most memorable trip. I've made many trips across the Atlantic since, by by sea and by air. Nothing to equal that trip by this beaten-down Portuguese freighter, the Serpa Pinto, making a long slow voyage by way of Casa Blanca uh Morocco where more adult refugees got on board, and then we finally stopped in Bermuda and uh I

don't know...maybe to take on supplies. Nobody got on board uh in Bermuda and finally we arrived in the port of New York in September 1941 and our ...(pause)...well, the thing was at an end. It was the beginning of a new life, a new...wasn't ideal. I mean I was with a Jewish foster family. My relatives in the United States were not in a position to take me so I was placed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with a foster family and that wasn't an ideal foster family. Few foster families, incidentally, are ideal. There's been a whole spate (ph) of articles about foster care being very inadequate and I can testify to that. Uh it wasn't wasn't bad exactly but it was totally lacking in in empathy, sympathy, real human sympathy and real love for the uh refugee children because I wasn't the only refugee child there that I was five years with that family, four years with that family and uh but anyway it was a new life. I went to an American school, learned English, initiated the American...Americanization process, learned about Philadelphia, about what it was to live in the United States, uh played with the kids on the block...was a largely Jewish block, every house there was occupied by Jewish people, most of them immigrants from eastern Europe...uh and uh that was my life and starting in late 1941. Came two and a half months past and Pearl Harbor took place and the U.S. was at war. When Pearl Harbor was announced that Sunday, the day of infamy as President Roosevelt called it, my English was still very spotty, very spotty. It took another six months maybe before I was able to really uh get the hang of it, but they had me in an English uh elementary school class uh sixth grade and uh so by hook and by crook I got my education. Then I went to junior high school in Philadelphia. Then I started high school in Philadelphia and finally I moved to New York when my mother, in 1946 after the end of the war, was able to join me in the United States.

Q: So you were with this family until...

A: I was with this...I was actually with two foster families. The first fos...most of the time with the first foster family. Then they left the city and I went to another foster family in that very block. I didn't...it was like, it was like staying with the same family almost. The people lived a few houses down the street, was staying in the same street, playing with the same kids, same atmosphere except that this family was a little perhaps a little more, had a little more empathy for refugees than the other one. I think the other family was in it primarily for the money, for the finan...financial support they got for taking in kids, and they didn't only take in refugee kids. They took in Jewish kids from broken homes. They took uh a baby in, a little infant, maybe ten months old who uh the mother had died, maybe in childbirth. I couldn't say. The father placed it with the family and the kid's name was Myron. I still remember that. I don't remember the last name. Uh but anyway they took anybody, anyone and anybody as long as they were paid for and they were paid by the Association for Jewish Children of Philadelphia. That was the organization which ran this operation.

Q: Were you in touch with your mother at all during this period?

A: Yeah. Once I got to the United States, I once again was able to correspond. Of course, the war was going on in Europe but the U.S. and Britain were allies and once again I could have a correspondence with my mother, so we corresponded and one fine day in Philadelphia...it was in 1946...the war had ended just a year earlier...a telegram arrived from the _____, the Swedish liner _____, very well-known for its many humanitarian missions of evacuation

and moving people, and this was a very short telegram. Arriving on the _____, New York, Love, Mother. And so shortly thereafter I took the train to New York, my second trip to the port of New York...my first one, arrival in 1941, September...the second time 1946 of May, on a rainy day in May, a seventeen year old son (crying) whose childhood _____ messed up, a seventeen year old son finally met his mother in the port of New York and that was it. Finally then I moved to New York, finished high school in New York and uh well, that you might say is the rather pertinent facts about my escaping the Holocaust. I might add that my mother went to work for the United Service for New Americans, a refugee aid society in New York, very important for the many refugees that came to these shores after the war. United Service for New Americans in New York City, after the after the refugee numbers diminished, the refugee service joined with the HIAS, Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, and today it is known as the United HIAS Service...still exists, uh for Jewish refugees.

Q: How...what actually happened when you saw your mother for the first time after...

A: I'll tell you what happened. It was like meeting a a a dear aunt. I tell you what happened. It was...maybe it was what happened...what didn't happen. When I cry about this event, it's...when they ruined my childhood...you see I left, I left as a child, the love of my mother. When I met this nice lady walking along the pier...(crying)...it was a meeting alright, but it wasn't the same...(crying)...this, this...they ruined my childhood, that's what they did. Oh, we got along fine, but it wasn't the same thing. It was...my my aunt could have been standing there on the pier. Dear Auntie. Was not the same thing. She did not meet that same child that she left at the at the Berlin train station that summer day or late spring day of 1939. That little boy didn't exist anymore. He had been disappointed and disillusioned and mistreated, mishandled, but always lucky enough to escape, to escape with his life and always having a future in front of him. I must say, as I say, as I point out in my memoir again and again and again, I was one of the very very lucky ones. Incidentally, of those three thousand or five thousand children what were supposed to be saved from occupied France, of which Mrs. Roosevelt was the chairman or chairwoman, three hundred and eleven actually made it between the fall of France and the total occupation of France in November of '42, when the Germans occupied Vichy France too. During that period '40 to '42, three hundred and eleven children actually made it to the U.S.A. out of five thousand who uh theoretically were supposed to make it. Three hundred and eleven made it. I am one of three hundred and eleven. I learned that only early this year, that I was one of three hundred and eleven because a French book was published in Paris by a Professor Sabine (ph) _____ in Paris. She specializes in Holocaust studies and she published a book last year about _____, These Children We Just Had to Save, and there I learned, on one of the pages, that three hundred and eleven children, these German-Jewish and Austrian-Jewish refugee children, were saved and brought to the U.S., actually three hundred and eleven.

Q: I want I want to come back again to when you met your mother finally. What had she been doing and what did you physically do? Did you go out and have dinner together?

A: Uh no. Well, I don't know. No. I think we went to her cousin who lives in central part, western New York, and we had dinner there. Uh we didn't have...well, we had dinner but

there was two other people, an elderly couple, uh uh a first cousin of her deceased mother who had died in 1940, buried in the Jewish cemetery of Erfurt, my dear grandma, uh well she died in 1940, but her cousin uh Dr. Freelander (ph) and his wife lived in New York and we had, if I am correct, we had dinner at the Freelander's...uh

Q: You had dinner there and then what did you do?

A: Well, then I returned to Philadelphia to my foster family and my mother then found lodging and uh was supported by the United Service for New Americans until she went to work for the United Service for New Americans. She was supported by them.

Q: This was in New York City?

A: She lived in New York, and for a while longer I was in Philadelphia, for a while longer, but shortly thereafter I joined her in New York and went to high school in New York, finished my high school year, my final high school year in New York and then I left Philadelphia behind for good and then as I say I lived in New York, joined her in New York. She lived, but you see the story...I mentioned that too in the memoir that I wrote...childhood and refugee memoir...she had two good years in the United States following her arrival here. Her health was good. Then she fell ill and got progressively worse with cancer and she was from one hospital to another, trying all kinds of treatment. Nothing worked for her liver. And finally, while I was in Germany in 1952, she died in early 1952. Uh I was doing my military service, as I mentioned earlier. I got a telegram from the Red Cross that my mother had died. Of course it was not a real surprise because I knew that she was in a terminal uh in a terminal stage, that she would not recuperate, that it was terminal. And what I still find ridiculous was that the draft board, knowing this...they had a documentation from at least one doctor stating that her case was terminal and you would think that they would give this son of hers, her only son, a deferment. No. The draft board saw that and says, can't help you. Sorry. If we do that for you, we have to do it for a great many others and we wouldn't meet our quota. A very heartless way of for draft board a draft board to treat such a situation, where you knew in advance that you would probably never see your mother again, lying in the hospital, you were being sent to Germany for your military duty. You knew in advance that you saw her that last time before embarking for the _____, Germany, that you'd probably never see her again. That's the way it was, and then I heard next from the Red Cross that that she had died. Then they flew me back for the funeral, yeah, the Army, so I was there for the funeral but uh they could have given me a deferment, but her case was terminal in in any case. It was very sad when you think of...she died at the age forty-nine, her life ruined in more ways than one, but she could be alive today and she would be around eighty-seven or eighty-eight today. Eighty-eight.

Q: And she was in England during the whole time?

A: Spent the whole war in England. The final three years in the German language division of the BBC, working as a secretary to one of the executives there. That was her final years. She loved it in England, despite the Blitz. She lived through the Blitz. She loved it in

England. If it hadn't been for me in the States she would have stayed in England but she probably still would have died. That that wouldn't have changed.

Q: Werner, how would you say, how did the war affect you?

A: Not too bad all things considered. I mean once I got to Philadelphia I, you know...some of the children who made it to the States with us on that very ship, the Serpa Pinto who arrived in uh in in New York port, Port of New York, uh we were then taken to Pleasantville, New York, by which organization I couldn't even tell you, but Pleasantville, New York, and there we were put in a home for just a short while, maybe two weeks, and every child then was eventually taken individually to his new destination, in most instances to the relative...in a few instances to foster families, but little by little we all disappeared, going our own ways. But the point is that OSE in Paris had never heard from the youngest of these children. I mean they heard from many of the older children who retraced their steps, tried to retrace their roots during the war. From these youngest children, who by this time were nine years old, ten years old, at the most eleven years old, these youngest of the group...uh nothing. They've never retraced their steps. The OSE...they never got in touch with the OSE. I've never been able to find anyone in the phone book. I've tried to find Zomie, the fellow with whom I was so...together for so long. In fact he was the only one with whom I was together the entire time, starting in Cassie all the way till we arrived in in Pleasantville, New York. (Laughter) The only one with whom I was together the entire time. I have not been able to find his name ...his name in German is ____...I guess without the umlaut his name would be Stock (ph) and I can't visualize anyone calling him Stock (laughter) in this country so I don't know what happened to him. He's not...made no effort to retrace his steps. That much we know, uh so that's the story.

Q: OK. We're running out of time...

A: I can report...oh we're already out of time huh. I was going to mention that two other, the two other kids who were sent to Charbon, you know, the other two...there was four...they made it...they also...their lives were saved. One got to Switzerland in 1944. The other fellow...

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

...lived in England until 1958. I found about his whereabouts finally in 1974, visited him in Montreal, Canada where he lives to this day. From 1958 to this day, living in Montreal, Canada, where he runs a bookshop, his own bookshop. His name is Gerald Glass (ph)...running a bookshop in Montreal, the Academic Bookshop he calls it, in Montreal, Canada. If anyone visits Canada, on Sherbrook (ph) Street, Montreal's 5th Avenue, the Academic Bookshop uh is Gerald Glass', one of the survivors, one of the lucky survivors who didn't make the transport, the Serpa Pinto to the U.S., but who made his own way out of occupied France uh eventually to to England and then Canada. The other boy, uh Norman De____ (ph) was his name or is his name, made his way to Switzerland, over the border, you know, on the quiet, successfully crossed into Switzerland, eventually after the war came to the U.S. Also him I found his whereabouts in 1974 quite by accident. The accident being an alumni association newsletter...without uh reading that newsletter I wouldn't have found him or Gerald to this day…

Q: Alumni association of what...

A: City College of New York, my alma mater. That newsletter is where I found his name, just by accident. If I didn't read that newsletter carefully I wouldn't know what happened to Norbert or to Gerald to this day. Anyway I found him and he was teaching uh chemistry, un professor of chemistry, at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Gerald as I pointed out uh running his bookshop in in uh Montreal, Canada. So they too eventually made it to the Northern Hemisphere. One to this country, the other one to Canada. Many...through the OSE I have learned that this organization in Paris...I have learned that most of the kids who were at Cassie, this original stopping point for us...most of the kids survived the Holocaust, made their way out. Some to Israel. Some stayed in France. Some to the United States. Some to Canada. Some to England. One to Australia. You name it, they made their way out, and a few stayed in France and uh and one friend of mine, my closest friend really, whom I really wanted to find more than any of the others, he died in France in 1962 in an automobile automobile accident. He was one of the ones who had decided to make his life, had survived the entire occupation under false name, false identify, Catholic identify, with a uh peasant family...

End of Interview