

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Michel Reynders
August 5, 1996
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Michel Reynders, conducted by Randy Goldman on August 5, 1996 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.

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MICHEL REYNDERS

August 5, 1996

Q: Can we begin by your stating your name, your date of birth and where you were born?

A: Okay. My name is Michel Reynders, R-E-Y-N-D-E-R-S. Date of birth, June 29, 1931. Born in a suburb of Brussels, Belgium. Called Uccle, U-C-C-L-E.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family life before the war.

A: My family on my father's side is a large family. My grandfather was a physician in one of the boroughs, if you want, of Brussels. They had eight children, my grandparents had eight children. My grandmother was, as we say, the strong woman of the Gospel. She was leading and reigning over that family like a headmistress. But, she was a very, very wonderful lady. My parents, my father was a physician. My mother was a housewife. They met when my father was a young doctor and their first encounter was actually when my mother was on the operating table when she had appendicitis. Then they got married in 1930 and I was born in 1931. I have a brother, a sister who was born in 1935 and a brother who was born in 1938. And we had, we lived in a very nice house in Brussels which to me remains the epitome of a nice family house. My grandmother's house was also a very nice one. And we very frequently met our cousins and uncles and all of that, the whole family, in her apartment in that big house. Actually, we had a sort of a little reunion of the cousins who were around practically every week. Every Tuesday. And we gathered around the big table with sweets, cookies and breads and you would call them danish, but we didn't call them that. Then in 1938, my parents bought another house which I didn't like and I never did like it. Even though we lived in it for a long time. And, well, shall I tell you about our, the things we did for entertainment?

Q: Yes, but just one moment, please. Are you hearing the clock? Well, what I'm trying to get a sense of, of course, is your lifestyle, what was disrupted because, clearly, in 1940, things changed.

A: Oh, absolutely, yes.

Q: And also a sense of your religious affiliation, all of that.

A: Well, my, on my mother's side, let's say they were, theoretical Catholics. On my father's side, they were very devout Catholics. Everybody went to church on Sunday, every Sunday. And to confession a few times a year. Just to get the load off their chest, I suppose. On my mother's side, they were the type of Catholics who went to church for a baptism, wedding and funeral. My, on my father's side, my grandmother was a practical religious person. She didn't go for, you know, a lot of babbling and all that sort of thing. But, she thought religion should be applied to your day-to-day life in a practical way. In other words, you know, it, she didn't believe much in kneeling on bench and then going like this and so on. She said, do this

thing right because that's the way God wants you to do it. And do that thing right and, you know, you'll be rewarded in your other life. And, you know, she wanted to make religion a real part of their, of her life and our lives. And she actually didn't spend all that much time, well, just one, she, you know, didn't spend all that much time in church and that's the whole thing. Just because, as I say, she was much more of a pragmatic person. Very interesting lady, as a matter of fact. What else can I say? Well, we celebrated, of course, all the religious holidays in a very extensive way. Mostly, Christmas and Easter. But, you may know or not know, that in Belgium, in addition to Christmas, the children celebrate St. Nicholas and that was the big event for the children before World War II. We would all gather to, first in our own homes and then later to grandmother's home, and get all the toys and candies. That would make us sick for two weeks. But they were delightful anyway. And we would sometimes go to the seaside. In fact, quite frequently. And the whole family would also meet there. We wouldn't always stay in the same place, but since, you know, the Belgian sea coast is very small, it was always easy to go from one village to the other. And we would have big picnics and that sort of thing. We were a very closely knit family.

Q: Now, there were other people, other relatives of yours, who were very involved with the Catholic church, yes?

A: Yeah. My uncle, Father Bruno(ph), was a Benedictine Monk and he had three sisters, my three aunts, who were nuns. Two of them were Benedictine Nuns in Liesch(ph), Belgium. The third one was a Sister of Notre Dame, which is a teaching order. And she was, she moved to various convents during her life. She is currently alive and well in Namure(ph), Belgium. She is 88 years old, almost 89. And clear as a bell, sharp as a tack. And she participated in Father Bruno's work quite a bit, too. As did the other sisters, who are now deceased.

Q: Did you go to religious school or to public school.

A: No, it was traditional...

Pause in tape.

Q: I was asking you if went to public or religious school.

A: We went to religious schools. We, in Belgium, the diocese or, you know, the lay, not the lay, but the nun, monastic schools, are called colleges. It has nothing to do with American college. You're in college from your first grade on. Until your 12th grade. So, yes, I did go to, first to a small school where the nuns were running the school and I was very privileged in having a very, very demanding, if you want, but very charming nun as a kindergarten teacher, and I've never forgot her. I still remember her as being a real guidance. And then I went to the college, St. Bonefas(ph) in Brussels. Where my father had been, where my uncles had been. And it was almost a family tradition already. Still in existence now. And, in fact, my brother was there, too. And my, one of my cousins, oh, several of my cousins,

actually, went through the same school. It was a very, very wonderful school. I had the best teachers you can imagine. And, you know, everybody keeps telling me, didn't you hate school? No, I loved school. I just adored my teachers. In the seventh grade I had a very tall, very powerful looking priest as a teacher. And I can still hear him talking. He was extraordinary. He made us live Julius Caesar's wars. Like you'd see a movie. And a couple of three years later I had another teacher who was a strong, sturdy peasant from the Belgian Alden(ph), the south of Belgium where the forests are and those people have their feet on the ground. Solidly on the ground, and he did, too. And, again, I have such extraordinary memories from my high school, you know, that I still relive them constantly.

Q: Because you came from a family that at least was partly quite religious and you went to religious schools, were there certain values that were instilled in you from an early age?

A: Oh, absolutely. Oh, yes. As I told you, my grandmother was running the house even from a distance, she was still running her children. Her children's houses with her strong principles that, you know, of charity, of tolerance. Even though she was strict, she was tolerant. You know, it sounds like a contradiction, but it really wasn't. She was strict in her tolerance, you see what I mean? You, she thought you had to force yourself to be tolerant, even if you couldn't feel it immediately. You just had to do it. And that was one of the principles that she inoculated into us from our very, very small childhood. And I think my, all my uncles and aunts, and my father as well, have always lived by those principles. So, yes, mostly Christian values. And, you know, people keep asking me, but what did you think about the other non-Christian people? Like the Jews and so on. We didn't know anything. In Belgium, you didn't make that distinction. I didn't know that we had Jewish neighbors where I lived until the SS came and took them away. We were friends with them, we played in the park together. We, you know, Belgium was not at all a discriminatory country or discriminating country. I'm bringing that up because I read not too long ago that when you immigrate to the United States, you have to say, I am Jewish. There is no such thing in Belgium. The identity cards that were issued never, never mentioned race, religion or anything like that. It mentioned profession, job, that they did. But it never mentioned anything that had the slightest hint of discriminatory inkling, if I may say. So, yes, we were, as I said, as you said and I said, high values were always proposed, if you want, by my parents and my grandparents and that included that, you know, that we accepted everybody as they were. Not because they had red hair or black eyes or dark skin or whatever. But, because they were just people. I think that is of extreme importance for what is going to follow.

Q: Were you aware of anti-Semitism in Belgium at all?

A: No, I was not. I'm sure there was a little, but not anywhere nearly as much as in France, for example. France has always, for some reason, cultivated a certain ultra-right philosophy, if you want. Which was definitely anti-Semitic. We didn't have that. Actually, it's to the point that we were never able to tell exactly how many Jews lived in Belgium. Because we had no way of knowing. We had no records.

Q: Were you, as a kid, involved with any social or political organizations?

A: Not a political organization. I did, I was, first of all, I was a cub scout for awhile. In Belgium we had, we did have, just after saying there was no discrimination, I have to say that there were the public school cub scouts and the Christian cub scouts. They were friendly, but they were different. I was part of the Christian cub scouts. Then, let's see now, I, yes, I think I was part of a small social group where we went to see puppet shows and that sort of things. But, it didn't amount to very much. Essentially, cub scouts and later on scouts, was my group activity, let's say.

Q: And, your family, while they believed very strongly in charity, was that ever on any organized basis before the war?

A: My grandmother had a route, if you want to say, or route where she went and distributed food on a certain day every month. Part of the St. Vincent DePaul general organization, which exists in France and exists in Belgium. And it consists of lay people who just get together and sort of, quote, unquote, adopt a few families. They visit them, and I think this is still being done, I'm not sure, but I think so. Right now. They bring them food or clothes and try to help them if they have difficulty with the welfare system and things like that. That was, in a way, organized, if you want. Oh, yes, my mother, actually, was part of the nationwide organization for the blind. And, yes, she did, she was, in fact, one of the board members of that for quite some time. And the same thing occurred there, they would have poor blind people assigned to them, if you want, to be visited and comforted and supplies brought as necessary.

Q: One other question. What kind of a child were you? If you had to sort of describe your energy, your...

A: I was, mine was to be very ornery, I'm sure. But, forgive me if I sound like I'm bragging, but I do remember that people were telling my parents, oh, he's well mannered, that child. So, I guess my mother was very, very proper and she came from a rather proper family and she wanted us to have good manners and that sort of thing. I think she taught me good social behavior and, but other than that, I think I was very ornery. I was running up and down and doing things and when my little sister was born, and we did very lots of very strange things. Like making mud pies and throwing them at each other. And one day my aunt visited us and my mother just showed her out to the door and while they were gone, we decided to sample the port wine which my aunt and my mother had sampled before and I never understood why the house was spinning so much around me. And my little sister fell asleep and we woke up the next day, I think it must have been with a headache, but I don't remember that for sure. In school, as I say, I enjoyed school enormously. And, so it wasn't a chore, it wasn't a burden for me to go to school. So, I studied with great pleasure and I guess I managed to have pretty decent grades. That way. It wasn't any, you know, great effort. I didn't really force myself, I just studied because I thought it was fun. And particularly the literary branches, such as Latin, Greek. And during the war later on, German and English languages, to me were

something where I literally basked in learning those.

Q: What do you remember about your Uncle Bruno before the war?

A: Well, we saw him very frequently because unlike most Benedictine Monks, he was not always cloistered. In fact, he dubbed himself the most mobile Benedictine in Belgium. Even before the war. He taught catechism at the Belgian border to Nazi, no, I mean, non-Nazi children who would cross the border before World War II to learn catechism because it was forbidden in Germany and under Hitler. He went to Czechoslovakia during the sad events of 1938 and so on. And he was frequently a visitor, a quick visitor, it was just come in and out for, you know, an hour or two and I still have someplace, some pictures of me on his knee where he made me jump on his knee. And I liked him very, very much. He was the image of perfection to me. He was almost a semi-god. I had an excellent relationship with him and I kept that relation throughout until his death. Unfortunately, when I was here I didn't see him as much as I wanted to. But, I had an excellent relationship with him. He was a very warm, outgoing person, very funny, too. He told the funniest stories and had a great sense of humor.

Q: What did you know about Hitler and Nazism before Belgium was occupied? Did you know much...

A: Hardly anything.

Q: ...German refugees coming in?

A: We saw a few. And, as a matter of fact, this is not Hitler it's Mussolini, in 1938, my parents took in a young Italian girl, about 14 or 15, to be our babysitter. Because her parents, her father was an active Socialist and had to leave Italy under the Fascist regime, and fled to Belgium. And, just as an aside, I absolutely adored that lady and I lost track of her completely until 1986. I decided, I've got to find her again. So, I wrote a letter to the mayor of her town asking, is this lady still alive? Does she live in that town? I didn't get an answer for about six months, but one day I got a letter from her. So, obviously, the mayor had passed on the letter to her. She wrote me and said, I remember you as if it was yesterday. I went to see her in Asti(ph) in the north of Italy. She came here. And we're still writing to each other every month and the most adorable lady. So, that's one thing I did know. About Fascism. As you say, we did see a few, yes, a few refugees, but, you know, until 19, well, in 1940, I was just nine years old and at that time, I don't think I understood the full impact. But, you grow very rapidly in a war, you know. It didn't take us more than a couple of years before we had it all assimilated and we understood what was going on. Well, not everything, but nobody else did. But, we understood, I think, far more than we would have if we hadn't been occupied.

Q: What do you remember about the German occupation? How it began? What were you doing?

A: 1940, May 10, 4:00 in the morning, my father came and shook me and said, boy, let's go to the basement, it's war. And I heard anti-aircraft cannons, I heard airplanes flying overhead. And then we heard some bombs falling. Brussels wasn't severely bombed, but the Germans did bomb Brussels the first day of the war. I guess, more as a scare tactic than actual, you know, aim at destruction. And I remember that as if it was yesterday. And from then on, just about everything that occurred during the occupation is in my computer. And it comes back when, you know, when I think about it. I remember being a very bad boy. Stealing my mother's very scarce sugar and putting it into the gas tanks of the German trucks that were parked in the street in the front of my school. We were a little group of kids and one of them would be watching the sentry and he was going up the street, we would immediately go and unscrew the caps and pour the sugar in there. And, you know, that gums up the engines, makes a mess of the engine. And I remember being kicked in the rear end by a couple of Femp(ph) Polezei(ph) who were searching us and, I guess, as I say, I must have been ornery because I probably talked back to him and he really, I can still feel the pain. And one time I was on a street car and there was, unfortunately, there were a few traitors as you know, in all the occupied countries, including Belgium. And it was the 21st of July, which is a Belgian national day, and I was carrying a little black, yellow and red flag, which is the Belgian colors, in my lapel. Very obvious. And one of those traitors came up on the street car and said, why do you have that on your lapel? And I said, why do you have it on that, I'm not going to say the word, but that ____ uniform that you're wearing? And he slapped me in the face and I fell out of the street car. I almost got killed by it, but I wasn't really injured. But, I think the traitors were worse sometimes than the actual Germans. I couldn't stand his arrogance, and I talked back, I must have been about 13 at that time. And, as I say, you learn very fast during the war. And you learn things you maybe you shouldn't be learning, like bad words and that sort of thing. But, yeah, I remember the occupation extremely vividly for some reason. Maybe a half a block from where we were was a, one of the rare skyscrapers in Brussels and there lived three German generals there. And I remember very well going to school and seeing those gentlemen, quote unquote, come down the steps there with their green capes that were lined in red, you know? Very, very flashy. Those were probably too impressive for me to insult because for some reason, even an enemy general is still a general, I suppose, you don't say bad things to a general. But, I remember that as if it were yesterday. It's something that stays with you.

Q: Was their presence ominous?

A: Yes. Yes. We had the same reflex that the Germans had in Germany under Hitler's day that always look behind us to see if we weren't being followed. And, yeah, the presence was heavy. And they made their presence known. Like, every Saturday, they had a victory parade. Every Saturday. A victory parade in the streets of Brussels. And they would parade in front of the royal palace and then stop there and have a band concert. And they were pretty obvious. As I say, on the street cars, you had to be careful what you said because there were always some ears that shouldn't hear what you were saying. Oh, I remember, for example, one day I was, that was probably toward the end of the war, must have been '44, I was standing on the platform there and a man was seated inside reading a newspaper and the

street car stopped and the Germans came aboard and started searching people. And everybody had to put their hands up. And this man very, very casually, very quietly, took a pistol out of his inside pocket, put it in his newspaper and went like this. The Germans searched him but didn't look inside his newspaper. And he was never found out. But, you know, you had to be very careful of what you said and what you didn't say.

Q: Change the tape?

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: Is this, I think my angle...Oh, yeah, that does make a big difference. I think he's, he's just sort of...

A: Are you all right?

Q: I want to learn more about how, what?

A: Is he ready? Okay.

Q: I want to get a better picture of what life was like once the Germans came into Belgium. How your life, personally, changed.

A: Well, the first few months, there really weren't that many changes. Because they tried to go easy. And, as I said to you previously, we had a military governor. We did not have a Golighter(ph). We didn't have an SS general at that time. We only had one general who was an anti-Nazi. General Alexander from Falkenhausen(ph). Who was an old Prussian aristocrat who actually was pretty friendly to the Belgians. So, the first few months were not all that bad actually. Except for the obvious presence of the German army. The parades and all that sort of things. And, of course, the rationing. The scarcity of essentials. Which, actually, became much, much worse as of probably 1943. In 1940 and 1941, I can't say that we were that miserable. But in 1942, then Berlin realized that the military governor was not being strong enough, was not being harsh enough. And we received then, an SS man who sort of took over the, quote, political aspect. In other words, diminishing all the powers of the army which in itself wasn't all that bad. That's when things began to change very drastically. The day-to-day life for us became pretty difficult as far as food is concerned. Various supplies. There was no gasoline for my father's little car which he kept, as a doctor was able to keep. But there was no fuel for it so that didn't do much good. And things like that. And then, we began to see things changing even more drastically. That's when we saw people being taken away. We hadn't quite yet realized why they were taken away. We thought maybe they had done some bad things. And were being put in jail for that. And then, pretty quickly, it became obvious that they were mostly Jewish people, as well as Belgians who had either something to do with the Resistance or simply hostages. People who were not Jewish that hadn't really done anything bad, were taken as hostages in reprisal for various acts of resistance and that sort of thing. Or for having hidden resistance or people who were resistant to the forced labor that, of course, was imposed. That's another thing that didn't come immediately. Forced labor. Young people taken to Germany forcibly to work. Not necessarily to concentration camps, but to factories and that sort of thing. Being paid a measly salary and living in squalor and terrible conditions. And, of course, it didn't take long before the young people understood what was going on and they went into hiding. Electricity became limited. We would have power cut off after, say, 8:00 at night. Curfews, of course. That began pretty early in the war. Curfews were established, but they weren't strictly enforced. Again, it was still the army at that time. But, as soon as the SS and Gestapo police

came, those things were strictly enforced. And if you were out in the street at 8:30, you immediately went to jail. You know, not just getting a ticket or something. You were taken to jail. And, the trains were limited. There was hardly any coal for the locomotives. Except for the German transports. And then I saw, with my own eyes, the first Jewish transports that I ever saw, at the end of 1942. At first I didn't realize what was going on. But, I saw lots of people being packed in, they weren't yet using cattle cars. They were using very old third class cars with, which were boarded, the windows were boarded up. And, but the people were still sitting on benches. They weren't yet packed 100 or 120 in a cattle car. But, I saw them because there was a railroad station only about three or four blocks from my house. And the tracks were down and so you could see from a little wall and there were iron gates, if you want, you could see through the gates what was going on down there. And I saw this train where people were pushed in with little package or suitcase or bundle of some sort. And then I was told by somebody who worked there, you know, who these are? No. Well, these are Jewish people that are taken to Germany. That's the first time I ever saw a transport. And I remember that as if it was yesterday. What else? Well, of course, the city was down completely as far as activity is concerned. There were some movie theaters playing German movies and propaganda, of course. All English or American or French movies were outlawed. I don't think I ever went to a real movie until 1944. When, just after the liberation. My father just didn't want us to go to, to go see that thing. Then after World War II, interestingly enough, I was able to see a number of those propaganda movies, but that's neither here nor there. During the war, there were no candies, you know, for kids that was important. Chocolate was still being made, but taken by the German army, most of it. As I say, the food was tolerably abundant for the first two years, but then after 1942, things began to go very badly. We probably, we had a loaf of bread for the five of us for a day or two. Sometimes maybe twice a week. Meat was rarely, rarely available. We were extremely lucky in Belgium that, almost been called a miracle, in 1943, because for some reason, an enormous bank of herring began to swim right off the Belgian coast. Within a mile or so. The fishing boats were allowed two lines, so they were allowed to go and fish those herring. And for about six months that sustained the Belgian people as far as protein is concerned. And I still remember my poor mother, you know, getting up at 4:00 in the morning, waiting until 10:00 or 11:00 in line, standing there. Sometimes I went with her when I wasn't in school. And getting two or three measly herrings, but at least we had that. My mother had to learn close to 100 different recipes so we would still eat those because after you've had herring every day for six months, you just don't want to ever see another herring in your life. But it saved us.

Q: What about school?

A: School, at first there was no school for a few months. But it started again in September. You know, the war began in May, it started again in September. And the first year it was school as usual. But then it didn't take long before all the books were censored and only the Nazi controlled versions were allowed. We were, that was mostly in high school later on. But, we were allowed to learn English after we had learned German first. It sounded awful at the time, but in a way it was blessing in disguise, because when I finished high school and all

my classmates the same way, we could speak Latin, Greek, French, Flemish, German and English. Which has served me well, you know, later in my life. So, I guess I owe that to the Nazis. But, I'm not grateful.

Q: You've spoken about some of the ways in which your life was changed by the occupation. Were you aware of the different kinds of restrictions on Jewish people?

A: As I say, after 1942, we began to realize what was going on. And we saw some of our friends being taken away. And then it dawned upon us, oh, that's why they're, you know, they're taken away. Because they are Jewish. As I told you before, we didn't even have an inkling before World War II. We didn't ask the people which, you know, where do you go? Do you go to a synagogue or do you go to a Catholic church or anything. If they went to a Catholic church, we would see them because they would go to the same one we did. But, the other people who were not in our church, we didn't ask them what they did or where they went or what, and you know, if they had no religion at all, so what, that was fine, you know. Yeah, we began to see and I have somewhere in my file, I have a picture of a transport taken by a friend of my father's who was a doctor, too, from his office window which was just above the building where they took the people. So he took a picture, this was obviously forbidden, but he did anyway. They didn't catch him. We still have that picture.

Q: Were they wearing the yellow star?

A: Yeah. As of 1942, we began to see the yellow stars. And, of course, at that time, it became quite obvious. Then in the center of the city, for example, Jews were not allowed to walk on the sidewalk. I have a picture of that, too. They were forced to walk in the gutter. And when it was dry it didn't matter that much, except it was humiliating. But when it was raining they had their feet in the water which wasn't all that pleasant, particularly during the war when we didn't have any good shoes anyway. Many shoes were made out of cardboard and they would just fall apart in that water. If that had been the only misery, I suppose they might have survived it, even though resenting it. But, that was only the beginning. The yellow star, there were a number of people who in the street car, would ostentatiously get up and give their seat to a person wearing a yellow star. Particularly if there were German officers or German soldiers on the street car at that time. They would deliberately show, you know, say, please take my seat. I wouldn't say everybody did that, but there were people who did it. I've seen it happen.

Q: What was the reaction from the Germans?

A: Very quiet. They wouldn't do anything. You know, actually, the individual German, particularly the army people, were rather, I wouldn't say scared, but they weren't particularly aggressive when alone. As I said before, the, this traitor there was probably more aggressive than the German army people. Now, I'm not talking about the SS. But we didn't see the SS all that much. They were always in cars. They hardly ever were on foot. The people on foot were mostly the soldiers and they were sort of well restrained in their attitudes, except when

they were asked to do a search. And, you know, to line people up against a wall and search them and that sort of thing, which is how I got my kick in the butt. In general, the population was very understanding and sympathetic. Now, there were a few bad ones. And I'm not going to deny that. I'm not proud of it. Nobody is. But, it wasn't as bad as in France. I can assure you of that. We could see that a number of shops where we had been shopping regularly for either food or clothes or that sort of thing, were closed. There was nobody there any more. And, actually, the Germans did not, as much as they did in their own country, take over the Jewish businesses.

Q: So, you were telling me about the general climate.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you said that most of the Belgian public was supportive of, I guess, the Jewish population?

A: Yeah. And, as a matter of fact, anything that had to do with being against the Bosch(ph), as we said, you know, was in favor of most of the Belgian population at that time. They, you will hear people say that, oh, there were some very bad people and, as I said, it's true, the largest newspaper in Brussels was actually Nazi controlled completely. But, interestingly enough, it was Jewish owned. But the owner went to England, so the paper was taken over by pro-Nazi people. The other large, the other two largest papers, the Socialist one and the Catholic ones, just shut down. They didn't publish any more. So the only paper we really had was Neswah(ph) which is the evening, although it was published in the morning. Which was Nazi controlled entirely. Interestingly, a little anecdote, on the 21st of July, I think it was in 1943, which is the national day of Belgium, there was a false Swah(ph) distributed which had been printed and put out by the resistance. And, at first, it was so well made that people didn't realize it was not the real one. And they just took it and then you could see the people picking up the paper and their jaws dropping because all the things that were said there, you know. We shall win and we'll crush the Bosch and naming all the traitors and that sort of thing, and people started reading and reading and sometimes giggling because some funny stories were written in there, too. And that was a day of levity during World War II when the entire city of Brussels was covered with Neswah, but not the real one. Which was, of course, much more real than the Nazi controlled one.

Q: You speak of the resistance. How apparent was it?

A: It became fairly, for me, it became fairly apparent because right in my house we had a housekeeper who worked as a concierge(ph) if you want, cleaned the entrance hallway where my father's patients would come because in Europe, many doctors had their office in their house, it was very common. And so did my father. And her son was a career soldier in the Belgian Army, was taken war prisoner, and when he came back, immediately joined one of the earliest resistant movements and it was impossible for her to hide it from her, from us, because he had to come home occasionally to get, you know, clothes and that sort of thing

and he would come at night, sometimes after the curfew, but he never got caught there. So, I became quickly aware that there was something going on. And so did my sister and brother who were much younger than I, but they knew, oh, Roger was here again. Roger, Roger. Yeah, Roger was in the resistance and well, actually, Roger had a little brother who was exactly my age and slept on the third floor and at 4:00 one night, my mother came and shook me and said, hurry up, open the back windows and hurry up, the Germans are at the door. And Roger was in the house at that time with his brother, sleeping in the same bed. Which was, of course, on purpose. He immediately ran out the roof windows, you know those roof windows in Europe where you can lift like a trap, the window, and he ran out that way and was able to escape and the Germans came and found the little brother in the warm bed, but, you know, they had no way of telling there was another guy there. So, they searched the house, these were SS, it was Gestapo, actually. And they searched the house, didn't find anything, they were very careful not to leave any traces of his passage. And after that, he never came home again. It must have been later in the war, it must have been 1943 or something like that. And, so we were quite aware of a resistance movement. I don't think we made any distinction between the Jewish resistance and non-Jewish resistance. That probably would have been a little too complicated for us to understand at that time. But then, when my uncle, when Father Bruno came into the picture, and that was late 1942 or early '43, for me, then we began to see things quite differently. We, he didn't say anything, you know, he was very, very quiet and never said a word. He never said, I am helping Jewish children escape. But, after two or three or five had gone through my other uncle's house, and I was there quite often, you know, you can be 13 and still think, you know? And at that point, I realized things were going on that were not at all, quote, normal. And I didn't say anything, but you put two and two together at age 12 or 13, just as you can when you're an adult. And it's from that time on that my uncle, Father Bruno, became perhaps less secretive with me. I was one of the oldest nephews and I was, by far, the one he was closest to. And so he became less secretive in the sense that he would give me a letter to take to a place or there would be a child I had never seen and he said, oh, this is a friend of mine and his name is Robert, maybe his name was Abraham, I don't know. But, and, do you know where such and such street is? Yes, I do. Well, why don't you take the street car and go to such and such house there and tell them that Robert is looking for a place to stay. And that's all he ever said. You know, he never said, Robert is Jewish. And Robert always had a war name, a different name. One of the kids that I knew particularly well, is alive and well and we called him Roger. Roger Dumois(ph). And I actually lived with him, more or less, for at least six months. In my other uncle's house, my younger uncle, the dentist. Jean(ph), who worked in very close cooperation with Father Bruno. That was my grandmother's house and he was the only child of my grandmother's who stayed in the family home after he was married because he occupied my grandfather's medical office as a dentist. So he didn't have to look for another place and my grandmother just took the upper floor for herself. And so, the kids were brought there frequently. I, one day I entered without warning into my grandmother's apartment and there were eight kids sitting, seated there on eight chairs, she had a lot of chairs because she had a lot of children. Each of them had a glass of milk in his hand and, of course, I immediately put two and two together but nobody said anything. She says, Oh, we're just having a little party. And there were eight Jewish kids. One of whom stayed and, it

was a funny incident because he was playing with matches and almost set fire to my grandmother's curtains. But she got the fire under control pretty rapidly. But, this is how I, you know, I realized what was going on. And then my uncle Bruno, Henry, Henry was his real name. Father Bruno was his religion name, would come in civilian clothes. I had never seen him in civilian clothes, couldn't understand why he was doing that. But, after a while, of course, we realized he had to because the Germans were after him. And he had a bicycle and he would occasionally ring the bell quite late at night and hide his bicycle inside and disappear in the middle of the night while we were, I frequently slept at my younger uncle's house because he had a, there was a better heating system in his house than in my parent's second house, which I didn't like anyway. And, so I did get to see quite a number of the proteges, as my uncle used to call them. And, okay, what else?

Q: Well, since you mentioned this boy that you actually lived with for quite some time, this Jewish boy, I'm just curious if you, what it was like. Was he scared? Did you talk about things?

A: I must honestly say that life went on pretty normally. There was a feeling of security in that house. I don't know why. Everybody felt pretty safe and secure in that house. He went to school with me to the College _____, of course, where else? It happens that that school is only about three or four blocks away from my grandparent's house, which is the main reason why everybody went there. And so we went to school together and sometimes we didn't see each other during the day because we were not in the same class. But, usually at 4:00, which was dismissal time, we would wait for each other at the door and just go on home as if nothing had happened, and as if nothing was going on. Jumping like kids do, you know, and kicking a can once in awhile and that sort of thing. And he looked pretty happy. It's only actually towards the very, very end of the war when I think he had an inkling that his parents had disappeared, that he became a little more sad and more, less expansive, less talkative. But, for a good while there, we were just like two old buddies and playing games like you see kids do and doing our homework together and that sort of thing.

Q: Did he talk about what happened to his parents?

A: No.

Q: Or why he was hiding?

A: No. No. Actually, that was one thing that Father Bruno stressed upon them, to never talk about, never, your name is Joe Blow now, you don't have any parents, you are not Jewish, you are of Flemish descent, and your parents are travelling in France or something like that. Or your parents are dead, you know, or something. But, dead from other causes he meant. No, that was one thing he was very, very strong and stern about. Do not ever talk about your family and things that happened. So, even in my grandmother's house, there was no such talk.

End of tape #2

Tape #3

...down a little bit, they might be a little...

A: Well, they're already down. No, I don't mean that, I mean, I'm saying you can tip it back a little.

A: I was going to say, if I point them more down, they'll be... Yeah, I know they were too high.

Q: I just wanted to pick up where we stopped for a moment, because it was at the end of the tape.

A: Yes.

Q: You were telling me about this Jewish boy who was hiding at your house.

A: Right. Roger.

Q: Roger. And that while, when he maybe learned more about his family, he became...

A: Sulky, you know.

Q: But I was asking you whether, at any point, you ever talked to him about what was happening?

A: No.

Q: What was going on in the war.

A: No. That was a no-no. And it was on specific instructions by Father Bruno to not talk about events surrounding the children. Any child that was under his protection, if you want to say. It just was too risky. You know, one unfortunate word and it could have caused the death, not only of the child, but everybody around the child. So, no. As little talk as possible. How do you say that? The enemy has ears everywhere? Or something like that. We were very aware of that. And at that time, when I began to work a little closer to Father Bruno, I was already, well, a young teenager at that time, I was mostly, well almost 13 and 13, and I began to understand, you just don't talk about things of importance during the war. Now, on the contrary, we had a little club, if you want, of school kids, we thought of ourselves as very important. And we had a club which was our resistance club. It didn't do much resistance, but we were organized as a military club. There was a colonel and there was a couple of majors and a couple of captains and if you did well, if you, for example, you could report on seeing so many German trucks going by, then you got promoted. And if you had counted how many B-17's are flying over our heads, then you got a promotion or a decoration or a commendation of some sort. We had to know by heart, all the types of aircraft, enemy or

friendly, and we had exams given by the colonel, you know, and that sort of thing. It didn't amount to anything, it was just games, but to give you the spirit of the war. You know. And we would hide in the, somebody's basement so the Germans wouldn't hear us. It was very secret. That was mostly, actually, before 1943, I think. When I was still a little more innocent.

Q: Did you every do any little, you mentioned putting the sugar in the gas tanks...

A: Yeah. That was part of our assignments. If we did that, that was a great big promotion because, if you did that, you know, you took a bad risk. And you could be promoted from second lieutenant all the way to major for doing that. Yeah. And when my mother found out about that, was she every unhappy. Not so much for the sugar, but for the risk I was taking. And even though these were not SS, I'm sure if they had caught us, they would have definitely called our parents, maybe put our parents in jail, and that sort of thing.

Q: Were there other little sabotage activities?

A: Well, yeah, flat tires and things like that. For some reason, a truck would suddenly develop a flat tire. I had a couple of friends who were specialists of that, they would have a little stick of wood and put that in the, what do you call this valve, you know? Where they inflate the tire? Push it in and there's a little peg in there that if you push it in, the air goes out. So, when nobody was looking, he would just push a little piece of wood in there and slowly the air would go out. And the next morning the truck had a flat tire. And, but again, all that didn't amount to much. But, it's just the spirit, you know. We, it was a spirit of resistance. In our childish way, you know. Go ahead, I'm sorry.

Q: Was that spirit of resistance fairly prevalent in Brussels?

A: Well, I can only speak about my own environment. I would say that in my own environment, it was. It was, you know, in World War I, my grandparents had been very, very miserable and badly treated by the occupant, so that was still lingering. And, the eight children, except perhaps for the last one, had lived through that war with the spirit, let's get rid of the Bosch, you know. And it was still there 25 years later. You just don't get rid of that sort of resentment so easily. And, so it wasn't at all difficult for us to pick up because that spirit had already been imparted to us between the wars. You know, when they were telling stories, oh, do you remember so and so? Do you remember when general so and so got beaten by the French and da, da, da. So, we were living, see Belgium has been occupied by foreign powers ever since Julius Caesar and, you know, Belgians have become, for that reason, exceedingly independent minded people. And it's only since 1830, that Belgium has become a political entity of its own, a free, independent country. And then, but we, we have an ancestral tradition of hating the occupant. You know, from Julius Caesar to the Franks to the Spaniards to the Austrians, the French and then the Germans again. And, yeah, that spirit of anti-occupant was very prevalent in my environment. It's difficult for me to judge, you know, how it was in other families. But, the families that we knew were on our side, if I may say.

We never, I never, never knew, personally, anyone who was not anti-Nazi. On the contrary, my father had several excellent friends who suffered greatly during the war because of their anti-Nazi attitudes and actions. One of them died in a concentration camp, the other one was killed by the SS on the last day of the occupation. He was, they came with a car and started shooting blindly around and he got hit by a machine gun bullet and was killed about five minutes after my father had said good-bye to him for the day. And then there was the governor of the national bank who was giving funds to Father Bruno for his children. And one day, three or four Nazi thugs came and rang his doorbell and said, are you Mr. Gallopan(ph)? And he said, yes, [machine gun sounds], they just machine gunned him right on his doorstep, right in front of his wife.

Q: Because of his efforts?

A: Because of his support of the resistance. You know, Father Bruno needed enormous amounts of money to be able to feed and clothe his children. And he didn't have anything, of course. And so, he went to Mr. Gallopan who was a notorious anti-German, even though they had left him as president of the national bank knowing that he was not, he didn't like them. So, he went to this man and this man committed himself to giving him a certain sum of money, I don't remember how much it was, every month. And my other uncle, one of my other uncles by marriage, Uncle Jack, was the one who collected the money from the bank every month and kept the books. Kept the accounting. And when Mr. Gallopan was killed, someone else in the bank honored his promise and they continued to deliver money until the end of the war.

Q: I do want to learn a lot more about this whole rescue effort, but I'd like you to tell me a bit more about what you did. Your involvement.

A: Well, I don't want to, you know, I've never been for self aggrandizement. All I ever did, as I told you in this film before, is carry little letters and escort children from one point to the other. I was too young to do anything else at that time. So, that was my contribution, if you want, being a messenger.

Q: Do you remember specifically...

A: And also being a school mate, which probably brought a little comfort to Roger, among others.

Q: Do you remember specifics of some of your messengering and escorting?

A: Well, the one picture I keep is my standing on the rear platform of a street car with my arms stretched out on the railing, on the back thing, and a Jewish child looking at me with a cap on his head, hiding his dark hair. And my hair was light blond, very light blond, I was a perfect Aryan. And we were just playing, you know, being silly kids. With my blue eyes and my blond hair, the Germans would, there would be a few Germans on the street cars, but they

would probably just take one look at me and just, you know, ignore me. And that was one picture that I remember very, very well. Another incident was that, at that time, I was carrying a letter, but I was with my aunt, the wife of the dentist. Of Jean, my aunt Ninette(ph), one of the women I have most loved in my life. And I was there with her and we were trying to find an address, and we couldn't find the house. And at one point, there were Germans in the street. They weren't looking for us, but she got scared and we ran away. And then she said, you know, I shouldn't have run away because that may give us away. I should have just said, and I said, well, let me go back by myself. They're not going to bother me. And I went back and I finally did find that house, rang the doorbell and delivered the letter, ran like heck out of there to find my aunt again. And she was waiting around the corner on a bench somewhere. That's, those are two incidents I do remember.

Q: How much did you know about what you were doing?

A: Well, I've been trying to explain that, you know, it grew gradually. At first, we didn't really know what was going on. Certainly not before 1942. And even in 1942, early in the game, we were only sensing something was going on. And it was very important. But, we couldn't pinpoint what it was. But even at, you know, the ripe old age of 12 or 13, during the war, there are things that you perceive that you would not normally otherwise perceive. And it didn't take very long, as I said I think previously on this tape, that, you know, I put two and two together and began to realize how important it was. And what was the purpose of all these kids coming and going. And some I would never see again, some I would see again, maybe two or three months later. That would be when a hiding place would be blown for example, you know? Then Father Bruno had to go get the child back. People were talking or whatever. Some unfortunate circumstance had taken place and, well, you know, I have my little six year old grandson here and I'm amazed at how much a little six year old can perceive already. So I'm sure that at 12 or 13, all of us were much more aware than people thought we were. Even though Father Bruno never said the word, you know.

Q: So you weren't given much information? You didn't talk about it with your uncles or...

A: No. No. The only thing that was talked to or talked about was where to go put a letter and where to take a child. That was all. No, no, no. Not at that time. Even though, you know, I'm sure that if I had been put under torture, I would have certainly said what I knew. You know, at 12 or 13, you don't resist torture, you have to talk. I'm sure I couldn't have withstood torture. It never happened. I was very lucky. But I'm sure I would have given them more information than everybody else thought I knew. And I had a couple of cousins who were about my age, who knew almost as much as I did, even though they weren't quite so close to Father Bruno because they lived in a different house in a different part of Brussels. But nevertheless, they weren't fools, they knew what was going on.

Q: You said you were asked to escort some of these kids to hiding places. What kind of places did you take them to?

- A: Just families. Just mostly families. Occasionally a convent, or occasionally a school, but most of the time, families. And I cannot be sure of that, but I believe that one time I took a child to this extraordinary lady who helped Father Bruno with at least 50 of the children, and was, never asked for any payment except for her train fare and an occasional lunch. And I think I met her then, but that's a little fuzzy in my mind. I can't be absolutely sure. Mostly, these were families or private persons.
- Q: What did you talk about with the kids you were transporting? You were, how did you transport them?
- A: On foot or in the street car, public transportation. The street cars were the only public transportation available, there were no busses, no gasoline. And, I think we would just talk about usual kid stuff, you know. School or maybe talk about the people around us. Talking about, you know, games or whatever. I think we would just talk about ordinary things. Never, definitely never, about deportation, about camps or all that sort of thing. Of course, we didn't know much about the camps anyway. But, not at that time we didn't, but we would never say, oh, your uncle so and so went away. What happened to him? Never. That was forbidden.
- Q: Did you have a sense of their fear or trepidation or...
- A: Occasionally, some kids were pretty antsy, yeah. Occasionally. Some of them would be kind of, you know, looking around and checking to see if they were being followed and so on. Mostly the older ones, I mean older, I mean 8, 9, 10 year olds. Not a four or five year olds. But, I think that, yeah, some of the older kids were scared, obviously scared.
- Q: Did you have to say something to them so they wouldn't give themselves away?
- A: Well, we tried to, I don't know, what do you do when somebody's scared? You try to talk about something else, distract them, you know. That's all we could do, you know. Or we would just try to interrupt their train of thought by pointing at something, oh, look at that, you know. Something like that. I had, this had nothing to do with Father Bruno, but I had a classmate whose mother was killed in the bombing, bombing by the Americans, by the way. And every time there was an air raid, he would literally go into a trance, into hysterics. And there was nothing we could do to, you know, to calm him down. He would just shake all over and perspire and moan and he never got over that. He never recovered. In fact, he died rather miserably ten years ago or something like that. And, so there were times where you couldn't do anything. But this never actually happened to me with one of kids I was escorting. No.
- Q: What about the risk to you? Was this exciting? Was this like a big adventure? Or were you a little bit nervous? I mean, you were taking risks.
- A: You're 12, 13 year old. You don't think of risk. You don't think of, you think of it as, you

think of it as a new adventure. You think of it as something different, you know, outside of going to school and doing your homework and going to bed and have breakfast and so on and so on. Suddenly, there was something, and you had, you know, sort of a feeling of being useful. Because they were calling upon you to do something. You know. You were no longer the little child playing with his little cars and, toy cars in the corner. You know, you were part of the responsibility. So, no. Well, of course, we knew about some, something of the risk. We knew to avoid the Germans as much as possible. But that was even before. I mean, we tried to avoid the Germans, when we saw a group of Germans on the street corner, we immediately changed course and took another street. Even before 1942. We just didn't want to, you know, that was, that kind of risk we knew we shouldn't take, we weren't supposed to take a risk by going too close to the enemy. Oh, that's something we acquired immediately. And our parents certainly re-emphasized that, too. Sure. It's interesting because my first exposure with the Nazi military was before World War II and I was in Switzerland with my parents in a town that's right at the border, the German border, called Reinfelden(ph). There's a lovely bridge there. And on one side is a Swiss guard and on the other side is a German guard. And I was, I think, seven or eight years old at that time. And, you know, like any kid, I ran on the bridge and the Swiss soldier stopped me and said in French, because he'd heard we'd spoke French, he says, don't go there, this guy is bad on the other side. So, the Swiss didn't like the Nazis any more than we did. Even though they spoke German in that area.

Q: Did you, were your activities secret even from your parents?

A: No. No, my parents knew about it. In fact, we had three Jewish people in our house in a row, I mean, success, in succession. We had first, I think the first one was a Polish girl. Blond, Polish girl who was a little ornery. She was a bit difficult. She didn't want to be cooped up. And, in fact, she left us. To go with a Belgian policeman. The last we heard, she was working as a, I don't know what you call it, a call girl or something in a tavern. Not far from our house. Where German officers went. I guess that fact that she was blond and blue eyed didn't tip off the Germans that she was Jewish. Then we had a large German, no, yes, German woman, but from East Germany. And she was very, very scared. She was very, very scared. She stayed with us for about, I think, three months and then Father Bruno came and took her out and took her away. And then we had another woman and she told us all kinds of funny stories. She told us the stories of Laurel and Hardy movies. In French. And on the Liberation Day, September 3, 1944, she ran to her room, picked up her suitcase, she only had one suitcase, packed up, ran out the door and we never saw her again. I don't know what happened to her. She was just so elated she was free again, that she just ran out the door. So that was the last, the last one I ever saw actually.

Q: So a number of, how many? Three.

Q: Okay. A number of people in your families, in your family, hid Jews? Is that what you're saying?

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. The nuns did in their convent in Liesch(ph). The other nun, who was at

that time in Brussels, no, no, she was in Schlovese(ph), another small town. That convent also hid a couple of kids. My parents did. My father did surgery on a couple of Jewish kids. Another anecdote. He had a small child who had appendicitis, put him in the open ward because that's the way hospitals were at that time. Maybe 20 patients in an open ward. And, believe it or not, a German soldier had a bad car accident right in front of the hospital. So, instead of taking him to the military hospital which was the other side of the city, they took him to my father's ward. So, at one end we had the Jewish child with appendicitis, at the other end we had an injured German soldier. But, you know what? It turned out to be a sort of a protection. Because this guy was there lying, he was there for at least a week before they transported him to the military hospital, well, there was a constant flow of friends and officers coming to comfort him and bring him candy and flowers and so on and so on. They wouldn't pay any attention to the rest of the ward. And there wouldn't be any searches during that time.

Q: I need to stop here because we're really...

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

Q: Are you ready? I'm rolling.

Q: Oh, you are rolling. I just started. Just.

Q: Are there other memories you have of your own personal experiences during the war, you're own involvement in trying to help people?

A: Not specifically aimed at Father Bruno's network. More like the general population. Yes. For example, we had a big house and I didn't like the house, but that's neither here nor there, it used to belong, a hundred years ago, no a hundred and fifty years ago, to twin brothers who were wine merchants and they had cellars that were two level cellars, like in a sub-basement, if you want, basement and sub-basement. All of these were vaulted, almost like a cathedral. And because of that, we had the visit of the air defense people who came and looked at our place and they said, well, this is a pretty safe basement. It can probably resist most of the normal bombs that were available in those days. Would you be willing to open that up to the public? And we did. And so, yes there were numbers of people from our neighborhood who would come during air raids and, actually, it turned out sometimes to be a rather, rather fun. Because they would bring their food and we would share their food and we would share with them our food. And in that cellar, I must tell you, that there were still some bottle of wine. And I'm sure the neighbors enjoyed those quite a bit. And there was an air intake, a sort of a column about a foot and a half in diameter which let the air in and opened up in our back yard and I was the air raid signaler. I was in charge of listening if I could hear the airplanes and if I did, I would say, they are coming, they are coming. And also to warn them when it was the end of alarm signal, so everybody could go home. That was my duty at that time. So, this is a memory I keep, you know, very vivid. And other than that, well, yeah, distributing whatever little food we had to some other people who had even less. My mother did that, but she did that mostly as part of her duties in that blind people organization. And my great aunt, who was my mother's aunt, was also the president of that same organization. Took me around a number of times during the war to help her carry packages and that sort of thing. Yeah. But that wasn't, you know, was not directly connected to saving the Jewish people. That was mostly just ordinary being nice to people. Oh, I might mention that even though my wife's family had no connection with the Jewish movement, they did hide non-Jewish resistance in their attic. That gave rise to a rather hair raising occasion because one of them also got appendicitis, but how are you going to get that guy out of the attic when, you know, in a neighborhood where everyone knew everything about everybody. So, what they did, they waited until it was dark, called the ambulance, had my wife's sister climb on the stretcher with the guy, covering both of them so that only her head would be visible, put the stretcher in the ambulance and took the whole thing to the hospital. So, of course, my sister-in-law had to stay away from the house for at least a week because they kept people in the hospital for at least a week after appendectomy in those days. And then to bring the man back was another thing because at that time he could walk so it wasn't so difficult, but again, they had to be very careful at night. And there was an asthmatic woman living right across,

because those were row houses, and she would always open her window during the night to take a breath of fresh air. And they had to wait until she closed the window before any movement could occur in the street.

Q: Let's get back to your family. Your immediate family. You started to tell me who all was involved in this rescue operation.

A: Who, well. Father Bruno was the driving force. The leader. He was also the person having no children who adamantly said that he was taking all the responsibility on his back. Whether that would have served, you know, or helped, I'm not sure because the Nazis were smarter than that. But, at least he said, I want to take all the responsibility and I will have you help me, but I will never mention you or anything. But he got his mother involved, my grandmother, my father, who was a surgeon. My younger uncle who was a dentist. My uncle by marriage who was the finance man. And his three sisters who were nuns. But, that was only a very small part of the network. Because he had to have a lot more help than that. So, he got quite a number of assistants either permanently or occasionally. Some of them were Jewish, some of them were not. He did all kinds of visits himself to the families where he wanted the children to be hidden and in the little book that we wrote there is that famous story of the University professor in Louvan(ph), Belgium who was a devout Catholic and my uncle went to see him and told him all that was happening. And the man said, you know, I honestly am not aware of this. But, my duty as a Christian is to help you. When are you going to bring me a child? And, you know, that sort of thing, of course, was very comforting for him. He said when he went to Israel after the war, that no one actually shut the door on him. So, he did have a few, well, misadventures where some kid didn't get along with a family or, particularly, adults sometimes were a little independent and the family would consider them as being servants. And they wouldn't like that. So, there were a few, but I would say not more than five or six such incidents occurred. And the vast majority of the people were just welcoming and opened their arms, you know, and their families to Father Bruno. But I would say that there were probably more than several hundred people involved eventually. Because you know, three hundred twenty and maybe more children, we don't know exactly how many there were, Flora thinks, Flora Singer, thinks there was about three hundred and fifty. That may be a little too much. We don't know. Because, obviously, for security reasons, Father Bruno couldn't keep accurate records during the war. So all the records he had were little notes he made in a certain code which, after the war, he then transferred to a more elaborate ledger. And so he lost track of a few of them. So we know for sure of about three hundred and twenty. And since each child probably had to be moved, one, two, three, up to five times, well, just count and you'll see that would imply probably something like a thousand transfers. You know? Not, there were sometimes the same families taking different children. But, most of the time they, you know when there was too much talking or too much something going on that might give it away, he had to find new families all the time. And so, his personal network included probably the eight or nine people of his family and as many close collaborators or friends as that. Like eight or nine, maybe ten. Close associates. But, then, you know, there were hundreds of families that were involved that should not be forgotten or neglected. You know?

Q: How did he get into this? What, I mean, yes, he was a good man, but how did he initially get involved with this rescue operation?

A: Well, that was sort of a happenstance because he was sent as a chaplain, he was requested to come as a chaplain, in a small school for the blind in the southern part of Belgium called Hodbomo(ph). And when he got there he discovered that there were some blind children, but that most of the occupants there were Jewish. Including the director. And that, you know, it just, he just saw the light immediately. But, he had, in 1938, taken a trip in Germany. I told you that he was a mobile Benedictine and he was in Frankfurt in a busy street and he saw people just haggling and harassing or annoying and pushing someone. And he got closer and he saw an old Jewish man who was dressed like most Orthodox people were with a big black hat and caftan and so on and you know what I mean. And they were spitting at him and pushing him and that absolutely tore him apart. But, obviously, being in Germany, he couldn't do a thing about it. You know? He couldn't go to the rescue of the man. If it had been in Belgium, he probably would have, but not in Germany. And he never forgot that incident. And when he got to Hodbomo, that little school for the blind, he said, well, now I realize the full impact of what I saw in Germany and he decided to help. And he didn't help because they were Jews. He helped because they were people. He said, I don't care if they had been Africans, if they had been Japanese, if they had been Papu(ph), I would have done the same thing. He didn't, perhaps he knew more about the Jews than he did about other people, which made it a little easier for him to understand. But, he was mostly concerned about human beings, about people. And he said, you know, I have to do something to save those people. I don't care what they are, who they are, I have to save those people. They are oppressed. They are persecuted. My duty, as a Christian, is to help them and try to save them if I can. Then, at Hodbomo, he got in contact with Albert Vandenburg(ph) who was a lawyer in Liesch(ph) and was the executive director of the camps for sickly and destitute children of the archdiocese of Liesch whose bishop was Bishop Kerkopfs(ph) at that time. And they started working together and Vandenburg was very happy to find someone like Father Bruno who was, you know, free of family, in a way. Didn't have any children and so on, and was willing to do anything to help. And then, unfortunately, Albert Vandenburg was taken by the Gestapo. At first for having forged identity cards and that was actually under the jurisdiction of the military government. And he was condemned to three months in jail and he was very happy that he didn't have more than that, get more than that. And he got out of jail and the Gestapo was waiting outside. Took him again. Sent him to Bergen Belsen where he finally, well, nobody exactly knows how or when he died, but he must have died, perhaps even, after the liberation of the camp, of typhus. Which was, at that time and even now actually, is a deadly disease. And so, Father Bruno took over and went on his own and started his network by contacting various people. Some of the people he already knew from the camps because they were helpers in the camps and this way he was able to place a few children. But, the first month I think, he must have had four or five requests in addition to the, oh, I forgot to mention that the school became very unsafe because in the village people began talking, I'm sure quite innocently, there were no traitors, but they were talking. And talking, as I said, is very dangerous. You know, the enemy has ears everywhere. So, the first thing that Father

Bruno and Albert, who was still alive then, had to do was move the children to other places. So right there, they had 25 kids that they had to get rid of from that school. So they placed those, the early ones, they placed in convents or, again, in the camps. But even that became unsafe because, again, people began talking and there were raids and in one of the raids, there were some adults who were also in the camps and they were arrested and sent to concentration camps. One of the adults who was there was the Grand Rabbi of Liesch, by the name of Lepkifka(ph). And he escaped but his parents went to and died in concentration camp. And so after the war, he did a lot to publicize the work of Vandenburg and...I'm sorry.

Q: That's okay, let it go.

A: What's up?

Q: It's okay, continue please.

A: Alright. You know, to publicize the work of Vandenburg and, incidentally, of Father Bruno as well. They knew each other quite well. As a matter of fact, the sisters who were running the camp were full of praise for the extreme righteousness and religiousness of this rabbi who was very broad minded at the same time. So, that did a lot to smooth any possible differences that might have occurred under his guidance. And then you, I think you were asking me how he got to do that. Well, then people heard about his work and they came with requests, you know. Oh, Mrs. so and so has two children and she would like to place them in safety. And the first month he got maybe four, five or six of them. Eventually after a few months, I think it was in July of '43, his largest number was, I believe, 24 requests in a month. That doesn't sound like much, but when you realize that he had to go on his bicycle across Belgium, you know, 24 times to find families to bring papers, to bring food, to bring the child. It was a day and night job. You know, he worked 18 hours a day. And sometimes more. He said after the war that he had crisscrossed Belgium 40 times the distance that the bicycle racers do for the tour of Belgium now. So, that give you an idea of how much bicycling he did.

Q: What was the involvement of the, or support of the Catholic church in Belgium?

A: Well, in Belgium, as opposed to some of the eastern European countries, the majority of the Catholic church was helpful. The Cardinal, the Primate of Belgium, Cardinal VanLouie(ph), had directive, if you want, or directions that, to be very cautious. But he did several times, issue bulletins saying that, you know, I will not, I will close my eyes if you do this. I will do, I will not interfere if you do that. In other words, he was giving them free rein without saying, I want you to save the Jews. Because that would immediately have put him in jail right there. And he couldn't do that. And it's the same thing that they said about Pope Pius XXII, this is maybe a controversial subject, but I'm very, very positive on that because my parents were married by Cardinal Mikar(ph) who became a very good friend of them and he became the Secretary of State of Pius XXII, and he told my parents and me, specifically, that the Pope was very sympathetic and that according to the records, the Vatican itself saved

around 20,000 Jewish people. Including the Grand Rabbi of Rome who was at the Vatican during the war. Now there have been many books written and criticizing him a lot because he didn't do enough. But, again, you know, you have to look at this from different angles. It, there is no question that if he had been very, very strong, Hitler was all prepared to invade the Vatican. And take the Pope prisoner. He couldn't have done anything any more at that time. So, in other words, what he did in a concealed way, was probably more useful than if he had spoken very loudly and been very outspoken about it. They said he was a friend of the Germans. Yes, that's true. He had been the Ambassador of the Pope in Munich for several years and he really liked the people of Germany. But, he abhorred Nazism. In fact, one of his encyclical(ph) letters was directed at the Nazis and condemning it without reservation.

Q: One of the reasons I'm asking about Belgium in particular is that as we know in many instances, there was a, there were traditional beliefs about Jewish people as traitors, as Christ killers, as whatever. And the Catholic church was not always as supportive toward helping Jewish people.

A: Well, you know, let's say that in my environment, it wasn't the case. I cannot speak for all the Belgians, but in my environment, it was not the case. And from what I've been reading and from what I've heard and discussed with other people, this was a lot less prevalent in Holland and in Belgium than, for example, in Poland. Because in Poland, even now, there is still a great hostility between the non-Jews and the Jews. Let's face it. That was not the case in Belgium. It was not the case in Holland, either. I want to say here that we never knew exactly how many Jews were in Belgium because people were not registered as to their race, religion, creed or anything else. We figure that there were probably, including all the refugees from the east, in 1938, '39 and even early in 1940, there were probably something like 70,000. Only about 30,000 survived. And that was better than Holland. Where only, I think, only maybe 20 or 15 percent survived. So, the Dutch were not as lucky as we were. They had this SS Goligher(ph) from the very beginning and that was very, very dramatic. Very sad, tragic.

Q: Let's stop here for a few minutes.

End of Tape #4

Tape #5

Q: In this rescue network of your uncle's, who, was he involved with organizations? Did he get help or finances from different resistance organizations?

A: As far as administration, you could say it was a one man operation. He did have assistants. He had people helping him find families. He had people taking care of false identification papers and that sort of thing. But as far as administration, he was it. He had all the power and all the responsibility. As far as finance is concerned, he was a Benedictine Monk, and all his possessions were on his body. That is his cassock and maybe his handkerchief and that was about it. He got support from various families who were not willing to take a child, but were willing to contribute. But, of course, the biggest support he got was from the _____ . The largest bank in Belgium whose director we called governor in those days. Was Mr. Gallopan, he was fiercely anti-Nazi. And he committed himself to contributing a large amount of money each month to Father Bruno. It may not have been quite enough to cover all the expenses, but it was an extremely significant help. Mr. Gallopan guaranteed those payments monthly and the payments were collected by Jack Dupon(ph) who was Father Bruno's brother-in-law. Another uncle of mine. And he continued doing that until the liberation. Unfortunately, poor Mr. Gallopan was a victim of Nazi thugs who one day came and rang his doorbell and said, are you Mr. Gallopan? And he said, yes. And they just killed him on the spot with a blast of submachine gun, right in front of his wife. But the bank continued honoring his commitment all the way to the end of the war.

Q: What about other organizations such as the Jewish Defense Committee?

A: Well, there was, of course, the CDJ, which was a committee for the defense of the Jews, the initials are the same in English as in French, _____. Who was very active and collaborated very closely with Father Bruno. The problem with that is, like it was in France, some of the leaders of that group were, how shall I say, were persuaded by the Germans to cooperate with them. But, of course, the ultimate idea was not at all cooperation, it was to get all the information they could get. And so, Father Bruno was a little bit reluctant to associate directly with the CDJ because he knew there were files and reams of paper that could be found and were found by the Gestapo leading to the arrest of quite a number of people. Fortunately, most of the members of CDJ escaped death. Several went to various camps, but they didn't die. One of them was Mrs. Jospa(ph) who was one of the closest collaborators of Father Bruno and is still alive now, as a matter of fact. And there were several others who were both in the armed resistance and in the peaceful resistance. Because Father Bruno always said, I'm going to be resistance, but I'm going to be a peaceful resistance. I will never bear arms. Which he didn't. But some of the actual armed resistance did cooperate with the peaceful resistance for various reasons and there were several of those, one of them was killed in action and another one died, I believe, after the liberation in an unfortunate accident, in the army at that time.

Q: What sort of coordination would there have been between this committee and your Uncle's network?

A: The coordination was on a person to person basis mostly. They were, the CDJ had visitors, or visiting people I should say, who visited the children at various places. And they would report to the CDJ, but also to Father Bruno. And the CDJ had a committee that was specifically organized to do that, to keep track of the kids that were placed. But that was precisely one of the dangers that Father Bruno feared. That there was too much documentation. And so he tried to cooperate with them as close as he could, but without any written documentation, without papers. He would handle only cash, never checks. Or just, you know, items, like butter or meat or something. But he would not use things that could be traced, such as checks or various deposit slips and that sort of thing. He would meet with the representatives of the CDJ in a neutral environment, but there were never any records written of their discussion, except when he was called to the committee of the CDJ as a guest. Then they kept their records, but he always insisted, he said, don't put my name on your records. Not that I'm afraid for me, but if they catch me, my entire network is gone. So, they didn't put his name on the records. This actually caused some confusion after the war because he said, I was at that meeting. And they would pull the records and say, well, you're name is not on it. And, but that was deliberate. So, there was a loose cooperation, but there was cooperation. And in fact, a fairly extensive, but loose, if you see what I mean? It wasn't, you know, like in an army where the corporal refers to the sergeant, the sergeant refers to the second lieutenant and so on and so forth. It was a loose cooperation. They would have meetings that were informal where decisions were made only verbally and that actually added to the security of the network.

Q: Were there Protestant groups who were also involved in this?

A: There was some Protestants but, you know, Belgium has very few Protestants actually. But there were several Protestant ministers involved. Indeed. But to go back to the Catholic clergy. There was a whole network of priests who worked either directly or indirectly with Father Bruno. One of the best known was Father Andre(ph) from Namir(ph) who, you know, at the greatest risk, always had something like 10, 12, 15, up to 25 kids in his own house in Namir. And here's another one of those extremely bizarre coincidences. Father Bruno did not have a house or an apartment where he could, you know, which he could call his base. Until a spinster of a certain age allowed him to use a little house she had on the square in the middle of Brussels. Because she wasn't using it and it wasn't being rented. It was a very small house. On the left side was a cafe with horse betting, what do you call that? You know what I mean. Anyway, horse betting. On the other side was a _____ of the SS, who was working on the Gestapo Jewish files of New Louise(ph) in Brussels. But that turned out, again, to be a sort of a protection. Because he was right next to this important Nazi officer and they never ever considered the little house in between there. And the second coincidence, Father Andre in Namir had, on his left, a cafe with horse betting and on his right a portion of the Commandant _____, which was not SS, but it was German army. Can you imagine a more bizarre coincidence than that? Father Andre did an awful lot

of work and he deserves all the credit. I think he is on the list at the museum, also. Deserves all the credit. And until the end of the war, he was constantly at risk of being caught. There were many other priests, I won't give you all the names. First of all, I can't remember them right now, one of them was Count _____, who was an aristocrat of a very old Belgian family who was a pastor of a church in Brussels. He, too, took care of several kids. He was a friend of my father's actually. And there were quite a number of other clergymen. And nuns, of course, too. Flora Singer was hidden in a convent of nuns. It wasn't always a pleasant life because the nuns themselves don't have a very pleasant life. Very strict and during the war there wasn't enough food for everybody and they had to, you know, to share what food they had with everybody, including the Jewish girls, usually girls, who were hidden there. So some of the girls have bad memories of having to wash the dishes and of being cold in their beds because the central heating wasn't working. There was no coal. And at that time, central heating was mostly coal fired. We didn't have any oil. Even if it had been oil fired, they wouldn't have had any oil to put in there anyway. So, yeah, the conditions were not always pleasant. But, what's the alternative?

Q: When you mention the scarcity of food or coal, how did your uncle and his colleagues get enough food or clothing?

A: You know, that was one of the most hair raising problems, of course. To get enough food and clothing. Partly it was contributions from people who had enough food, just enough and maybe a little more than just enough. That was only a small part. I think most of the sources were actually legal sources done illegally. In other words, there was, for example, the wife of the same professor at the University of Louvan(ph) who at night went, would you believe, to burglarize the office of rationing, the rationing department. And stole reams of food stamps. Now, you couldn't have just food stamps because you also had to have a card to go with them. That was a precaution the Germans took so that that very thing wouldn't happen. So, they had to forge food cards. And in the book that, the new book that we wrote about Father Bruno, there is a sample of one of those food cards. Strangely enough, one of the best forgers was an old monk in Father Bruno's abbey, _____, very, very adorable old father who would never have done a thing like that in his life if he hadn't been persuaded by Father Bruno that he was doing humanitarian work. He said, I can't be a forger. But, he did and he was probably the best of all. So, they forged hundreds of food cards. They also had to forge identity cards to go along with food cards because, unlike the United States, most European countries demand that their citizens bear an identity card on them all the time. At least after age 12. So, you know, they had to, we had to forge identity cards with false names, false places of birth and false dates of birth so that nothing could be traced. One time Father Bruno was at an open market, there was an open flea market in Brussels in the center of the city, and he was looking, I think, for old clothes or something like that. And he had his briefcase with him full of blank identity cards. And, sure enough, as he walked away, there was a check point with two _____, who were there and were searching peoples suitcases as well as checking the papers. And he had a false identity card himself which said that he was an employee of the government. And he managed to persuade those numskulls that he was taking work home because he needed to finish some cards for the next day. And they let him

go. Now, you had to be pretty thick to let that happen. But they did. That was one of his close escapes. He had a few more, but that was one of them. And, so, ration cards, food stamps, stolen. It was very difficult to produce false food stamps, it was almost impossible. You had to have the glue, you had to have special colors and so on and so on, so they were stolen, they were not falsified. Identity cards, on the other hand, were pre-printed and then they filled in the name by hand. So once you had the pre-printed card, it wasn't too difficult to falsify a card as long as you had one of the city rubber stamps or one of those embossing stamps. That worked. If you were lucky. There was always a problem because, you know, you had to have a signature on that and if somebody was pretty bright, which didn't often happen in the SS, thank goodness, they could have made the person reproduce their signature. You know, since many of those were young kids, maybe 14, 15 years old, they could have done a bad job of reproducing their signature and that would have given away the falsification. So, identity cards, food cards, ration stamps and mostly, occasionally a, what do you call it, a welfare check. But he didn't like that because, again, that could be traced. Most of the time the money, as I said, came either from the bank or from private contributions.

Q: Did he have cohorts in government offices?

A: Yes. Yes. He had, fortunately, many, many of the Belgian civil service employees were faithful, were reliable. They were anti-German and he knew which were and which were not. He had a number of helpers, mostly in the municipal governments where it was most important. Because that's where the stamps and the cards were issued. One day he went in this particular municipal office where he had an appointment with the assistant chief and a lady seemed to be in a hurry and, because he was very courteous, he said, okay, go in first. She went in, took her time, and he saw two people just babbling or talking about various papers there and then it was his turn and one of the guys walked away, went away. Picked up his suitcase, his briefcase, and went away. And when he got near the assistant chief, he said, you don't know, but I'm sweating here. That man who just left was from the Gestapo. If you had come in at your turn instead of letting the lady go in first, we would have been both caught. So, another close escape. But, this was help he got from the civil service or the employees of the government, various governments.

Q: Were most of these people who helped him motivated by working with Father Bruno, anti-German, or really motivated to rescue Jewish children?

A: I think all three. I think it varied on the person. You may even add one. Money. Because many rescuers were given money. And during the war, money was very tight. And some people would take this terrible risk just to get a little more money to survive. But, I would say, all three. Idealism, you know, I want to save the Jewish children. Charisma from Father Bruno. And, you know as you said, all these three possibilities plus, I think, a certain appeal for money at times.

Q: What other aspects of the logistics were very difficult?

A: Transportation. Not to be caught. Because some kids had to be transported from one end of Belgium to the other. And even though Belgium is a small country, that still represented 200 miles sometimes and the trains during the war were extremely slow and rare. And so, it may have taken a whole day to do 200 miles by train. You know, getting the children registered in a certain municipality with a false ID card. It was difficult unless you had cooperation from the local authorities. And once or twice, there was a close call because he would have help from one of the employees and then the mayor of that particular municipality would be either scared or maybe even pro-German. And they would get wind of the thing and immediately the child would have to be moved away. That was one of the logistical difficulties, too. And then as I say, as I said previously, the stealing food stamps, you didn't just barge in those municipal offices and pick your choice of stamps. You know, it had to be done extremely carefully at night, sometimes it was done with the complicity of the employee who would leave the door open, for example. Not lock the door. And pretend to go home as usual. And then a few hours later, somebody else would come in and sneak in and steal. And even getting the blank identity cards was sometimes difficult. Perhaps less difficult than the food cards. Logistics. Getting clothing. Getting a child registered in school because these kids had to continue their education during the war. I mean, they couldn't just stay for a year or even two years without any schooling. So, to have them accepted in school was not all that hard, but, there were school inspections and the authorities, the occupant authorities would know how many kids had to be there, and where did the extra one come from? So when they suspected there would be an inspection, they would, perhaps either tell the Jewish child to stay home or another child to stay home, or another child. You know, the teacher would say, oh, you've been sneezing three times today, why don't you go home? And the kid would be most happy to do that and the parents say, oh, what's going on here? Well, we think he may have a cold, keep him home for a day or two. So, that would bring the number back to normal. There were a few interesting incidents, too, because of the language problem. Quite a number of these kids were from Eastern Europe. And even the Belgian Jews sometimes spoke Yiddish. And one incident occurred in a school in the Walloon(ph) part of Belgium, in the southern part of Belgium, and the school inspector came who was, unfortunately, paid by the Germans and he checked the children and one of the Jewish kids was there and the inspector spoke to him and he said, do you speak French? And the kid said, yeah, of course. Alright do you speak other languages? Oh, yeah, I speak Flemish. And then the guy, sneaky as he was, said, well, what do you speak at home? Oh, Yiddish. [sharp intake of breath] That was it. He gave it away. But, apparently, as far as I know, the child did not get taken. Because the teacher was fast enough to make him go away immediately before the authorities had the time to go and fill their papers and, you know, send another crew to arrest him and so on. Somehow, apparently that incident could have been terrible, you know, passed away without any major trouble. But, you never know, little children, even though they've been trained and trained, they will do things that are beyond their control. A little girl in a train with one of the, what do you call them, the escorts, was talking to a nice gentleman across from her on the seat. And he said, what's your name? And she said, do you want my real name or the other? And, fortunately, the gentleman, obviously was not sympathetic to the Germans because he didn't say anything, he just kept quiet. But, see how, you know, alarms can just pop up like that without any warning.

End of Tape #5

Tape #6

Q: Other logistical consideration or challenges?

A: Like what happens in an emergency, for example. Well, there really wasn't any set system. Again, for obvious security reasons, there couldn't be a certain list where in this case, you call this person, in that case, you call that person. It was strictly a word of mouth affair. And one person would call the next person who would call the third person who would try to find, please find Father Bruno, he's on his way to such and such town, as soon as he gets there, tell him there is an emergency. And he would get back to the responsible person and see what to do in that particular case. One of the cases that I mentioned in the book there, was a little girl who, in spite of all the instructions, wrote a letter to her mother, who was still in Belgium. She had not been deported. She wrote a letter, the mother found, oh before I go any further, I have to tell you that the parents usually did not know where their kids were. Most of the time they were not told. Obviously, again, for security reasons. For obvious security reasons. Well anyway, this little girl had written to her mother, the mother was so anxious to see her that she took the train, went to Gent(ph) and, for some reason, had the foolish idea of taking two or three leather purses with her because her husband was a leather worker. And she was hoping to sell those to pay for her train trip. She walked into a purse, what do you call those stores where they sell purses? In French they call them _____. Anyway, she went in and offered her purses for sale to the man who, I think he even bought them. The man was one of the representatives of the Flemish pro-German group in Gent. So, the mother went to the convent which was strictly forbidden. And the sisters, in a panic, called two or three persons and the chain got into operation and the little girl was taken away after she did see her mother, I have to say, to a secret other place and the sisters simply had to give up keeping Jewish girls because the mother had told this man why she was in Gent. You know, sometimes people's brains don't function too well. But, anyway, that kind of emergency occurred a fair number of times. One time, again you can read that if you want in the biography, there were three kids who were in a home for Jewish children which was completely under German control. And Father Bruno wanted those kids to escape. And, well to make a long story short, he arranged for them to have diphtheria, quote unquote, and they were immediately transferred to the hospital because of a call, again through the chain, saying that, well, the Germans were terribly afraid of diphtheria, they had to take those contagious children out of the home and isolate them. So they did that. And, again the chain worked, when they were so called cured, they never had been sick in the first place, Mrs. Ruspa(ph) and a couple of other people took the three children, made a release letter in three copies, gave one to the hospital, mailed one to the home, because the Germans had said, now it's time to go get those children, and have the doctor release them. Well, they mailed one, but in the meantime, before the mail got to the home which would take at least 24 hours, the children were far away and they kept the third release copy. This was one of the most movie-like episodes because they had to enlist the help of the doctors, of the nurses, of the bacteriologist who falsified the cultures. Of the bacteriologist, again, who had to say they were cured. Of the person who made the release letter, who said they could be picked up. And knew perfectly well they were not going to be picked up because they were already

gone. You know, all of these episodes, if one of them failed, that was the end of it. But, nothing failed, everything worked fine. What other logistical things were we talking about, again?

Q: Well, I'm sort of curious. This may be a dumb question, but, how did people find Father Bruno and how did he find families to take care of the children?

A: Oh, yes. Well, how did they find Father Bruno? Occasionally, through the CDJ, but most of the time a simple word of mouth. Mrs. Abraham on this floor would talk to Sarah on the other floor and say, you know, I know this Catholic monk who took my cousin's little daughter and hid her. You're in danger, they're looking after you there, they're trying to find you. Why don't you ask him to hide your little daughter. And they would do that. Family members. Sometimes out of the blue. He would never know where or how those people would have got his name. Which was a bit distressing because, he said, if some totally unknown person got my name, who else got my name? And, as a matter of fact, there was one time when he was going in one of the streets in Brussels to go collect a little boy, I think, and as he was turning the corner, he saw a black car stopping in front there and he knew that was the Gestapo. And they got the boy. He never had the boy. He never had this child, didn't put his hand on the child once. But, they got the child. That was very sad. That was one of his most sad experiences, even though it wasn't really one of his proteges, he hadn't gotten the child yet. But, someone had babbled and that was it. Then, we were talking about emotional issues. That was a big problem. Many of these children, of course, didn't want to leave their parents. Some of them were old enough to understand what was going on and they would try to make do. The little ones, you know, the three or four or two year old ones, it was a very, very sad, very difficult thing to handle. Particularly for Father Bruno who had never had any children of his own. And this was one of the reasons why he was known to keep track of his, quote unquote, kids by going to visit them all the time. In addition to looking for new places, he kept track of the old places. And one of the most intimate friends of Father Bruno, a friendship which continued after the war, was the Rotmeal(ph) brothers who are now in this country. And they describe when he would come to the farm where they were hidden, and one day he would come with his cassock and the next time he would come with green pants, you know, those pants that they wear to play golf, I forget, knickers. With green knickers and then Bernard would say, why are you wearing that? Well, I'm not Father Bruno any more, I'm Mr. so and so. He had several identities. And his last identity was Msr. Renau(ph), you know Renau in French means fox. And it was kind of play on words, of course, because he out-foxed them all the time. And he said, no, I am Msr. Renau, you don't know me as Father Bruno any more. And he would visit them as often as he could. But, of course, when there are 300 of them, he couldn't see them every day. But, he would keep track precisely for those emotional reasons. Because he had a charisma and he inspired confidence to the, at least to the children old enough to understand. And they would really get very, very attached to him. And knowing that he was going to come back sort of soothed their anxieties. And made them, you know, accept the separation a little bit better. He made a big point of that.

Q: How do you find all of these families who would harbor the children?

A: Well, again, it's word of mouth. And occasionally, as we said before, by the CDJ, the Committee for the Defense of Jews. Frequently, Father Bruno himself would just go and talk to those people. Like the University professor I mentioned. He would just go in their house and say, I want you to help. And he had this way of talking to people that they couldn't say no. You know, when I was a little boy and I wasn't being very good, all he had to do is say, now, you're going to have to do it. And we did. You know. Both my sister and my brother and I, all he had to say is, I want you to do this. And we would do it. Even if we had been very bad with our parents.

Q: But I mean, isn't there a whole issue of trust? In just approaching people?

A: Yeah. Well, he approached people after, you know, carefully selecting them. People he knew were trustworthy and people he had known for a long time. His close friends. Or people who were guaranteed by others. There was always a risk. There was always a risk. Accepting a Jewish child from a family was a risk. Not for the Germans, where the Germans were concerned. But what if that person was a traitor? What if the child was not Jewish and was just being used as a, you know, a trap. You know? There was always a risk. But, for some reason, he must have had, he must have been a good judge of character, because the only time he almost got caught was when this dreadful traitor, so called Captain Jackson who was not a Captain Jackson, he was a Belgian by the name of Bziter(ph). Convened a so called resistance group and he refused to go because he smelled a rat. And all the people who went, went to concentration camp. And he didn't go. Because he smelled a rat. So, you know, he had a sixth sense that made him know when people were genuine or not.

Q: Was this the time when there were arrests at Mossesar(ph)?

A: No. That was, these arrests were made in Male(ph) in Belgium. Male(ph) Mechalen(ph) which is city between Brussels and Antwerp. No. And there were several of his assistants who went there and they got caught. But I don't think they died in the concentration camp. But, that's neither here nor there, I mean, they could have. They were trapped by this traitor who was shot after the war. He was condemned by a military court and shot.

Q: Wasn't there some close call at Mossesar, as well?

A: Yeah. Well, that was early in the game, actually. Early in the game when he was only beginning his network. He was still at the abbey and they came and searched the abbey at Mossesar from top to bottom. He managed to hide a bunch of papers in a chimney and, again, those numskulls didn't even think of looking in there. But, he hid them in a secret door or trap in the chimney and they never found anything. But that's when the superior of the abbey said, listen, I have 80 monks here and their my responsibility. I can't have you have your base of work, I approve of what you're doing, but I can't let you have your base here at the monastery. Because the next time they come, they will find something and we'll all go to

Bruckenvald(ph) or whatever. And, so, that's when he moved out of the abbey. But that was still fairly early in the game, that was in 1942. And he then rented a small apartment in Luvan(ph) and that became unsafe, too. And he then rented another apartment in Brussels, which he kept for a few months. And then came the little house from that lady between the _____ and the horse betting institution.

Q: Did he have any time for traditional religious practice?

A: Well, he was given dispensation from mandatory celebration of Mass every Sunday by his superiors. They realized that he couldn't do that. But, whenever he had a chance, he would go to my grandmother's house and in the attic he had a tiny little altar which he built himself and he would celebrate Mass for us there. That's one of the very vivid memories I keep of all of us, you know, really tightly packed in that tiny little attic and him just having barely space to turn around and speak to us. That I remember very vividly. So, he did as much as he could but it's quite obvious that sometimes he had to do without. You know, if on Sunday morning he had an emergency, well, that went before celebrating Mass. And he had permission not to.

Q: How did you feel as you learned more about this, probably afterwards, about being involved in this incredible network?

A: Afterwards, after the war when I was old enough to really grasp the danger and the risk, I was terrified. I said, my gosh, we did all that? And then when that time passed, I said, why, I'm very happy we did. I felt very good. I said, well, I didn't do much, but at least I was part of that and I'm so proud of having his name, bearing his name. You know, that's something that is, it remains with you all your life because not so many people are given that opportunity to help. And to do it willingly. That, now I shouldn't be overly proud because I did so little, but when I think of my family, I'm still pretty proud. You know, we all took risks, especially the adults, they risked their lives of course, and there were close calls. We were lucky. I guess we were blessed in our efforts.

Q: What happened at the time of liberation?

A: I'm not so sure. I don't want to elaborate too much on that because there were some slightly unpleasant moments. Most of them were very happy moments. Kids finding remainders of their families. There were very sad moments in that happiness because they knew that their parents and grandparents had died. But they were happy to return to a family. Some people didn't even, some kids didn't have a family to go back to. Some of them were kept in convents where they were and they were in slightly better condition because the rationing was over. And some of them stayed in school. Some of them had requested to be baptized, but that, oh, I want to insist on this point. This is a point that Father Bruno was extraordinarily touchy about. He absolutely refused to put any pressure on any Jewish child to change his religion. To convert, quote unquote. That he was adamant about. He said we are to save them, but their souls do not belong to us. That was one of his principles. And, but some of them who were, you know, exposed to the liturgy and to maybe some slightly, you

know, warmer person in the Catholic church, wanted to, there were about five or six of them who wanted to be baptized and that was a big point of contention. Because he actually did not want to baptize them unless he had the total guarantee that first of all, the parents wanted it if they were still alive. Second, that they would have accepted it if they, none of them did, but had previously made that allowance or permission if you want, and that his superiors were in agreement, too. And I think there were about five out of the 320 or something who were baptized and I think, two or maybe three remained in the Catholic church. The other two just went back to Judaism. And he found that fine. He said, first of all, you weren't totally adult, you were not sure what you were doing. Now you saw your fellow Jews and you wanted to be more close to them, fine, go back, that's alright. He never, never put any obstacle to that. And he always refused to put pressure. Now, I won't say that there wasn't an occasional old crotchety nun who thought that being non-Christian was the worst sin in the world. And may have put some pressure on some of the kids, that's possible. That is, I'm not denying that. Neither did Father Bruno. But, it was against his will and, actually, there is no record that any of those actually did change, so it was just an annoyance and was a little child abuse, I would say. Moral child abuse. Which he certainly didn't approve of. Okay. I digress now. What were you asking me?

Q: We were talking about the difficulties after liberation.

A: Right, that's right. It took months and months and, if not to say years, to find the surviving parents, if there were any. To find surviving family. Uncles, cousins, if there were any. And to find willing adoptive parents if there were no family members available. Some of the kids, even though they still remained Jewish, wanted to stay with the people who had harbored them during the war. That became a little difficult because the CDJ, after the war, tried to gather all the kids back into the Jewish fold, which is fine, I mean, it was a legitimate concern of them. The only thing where Father Bruno objected seriously is when a home for Jewish kid was built and, supposedly, non-denominational, but it was only Jewish children. And some members of the CDJ wanted some of the kids to go there. But Father Bruno said, I don't want that. I want them to go back to a good Jewish family, that's fine, but I don't want them to go to a sterile, although Jewish, environment where they will not teach them religion, or if they do it will be on an optional basis and where they will not be allowed to practice the Christian religion if they wanted to do so. And that was one of the points of contention. Unfortunately. Another point of contention was some of the relatives who wanted to get the children back before any formalities had been completed. And I have, unfortunately, witnessed a very sad and dramatic incident where some uncles came to my younger uncle's house the day after liberation and demanded to have one of the kids who was staying there, without permission from anybody else. Not even the CDJ, by the way. You know. They just came and took the child. Not knowing if the parents were alive or what. They just wanted the kid. And they didn't even live in the same city. There were a few unpleasant incidents, but I would say on the whole, the vast majority, the replacement of these children went pretty smoothly. Thanks to the help of people like Mrs. Jospa(ph), who made a point of continuing Father Bruno's work yet working for the CDJ or the, I forget the new name they get, they got after the war, but anyway, it's the CDJ, it's the same.

Q: So, Father Bruno's work didn't end at liberation?

A: No, it didn't. In fact, he continued to work for about two months and then had a bad accident. And had to be hospitalized for a full month. And during that time, he was unable to do anything. Most of his assistants took over. And took over the replacement functions and he kind of loosely supervised after that. Then he was re-drafted in the army because before the war he was an army chaplain, yeah, he was a mobile Benedictine. He was an army chaplain during the campaign of 1940. He was slightly wounded and was taken prisoner of war in Germany. Then after World War II, after his accident was healed, his superiors said it was okay for him to go back into the army. And he went back into the army for another three years. And he went to Germany. And this is where he was able to see with his own eyes numerous concentration camps. Particularly Neu _____, which he photographed extensively. And Bergen Belsen and several others. I forget which ones they were.

End of Tape #6

Tape #7

- Q: From my reading, I understand that your uncle was a true intellectual, a scholar, and yet, came time for the war, he had tremendous street smarts, pragmatic skills all of that.
- A: Yes, and people have all the qualities, don't they? He was a Benedictine. And in French we had a saying for people who do enormous amounts of tedious, lengthy work. _____ . The work of a Benedictine. And in addition to his action work during World War II, he did the same thing. He did that. He did the _____. He compiled very extensive studies on the works of some of the Catholic Church's early fathers. Like Saint Irinae(ph) who was one of the early writers of the Catholic Church, in the Fourth Century, I believe. Incidentally, I received a call from a very erudite professor at one of the Eastern universities a few months ago saying, oh, I read in the bibliography for Saint Irinae that your uncle's work is the basic work for people who research Saint Irinae and I was very proud to hear that his name has appeared in this, I forget the name of the man, but I've got it someplace. Doctor so and so is doing studies on Saint Irinae himself. And he's basing his studies on Father Bruno's work. He published one very extensive work in which he, a sort of a dictionary, if you want, in four languages, Latin, Greek, Coptic(ph) and Aramian(ph). Because Saint Irinae's writings were in various translations at that time already. And so that whoever is doing studies on Saint Irinae can read them in either language. And he published an extensive study on the writings themselves. And then he had a continuous series of articles in one of the theological reviews in _____.
- Q: I'm just curious, this contrast between the man you're describing right now and this man of action who was so successful and so active.
- A: He was, after the war, he was pastor of a small village for several years and enjoyed that very much. His superior had released him from the abbey because he could see he just couldn't stay in the abbey any more. He had done so much work outside that to be cloistered again would just kill him. So he sent him as pastor at a small village in the south of Belgium. I went there several times and enjoyed it very much. He became totally enthralled by this pastoral ministry which he hadn't actually done before. He became totally conquered by that. The village people loved him a lot, too, and yet, he would close his door at a certain time and they knew better than to bother him unless it's for an emergency. And he would work on his intellectual endeavors. So, he would spend two or three hours a day writing and researching Saint Irinae again. And so he tried to always balance, you know. Of course, during the war he did little intellectual work, but he did some. And I still remember my grandmother transcribing some of his chicken scratch onto neat white paper. She has a beautiful, had a beautiful handwriting. And she transcribed many, many pages of his works. So it would be legible for the publisher. During the war.
- Q: As an individual, is religion important to you today?
- A: To me? Well, we have remained practicing Catholics and our children are, too. I perhaps

don't have the _____ as we say in France, the sacred fire, as much as Father Bruno had. We try to remain, let's say reasonably close. We go to church every Sunday and one of our very best friends is a Dutch priest who speaks, you know, a Dutch priest who is a, who speaks several languages and we became very friendly with him. And he's one of the totally adorable people. A little bit like Father Bruno. He has been teaching theology, languages and so on, and yet, he did all the garden work for the seminary at St. Thomas seminary. Again, a man of both action and cerebral work, if you want. So, yeah, we're, I would say it's important. I won't claim and be dishonest and say that we are thinking about it every minute. But, it is still important for us, yeah.

Q: Are there certain lessons that you gained from that religious practice or observance that impact the way you live, still.

A: I should say so. I should say the concern for other people, the concern for _____, as we say in French. Our neighbor. You know, the things that our grandmother taught us to be concerned about other people, to be practically practicing our religion. Not just kneeling on the pew and babbling prayers that don't mean anything to us. I probably don't remember the vast majority of prayers I learned by heart when I was young. But, I don't think that's so important. It's much more important to be nice to your neighbor, to do things to help, to be concerned about your neighbor. I would like, if you don't mind, I would like to give you something that Father Bruno said when he was asked, why did you do that? He said, the motives was a revolt against injustice and violence. A consciousness of our common past. Both historical and theological. He was very conscious of that. Personal fondness for encounters, quote, at the frontiers. Because in the '40's it was still considered the frontiers, you know, Catholic priests didn't mingle so much with Jews. He loved it. Secondly, the goals. To save human lives. To reconstitute or preserve families. To establish human contacts between Judaism and Christianity. And the spirit is a spirit of respect of human life. Respect of human dignity. Expansion of mutual respect by reciprocal knowledge of values, culture and spiritual climate. That was his answer. He did not give very many interviews. Certainly not a four hour one. But this is one that he expected to give, to a Jewish publication. And I thought it resumed or it abstracted well what his ideas were.

Q: Through yourself. These early experiences for you, when you grew up very fast, how do you think they influenced you later in life?

A: I would say that it was a little bit on the back burner for maybe, oh, 20 years after the end of the war. Mostly because I didn't have time to do anything but study. I was in high school and then in college and then in medical school. I graduated in 1959. We came here in a new environment. In 1961. I didn't have any books with me because I didn't know I was going to stay so long. I read and spoke English, but I didn't know much about the libraries here, so I didn't have anything to go to to get more information. Gradually, on the other hand, after I talked to my uncle a number of times, and I saw him again on my rare trips to Belgium, I, suddenly it came back and I said, I've got to do something about that. And I became a fanatical history buff only about World War II and particularly the Holocaust. And I became

so interested that I felt almost as Jewish as my Jewish friends at times. We had a reunion in Washington D.C. about two years ago where a good dozen of rescued people met with me and we gave a series of lectures through the ADL and so on in Washington. And at the end, when they asked me to say something about them, I said, I think I've got 12 new Jewish cousins. And, yeah, it did change my mind on a lot of things. I realized how close we could be and, you know, which I probably wouldn't have known as well if I hadn't gone into that intensive study of the events. And then after I studied the Holocaust in general, then I dug into Father Bruno's records which were not all that abundant because he destroyed much of them after World War II. But I was able to collect a good number of things and, of course, there were things I knew of personal knowledge. I got information from my other uncles and aunts who had letters and had memories or, you know, in their minds. And helped me and we all worked together on that. And when he finally died, we decided we had to do something. And then this nice young man, Mr. Johannes(ph) Bloom(ph), who was much too young to have known Father Bruno, was an Austrian Jew. Came to Brussels and heard about him and said, we've got to do something to try to remember this person. And then he got in touch with me, we wrote the biography, we got testimonies from a number of rescued people, many of whom are still alive in Israel. One of his most favorite guys is still in a kibbutz there and his name is Svee(ph) Harlloff(ph). And he was one of the most vocal and before, actually, we started working on that, Israel invited Father Bruno, as a guest, in 1964, in August, 1964, he was made Righteous of the Nations at the Advashem(ph). And has a tree there in his name. And he met a number of the kids who were no longer kids at that time, had children of their own, that he had rescued. And for him, of course, it was a most emotional moment. This is a picture of him that was taken in Israel and it's been the picture that everybody has shown of him. It's a very good picture because it shows the twinkle in his eye and the half smile which was so typical of him. And he enjoyed his stay there. Then my second uncle, my younger uncle, the dentist, Jean(ph) _____, has recently also been made Righteous of the Nations and so he appreciated that very much. He's 82 years old now, still alive and doing well. So he was also honored by Israel for, actually, there were times when he had 25 kids in his house, and think of the risk.

Q: Your family also helped save adults.

A: Pardon?

Q: Your family also saved some adults.

A: Yeah, but not a great number. And those were most of the time, done by Father Bruno himself. Except for three that were in my house, in my own house, a Polish girl, a young Polish girl, an older woman from Eastern Europe...

Q: You had mentioned those, I just, I think it's important for the record to state...

A: Yeah. And a third woman, yeah. That's right.

Q: But there were also adults who were saved.

A: Yeah, they came in succession. Right. That was at the very end of the war, actually. I would say the second, well, 1944. The first nine months of 1944. And then, of course, the liberation took place and, in September, so, our last one ran out the door screaming happiness.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add? I appreciate your...

A: Well, I must say it's a great honor for me to be interviewed by the Museum. I've visited the Museum and it was an extremely emotional experience. My wife, who was with me, had the same experience. It was, I don't know what the word is, but it was quite an experience to see that. Things that I, for the most part, had at least some idea of. Many things I knew rather well, but to actually see all of that in one place and be totally surrounded by that, ooh, it was quite an experience. I think that's one of the most emotional experiences I've ever had in my life. It was really something I will not forget. And I want to thank you for coming to Denver and you people who are filming and listening, I appreciate your cooperation and coping with my old house with very little power.

Q: That's not important. Thank you.

Conclusion of interview.