

This is an interview with Ernest Fontheim on March 12th, 1997. The interviewer is Randy Goldman. This is tape two, side A.

What affected me actually more than these vicious articles in the [NON-ENGLISH] were anti-Semitic articles in the general press. And I also felt at that time-- and still feel today-- that they probably were much more effective in influencing people than [NON-ENGLISH] articles because the articles in [NON-ENGLISH]-- most of them at least-- were so outlandish that-- and also, they were always accompanied by horrible caricatures, where a Jew looked like a mixture of awe of a gorilla and a human being and totally distorted, that I'm sure many people just couldn't take it seriously.

On the other hand, the anti-Semitic articles in the general press, which were more subdued and not as outwardly ridiculous, and therefore also probably appeared more reasonable, probably influenced many more people toward increased anti-Semitism. And they were-- for example, I have to admit that to some extent, even I was influenced by-- a constant refrain of the German press was that the Jews were in charge of all the countries that were fighting against Germany, particularly, of course, the United States.

And there was a whole succession of names that always appeared. One was that of course of Felix Frankfurter, the Supreme Court justice. Another one was Herbert Lehman, the governor of the state of New York, I remember. And there were one or two other-- oh yeah, of course Bernard Baruch, the financier. And they made it appear as if these people were behind the scenes manipulating. And of course, Roosevelt himself, whose name was often distorted, as Rosenfeld, implying that if he wasn't a Jew, at least he was of Jewish descent.

And after the war, particularly after meeting American soldiers-- and many of them Jewish-- I was surprised actually, to hear that there was large-scale anti-Semitism in this country, and that the influence of these Jews was relatively minimal. I forgot one name, of course, that was Henry Morgenthau, the Secretary of the Treasury at that time. He was, partly I would say-- from what I can judge reading history-- the most influential, in the government at least, of the United States. And I think he was fairly close to President Roosevelt.

But it was nothing like that. And as the Nazis-- and I was, I have to admit now, disappointed because somehow that part of the Nazi propaganda I had started to believe somewhat. And by the way, the same thing in the Soviet Union, there were lots of Jewish names-- many of these were actually exterminated by Stalin himself, and particularly many of the original revolutionaries, starting with Trotsky, of course. And there too, actually the fact that there was widespread anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union and never made it into the German papers. It wouldn't have fit their purposes.

Now the Kristallnacht was not only just a devastating, horrible event in my personal life, as well as the lives of all Jews in Germany, but it represented a watershed because that was followed by a avalanche of new laws and regulations totally restricting Jews. What affected us first of all was that the remaining Jewish lawyers were now disbarred. So suddenly my father was not only living in an anti-Semitic hotbed, like Germany, but on top of it he was unemployed here. And my parents made, from then on, really desperate efforts to get out of the country.

But by that time, everybody had woken up. And I remember once standing in front of the British consulate in Berlin, which was in the embassy compound, arriving there at 6:00 in the morning, just to get some form to fill out. And I think by 11:00 or 12:00 or so, finally it was my turn to receive those forms. I don't know whatever happened. But I don't think-- but obviously, we didn't go to England. But neither did I. So I had stood there for nothing.

And then also that was followed by laws making it illegal for a Jew to visit any place of amusement or entertainment or general culture. That included the whole spectrum, from see a theater, symphony, opera, to circuses, county fairs, that kind of thing, or you name it-- also public beaches, public swimming pools, movie theaters, public parks even-- parks were much more popular in Germany than they are here because most people in this country-- or at least a high proportion-- live in their own homes and have their own gardens. In Germany the vast majority, at least at that time, lived in apartments. And so parks were visited by people just regularly just for recreation, just like people here might just sit in their backyard. Anyway they were now outlawed for Jews.

From the beginning, I and all of my friends totally ignored that law. And we just kept going. I remember one humorous incident in the summer of 1940. The Rome State Opera from Rome, Italy, gave a one-week guest appearance at the Berlin State Opera. And I had been an opera fan. And on the day when the ticket sales started for the Rome Opera, everybody knew you had to be there early. So I was there I think at 5:00 in the morning or so. And there was already a long line.

And while do you stand in line, of course, for hours, sort of treading from left leg to right leg and vice versa, you start also with people around you, to get acquainted and talk and so on. And the advantage of that was that you could then ask somebody to hold your place while you-- it's just easier to take a little walk than to stand at the same spot. So I did that also. While I then took my walk, I walked along the line. And I saw three other boys for my Jewish high school class. And it was sort of an unwritten law, one Jew might get away. Two Jews is already like a synagogue. So we just waved at each other with a grin without really getting together.

And most people I knew did that. But there was a danger. If the Gestapo caught somebody, the least thing was a concentration camp. But as a young person, first of all, I was always defying authority. And plus a young person is always more reckless than older one.

Actually in my personal life, what happens then, finally the schools were permitted to operate again. But then shortly-- that was probably late '38, that date I don't quite remember anymore precisely-- but then in early '39, most Jewish schools were closed by the Gestapo, including the [INAUDIBLE] school to which I was going. And there was only one Jewish high school left operating. And that was the official high school of the Jewish community of Berlin.

But by that time, my parents were really in high gear, time to emigrate. And they had the idea that it would be good for me to go to the American School in Berlin. The American School in Berlin also was very close to where we lived. It was run by an American principal. And it mainly served children of diplomats-- not just Americans, obviously, but also British and others who would know English-- and also children of businessmen who were stationed in Berlin. And therefore the tuition was correspondingly very high. And I remember that was the first time I heard about that this was a big sacrifice for my parents to put me in that school.

And actually I was scared because I would be thrown suddenly into a totally English environment. The teachers were all Americans. Some may be British actually. But English was the language. Most kids had English as their native tongue. And I had had three years of English at the [INAUDIBLE] school. But fortunately, things turned out to be not quite as bad.

As it turned out, the school followed the curriculum of the basic American school system. And that was a German gymnasium, was really a much more rigorous and elitist school and was at least a year, if not more, ahead of it. So many of the things-- for example, in Latin and biology, I remember-- we had had already much earlier. So the material itself was often just for me a review of things I had learned earlier. And therefore that made it easier for me to concentrate on the language then.

And I think I made quite a bit of progress there. I don't know exactly how long-- I wasn't there very long, probably from about February, March, '39 until the start of the summer term, which was, I think, May or June '39. And '39 also was the first summer in my life where my parents didn't send me to a summer camp. And on the 1st of September, 1939, of course, the German Wehrmacht entered Poland, attacked Poland, and I listened to Hitler's speech to the Reichstag, in which he explained this rationale.

And I never forget the words, which he said. Since 5:00 this morning, we are shooting back. The fairy tale that the Nazis told the world was that Poland had attacked Germany. And that had been going on already for days and weeks, while he patiently tried to look the other way and tried to come to a peaceful solution. And finally he is not taking it anymore and shooting back. It's unbelievable.

Anyway that was a Friday, September 1. And I should say, actually, two days before, on August 30th, that was my father's birthday, 1939-- must have been his 57th birthday. And at that time already, everything was much more subdued. And we didn't have a party at home. We just went out to some nice restaurant downtown. And while we were

sitting there, suddenly newsboys came in with stacks of news-- extra editions shouting, extra, extra. Every table bought a paper. And a big fat headline was, "General Mobilization in Poland." and so everybody knew already.

See in Germany, general mobilization was never officially announced because the Nazis had already quietly mobilized. And then on the 1st, as I said, Germany attacked Poland. That was a Friday. On Sunday, the 3rd, we took our customary Sunday excursion. We walked through the forest near where we lived to one of the cafes at the river bank of the Havel River. And at that time also most, if not all, restaurants in Germany were wired for public address systems.

And while we were sitting there-- it was early afternoon, I think-- the public address system went on with a important announcement from the German government. And it said that the British ambassador had, at 11:00-- I still remember the time-- submitted a diplomatic note, requesting that German troops be taken back to the original German-Polish border within a certain number of hours. If Germany refused to do that, then Britain in line with its treaty obligations to Poland will consider itself at war with Germany. And the French ambassador had submitted a similar note also.

As we were sitting there, I remember that my father broke out into tears. And that was the first time that I saw him cry. And he said, this is a second world war in his lifetime, and that he was not going to survive it. What prompted that remark, I never-- the Holocaust was still so far away as to be unbelievable. But obviously he must have sensed something. And then we went home.

And then the outbreak of the war was followed then by many more restrictions. One was we had to turn in our telephones. We had to turn in all appliances. Of course, all these, people had much fewer than today. But still that included such things as vacuum cleaners, phonograph players-- I don't know what else one had in those days. It was before washing machines and dishwashers. But whatever one has, it had to be turned in. In addition to--

Radios?

Oh yeah, radio? Yeah, I think radio's too. And then up to that time, I think Jews religiously obeyed all these things. And that was the first time where people started to sort of balk. And not everything was turned in. I know of many cases where people didn't turn in everything. Also jewelry, valuables, gold, silver, diamonds, things like that had to be all turned in. And it was just turned in for a receipt. There was no thought of for the government to buy it. It was just stolen.

And of course one victim of the outbreak of the war was the American school in Berlin, which did not reopen because even though America itself at that time was not yet in the war, but Germany was in the war, and Germany was considered a war zone. And there was a possibility of air raids and so on. So the school didn't reopen. And then at that point, I wanted to go back and do my high school graduation. So I went back to the high school of the Jewish community and graduated there in March, 1940.

That's a big difference between a high school graduation in Germany-- I think in any European country, also England-- and that in America. In America, it is simply an automatic thing after completing 12th grade of school, you graduate. And there, there's a rigorous examination. I still remember it was a fearful thing. And I studied day and night. And passed it, of course, but it was-- it ranks in my memory together with my PhD prelims, each one at their own level.

Also it's a state-administered exam. So they are from the State Education Authority, a high official appeared there. And the way the evaluation examination goes was the following. There was first a set of written examinations, each three hours long. One was a German composition, which incidentally, we had several essay topics to choose from. And the topic I chose was the discussion and evaluation of the work of a leading personality of modern times. And I chose Theodor Herzl, the founder of Modern Zionism.

And later on, my father chided me for it and said, since it will be read by a German examination commission, it was a mistake that I did that. It might harm me. And then I said, the people know who I am. I am a Jew. And they know that that's a Jewish school. So my father was always really concerned for something. And actually I got a very good grade for that.

And mathematics and so on, and that takes place over a period of about a month-- these various exams spaced. And then

after that about-- I think after the last exam, maybe two or three weeks [INAUDIBLE]. And the German examiners, they get all the written tests. And then one of them appears for the final oral examination. And the oral examination was handled in such a way that the examination commission, which consisted of all the teachers that we had in 12th grade, the school principal, and the German official, were sitting in the examination room, and we were called in one by one. We were 13 or 14. I forgot-- I think 13. We were called in.

And before that started, we were all called in together. And the German official made a little speech. And he was a tall, good looking guy with a white thick mane of hair and such a huge swastika party member button here, which didn't particularly made us-- or at least me-- feel easy. And he said a few things. But then he went on to say that he has read so far our written examinations. And he wanted to make us a compliment. He said, they are far above the average of what he has seen. And he wanted to particularly compliment us because he is aware of the difficult circumstances under which we are living. And then he dismissed us.

And that man was obviously, you know, must have been hold over from the Weimar Republic. He was old enough anyway for that. And many of these guys were pressured into joining the party or losing their job. And so they all-- not all, I guess, but many compromised and joined the party. But that man obviously, to have said that took already courage.

So anyway that was the examination. And then after that, I was, anyway really as I understood, claimed. So I volunteered for one of the preparatory camps for emigration to Israel-- or Palestine in those days. And they were named by the Hebrew name [HEBREW]-- means preparation. But I discovered that I was totally unsuited for communal living. I felt totally unhappy. The living there was to simulate kibbutz-style living. And I was constantly homesick and didn't like it at all.

And then for me, fortunately, actually, that camp was dissolved for some reason. And people were distributed partly to other camps and partly to a work camp in a suburb of Berlin. And that's where I was put in. And that was in a southern suburb of Berlin. And we were just a small group of boys-- maybe wasn't more than 10-- detailed to work in a forest, which was managed by a forestry official, to cut down certain trees that were diseased.

And I still remember that. That must have been the healthiest time of my life. It was by that time midsummer 1940. And we were working bare chested, just some shorts on, and sawing down. And of course, that was in the days before chainsaws and all that. It was really hand sewing these long band saws, where one man grabs a handle on one end, and the other on the other, and you go back and forth. And then after the tree has been felled, with an ax, all the branches had to be cut-- apparently they were deceased, but still could be used for some purpose because we had to hack off with axes all of the branches and then with a special peeler, peel the bark off so that just the bare trunk remained.

And the local forester was a fairly decent guy. He got us as Jews-- I should have said that with the outbreak of World War II, of course, immediately food was rationed. And not only food, also clothing, everything, shoes-- everything you can think of-- all consumer goods were rationed. And Jews from the beginning got less than the-- the ration system was a three-tiered system. The lowest was called the general consumer. And then higher, the next step up was [NON-ENGLISH]. These are factory workers. They got certain items more, like fat, milk, maybe meat. And then the highest category was heavy labor. These were people like construction, miners in the coal mines-- this sort of thing.

But first of all Jews were not entitled to any [NON-ENGLISH] even if they did do some work where Germans would have received them. And then our rations were actually shortened even compared to the general consumer. But the forester there, since he wanted also to get work out of us, and he knew hungry people are not as strong, so he got-- I actually saw the local Nazi [INAUDIBLE] as a farmer leader-- peasant leader, whatever-- extra rations for us of farmer's bread and sausages, which were actually delicious.

And it was sort of a really nice little community there. And I spent the summer there. And occasionally we had furloughs, where I could go into the city to visit my parents. And so that was over, I think, about in the fall of 1940. And then my parents, still hoping that maybe something will come of the immigration-- my parents did all kinds of things that I never really was aware of fully.

And there was in Berlin a mechanic school from ORT, O-R-T, that exists still today in many countries. And they had a

school for mechanics and machine working. And so I started down sometime in the fall of 1940. And by that time, however, already the Germans started to draft Jews into factories, namely to replace German workers who had been drafted into the army, to the Wehrmacht.

But my parents were lucky. Somehow they were able to produce doctor's certificates to exempt them from the Arbeitseinsatz. That means forced labor, basically. And then I was exempted because I worked in that mechanic school.

I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions.

Yeah?

What was your sister doing throughout all of this? Was she just at home with your parents?

Actually, there must have been telepathy [INAUDIBLE] my sister [? was. ?] First of all when she went to school, initially she started in the German public school, but was then transferred by my parents to a Jewish school, but a much less religious Jewish private school. And when all of these schools were dissolved in early '39, just like the school I was in, she was transferred to another Jewish school of the Jewish community.

And there she was until-- but that came later I think in '41-- all schooling for Jewish children was simply outlawed by the Gestapo. But until then, she went to school and had her friends. And in fact, she had already a little boyfriend.

Your sister was a little bit younger. So at the point when schools were outlawed, were there underground schools? Or people just stopped going?

When schooling was forbidden, no, I think first of all, she was then sent also to the country for-- there was some young Jewish kids were sent to help in harvesting things in the country. And then by that, when she came back from there, the deportations were already going strong [INAUDIBLE].

And your parents in-- were they supportive of your going to these little Zionist camps?

Yeah, they were supportive-- by that time, they wanted to get me out. In fact, we already applied for a passport. And in fact, they let us-- one incident I remember, where we went the passport office-- it was actually part of the Jewish emigration office, which was headed by Adolf Eichmann. And we applied there for a passport for me and for somebody here to come along, partly because I was a minor person. And while we were standing in line, you went from one position to the next, filling out forms of answering questions or whatever.

While we were standing in line, two tall and very good looking SS officers walked across that waiting room where people were standing in line. And for some reason, one of them just got pulled to my father for some reason and walked toward him and asked him why we were waiting there. And my father answered that, this is my son. And he is preparing to emigrate to Palestine. Oh, and then he asked my father, is he going with [NON-ENGLISH]-- in perfect Hebrew. And my father said, yes. And then he just turned around and walked away.

And I don't think-- my father didn't seem nervous or so on. But I'm sure it must have been extremely nervous. That guy was-- he looked very aggressive and like the image of an SS officer. In fact that passport I still have. That's one of my cherished memories-- with a big J, which after the war I found out we actually owe the Swiss more than the Germans. Did you ever read about that, that the Swiss pressured the Germans to put the J because Germany and Switzerland had a treaty for tourist visas not to need visas for tourism?

But that apparently Jews discovered and went as tourists with their German passports but then didn't leave. And Swiss didn't like that. And so they told the Germans to do something, put a J in or whatever, so that they can immediately recognize the passport of a Jew. And then they can refuse him. These nice, neutral Swiss.

Anyway coming back, where was I? Oh yeah, I went to ORT to learn mechanic. And actually that turned out to be one of the more useful things I learned in my life, probably more useful than Latin. But I learned how to operate a lathe--

although that, I have never done later-- and operate various tools.

And as I said, at that time also, they started to draft Jews. And on April 30th, 1941-- oh no, I'm sorry. I have to pick up there. I want to say that in February, 1941, we received a notice that we have to vacate the huge apartment that we still occupied on the Kaiserdamm, one of the major boulevards of Berlin, within a few days. That was an action that was actually originated by Albert Speer, who was a German armaments minister and also in charge of construction in Berlin. And he always tried after the war to pretend that he was just a professional and did a thing for the armaments, but had nothing to do whatsoever with persecution of Jews or other minorities, which is a big lie.

That was one of the things which he did, to kick Jews out of their apartments. And Jews who were kicked out in this way, had to move in-- then we were expected to move into so-called Jew houses. These were apartment buildings where at least 50% of the tenants were already Jews. And then also you couldn't, by any means, of course, displace the German family in such a house. But you had to move into a sublet, into an apartment already inhabited by another Jewish family.

And that was a big blow. We had a huge apartment. Of course, I never had mentioned that so far. But it was an eight-room apartment. And there were many art pieces in there that my parents had collected-- of course, in better times-- many oriental rugs, and I did mention the big library that my father had. And so I mean just to design-- and, of course, I think today, for example, if we had to move out of our house, which I think in square footage may be smaller than that apartment, it would be a nightmare-- within a few days. You accumulate so many things, personal things, documents, pictures, and-- but in addition to that, a new apartment had to be found or a new room that was in another apartment.

To make a long story short, we thought we had an ideal solution, moving into the apartment of an uncle of my mother. Now the man was the brother of my maternal grandfather-- and his wife. And it was a much smaller apartment. And they were living there. Then they had a son in their mid or late 30s. And then two single women were already living there also, who had been kicked out somewhere. Else

This is an interview with Ernest Fontheim, March 12th, 1997. Tape two, side B.

Of course, we were not the only family living under such circumstances. It was throughout the Jewish community that Jews were cramped together. That I guess was the equivalent of a ghetto in Berlin. That would have been impossible for the Nazis to institute a real ghetto in an area, where only Jews lived because Jews never were concentrated in one area to such an extent. So they would have had basically to clear some area of non-Jewish Germans. And that would have been too disruptive.

So instead they cramped then the remaining Jews at that time simply and into a much smaller number of apartment buildings. That immediately led to innumerable conflicts. First of all, I think I indicated before, that food was rationed. And so it was very important for each family to keep its food supply identified and separate. And there were frequent suspicions, and sometimes even accusations, that somebody else ate somebody else's sausage, or at least part of it, or that something was missing that should have not been missing.

And in fact the kitchen became known throughout the community as the battlefield of the apartment because it wasn't just the problem of keeping the food supplies separate. Then there was a problem of preparing dinner, for example. Usually people eat more or less at the same time. And they don't eat dinner at 4:00 when nobody needed a kitchen. And so there was a source of friction in that respect and then, of course, with cleanup.

Particularly these things all might seem to be petty. But at that time, the nerves of all or most Jews at least were so frayed already by years of oppression and innumerable Nazi anti-Jewish measures, that it never took much for people to fly into a rage and to-- that was really actually a very tragic outcome of that. But that's what's happened in many families. It happened in all-- the fact that we lived with relatives that had absolutely nothing to do with it. And I think my mother and her aunt became fierce enemies while we lived there.

I would like just to back up briefly to a somewhat earlier time when we were still in the big apartment on the Kaiserdamm Boulevard. And when I mentioned that after the outbreak of the war, the telephones were taken away from Jews, a few days after that measure was instituted, our doorbell rang. And when we opened the door, the men who lived

in the apartment upstairs above us was at the door. He was a wealthy bachelor-- middle-aged-- I have no idea, but the way I remember him, he was probably then around 50. And he asked to talk to my father in private [INAUDIBLE].

So my father and he went into our father's study. And they spent some time there. And we were all puzzled because there had never been really any social or any other contact with him. And then after some minutes, he reemerged. And both gentlemen were chatting pleasantly. And our upstairs neighbor said goodbye and left. And my father then turned to us with total surprise in his face, saying that Mr. [? Kopf-- ?] that was his name-- just offered that we could use his telephone. He just heard that our phone was taken away. And he felt that was terrible. And if we had the need to call somebody, we should feel free.

And not only that, but he even gave us permission to pass his number on to a few absolutely reliable people, who may have a need to call us. In that case he would send his maid down. And someone could come up and answer the call. And that-- in those days under those circumstances-- was extraordinary because the man surely risked, particularly in the second part of the offer. So there were sometimes such cases also.

Another thing that I wanted to mention is that in the same building on the first floor, the ambassador of a small Central American country was living. I am not 100% certain anymore, but I'm fairly sure that it was Costa Rica, I can't swear it. My parents, when the situation became worse and worse-- particularly after Kristallnacht-- my parents decided maybe an approach to that man might be helpful in opening some doors. And although we barely knew him, except when we crossed paths on the stairs or so on, my father made an appointment and went to see him. And all I know is that nothing ever came of it.

And back now to February, 1941, after our eviction from the big apartment and our move into that much smaller apartment. That was February of '41. Two months later in April-- precisely on April 30th, 1941-- the apprentice workshop of ORT, where I was apprenticing for mechanic and machine shop work, was ordered closed by the Gestapo. And all students in there were supposed to report to the Labor Office.

The Nazis incidentally had instituted a special Labor Office for Jews shortly after the outbreak of the war, whose task it was to deal with Jews exclusively and to give Jews jobs mainly in the defense industry or also in other generally considered unpleasant work, like for example, the city garbage department-- garbage pickup-- and similar things-- and also [INAUDIBLE] railroads-- and certain unpleasant jobs in connection with the railroads and tracks or so on. Many Jews had already been drafted to work. My parents succeeded in getting exemptions by doctors-- certificates from doctors. And neither one of them really was very healthy by the time anymore.

And now for our advantage was-- I mean our meaning the students, the apprentices, at the ORT school-- that we were considered to be already trained mechanics and therefore could get some better jobs. And all of us wound up at one of the Siemens factories. Now before the war, the central Siemens factory was in Berlin. Although they did have factories in other parts of Germany. But in Berlin was a central factory and also the central administration building of Siemens was in Berlin. And it was a huge complex. It was many square miles large, fenced in, of course, many buildings manufacturing all kinds of things.

In general Siemens is an electrical equipment manufacturer, along the same lines as General Electric, maybe-- at least used to be before they started building such things as jet engines or so. Of course they were entirely into war production at the time. And one day after the ORT school was dismissed, we had to report to this Labor Office. And there we were given pieces of paper telling us where to report the next day and at what time and so on. And so that's how I wound up at Siemens.

Did you have any choice in this?

None whatsoever. In fact the Labor Office also was run strictly along Nazi lines. We were treated very badly there in the sense of words. Nobody was beaten there, but just insulted. And we were just told where to work. Some others, by the way, were told to work also and sent to other factories. But I happened to end up at Siemens.

Did you feel a bit safer because they needed your output?

At that time the deportations hadn't started yet. So actually I felt, for two reasons-- to put it mildly-- disappointed. One was that I had just been about seven or eight months at the ORT school and was just getting into it, learning all kinds of aspects of the trade of being a mechanic. And that would be interrupted now. And the second thing, of course, that I knew I would be working for the German war production, which didn't really make me obviously happy.

At Siemens, the Jews who worked there-- and I think that is true of all other defense plants also-- did not work scattered around throughout the factory, here maybe a one machine operated by a Jew and next to him by a German worker. Instead the Jews were all in one particular department, where all workers were Jews, except for the foreman, of course. And in this way we also could be easier controlled.

Number two, we were not permitted to walk through the factory area unescorted. Now that meant the shift started at 6:00 AM. And it was already quite a walk from the factory gate to the building where we were working. So we had to be at the gate at 5:45 to be picked up by a guard, which then led us to our department, where we then punched in-- we had to punch in before 6:00. If somebody missed that guarded walk from the gate to the department, then a separate guard had to be sent.

And the foreman made a point of waiting after 6 o'clock. And the person had no way to get to the department. And then he would send somebody down. The person then would come and, of course, punch in after 6:00. And there was a rule that every late appearance has to be reported to the Gestapo. And so that was a very powerful incentive to be on time even at that time, at which deportation hadn't started yet, because nobody wanted to get entangled with the Gestapo.

Furthermore since we were not permitted to walk through the factory alone, that also meant that there was no way how we could walk to the toilets or restrooms whenever the individual need arose for a person. Instead twice a day, we were also under guard conducted to the toilets. One was at 9:00. And the second time after the lunch hour at 1:00 between 1:00 and 2:00. That meant if somebody, for example, needed to go in between, that person had to report to the foreman. And depending on the foreman's mood at that particular instance, he could either tell the person, well, you just have to wait, sorry, until the [INAUDIBLE]. Or he could give him a dressing down and say, I'll detail somebody to take you down there.

At this point, by the way, all the Jewish workers were men. Later on I will mention that we also got many Jewish women. And of course that was particularly humiliating in that case if a woman had to go to that male foreman and tell him that she has to go to the restroom, and then for him possibly to sneer and to detail somebody to take her down to the ladies room.

What was the actual work you were doing?

We built a part of electromotors called commutators. We didn't know what they were used for. There was a rumor these were motors which were built into submarines for the electrical supply. But whether that was true or not, we didn't know. And it these commutators represent an essential part of an electromotor.

Were there any attempts, to your knowledge, to sabotage in subtle ways the production?

To my knowledge, not-- I gave it a brief thought and rejected it outright because while being there, of course, I also acquainted myself with the system. They had a very thorough and sophisticated quality control system, whereby any part that was produced before it left the factory went to a controller, somebody who checked it out electrically and so on. That would mean anything that I would have done to make it malfunction would have been discovered by that person.

So first of all, it wouldn't have achieved anything because it would have never gone to a place where it could have done damage. And secondly as far as I remember, they could trace who made it. So I would have wound up in some horrible way without even achieving any purpose in doing so.

The atmosphere, there were still a few German workers in that Jewish department, actually some even women. They



had started to use women in factories, which used to be also unheard of in Germany. But simply because of the labor shortage after the war broke out-- since most of the able-bodied males, of course, served in the Wehrmacht, in the army. And also German workers, some actually were quite nice, I have to say. And some others were very hostile. So it varied from person to person.

Indeed as I said before, that happened on the 30th of April 1941. And in the summer of 1941, there was a rumor running around we are going to get Jewish women. And so obviously there was big excitement, notwithstanding the fact that for these women, probably was not so much of a pleasure. But at least we looked forward to some positive divergence. And the rumor turned out to be true.

And so later on that day, I think in the afternoon, a whole group of girls and women-- led again by a guard, of course-- came in. One of them particularly caught my eye immediately. She was in appearance, exactly what I had always looked for in a woman as far as appearance is concerned. So dark brown, close to black hair and brown eyes, curls, and looking in general had a very pleasant facial expression, and a very Semitic expression in her face, which I always enjoyed in a woman and still do, in fact.

And it turned out-- so I concentrated my attention to the first few days on her. I found out that her first name was [? Margot. ?] And I also found out that she had a steady boyfriend, which didn't surprise me. So this immediately cooled my interest, at least for the time being. And we worked then together. We were really interspersed. There may have been a woman here and a male here and so on-- several males, and so on.

And among ourselves a real camaraderie developed. The chief foreman was a man. His name was-- I'll never forget-- Alexander [? Ziegel. ?] And he was about, retrospectively guessing, in his late 30s, I would say-- possibly 40-- and a real roughneck, extremely nice to all females, who also after the war really didn't find much reason to complain about him-- and very gruff two males. And myself, I again started to rub him the wrong way and me the wrong way. So I was on his list to bark at whenever he found a pretext for doing that.

I also met there, that is very important, a male-- in fact that was already on the first day that I started to work there-- a man a few years older than I. His name was Hans Fabisch. And we became really extremely close friends. It was my first close friend since I lost the one whom I had in high school, who emigrated to England. And we really went through thick and thin. We became close personal confidants. We shared our recreational hours and did a lot together and talked a lot. And he was probably one of two or three best friends that I ever had.

He was, as I said, a few years older than I. And he had decided to study medicine and was already-- he had all kinds of medical books at home and had started to self educate himself in anatomy and other similar medical subjects. Oh yeah, that reminds me of something else. Since we graduated from high school, there was really no educational outlet for us. Universities, of course, we were prohibited from enrolling in or even attending classes. And there was really nothing else except my apprenticeship to become a mechanic.

So with a group of other friends and also particularly former classmates from my high school graduating class, we developed a set of informal talks, which were held in different apartments of us, sort of moving around. At that time I didn't use that word. But later on it occurred to me it was almost like an underground university. First of all, our German teacher, who was actually a very highly educated man also in philosophy, he taught us a course in philosophy. And it was partly that he talked. And partly it was done already in seminar style, where he would assign certain topics to one of us. And that person had to report back at the next time and give a little talk on that.

And this Hans Fabisch, whom I just mentioned, he had connections to various medical doctors. And we got talks from various medical subjects of general interest and so on. And then somebody else-- I forgot who that was-- knew a Jewish architect. These were all, of course, Jews who talked. And they were also happy because they were thrown out of their professions and had nothing to do.

But particularly this former German teacher, whose name incidentally was called [? Leibenstein ?], the others rotated. But he consistently, week after week-- he never took a penny-- and he taught with extreme enthusiasm, which was infectious even. And that was a tremendous intellectual outlet for us, which otherwise we had really no outlet for.

Another person that I would like to mention is a girl who was a few years older than I-- I think about four years. Her name was Ruth Pearl. And she was part of that circle that also went to classes. And she became somewhat close to my friend Hans Fabisch and myself and as time went on, I think closer to myself. And we started to strike up a friendship. And we occasionally went to movies together and developed that-- we came quite close. And she was my first girlfriend. And we shared a lot of both personal thoughts, general thoughts, and everything-- also entertainment, and so on.

An important factor, by the way, also was music. All of us in that circle and in various other circles were lovers of classical music. And that went also for Ruth. And it was in wartime practically impossible to buy your records. So people in private apartments-- also many non-Jews-- started business swapping records, used records, that is.

And so I enriched my collection by-- and by the way, not just swapping, but also selling. So I bought quite a number of records in those days that I didn't have before. It should be remembered, of course, that the quality and the kind of phonograph was a totally different world from what we have today. There was obviously no Wi-Fi. Obviously there was only one speaker out of an inferior phonograph. And a phonograph was sometimes even hand driven by winding it up. And if it was electric, then it was kept illegally, by the way, because it should have been turned in.

But we managed to have house concerts also periodically, where we actually made up a program. So like for Philharmonic concert, say some Beethoven symphony, and maybe a piano concerto by somebody else, and different people would then bring those records. And then we would all assemble in somebody's living room and listen to it just the way one would have gone to a Philharmonic concert, which of course was also forbidden for Jews to go to.

And a drastic change in the situation of the Jews occurred with the introduction of the yellow Star of David, as of September 19th, 1941. The law was very specific that every Jew, as defined by the Nuremberg laws, has to wear such a yellow star on his outer clothing, over other clothing, whenever the person is in public. And it specified even exactly where it had to be worn. It had to be worn on the left-hand side, about at the level of the heart.

And also it couldn't be tacked on by pins or safety pins, but had to be firmly sewn on. And this way they wanted to avoid that people might put on a star and then later on take it off again. And the Gestapo was known to walk up to Jews with a star and try with their fingers to get under it, to see whether there was a space between the star and the garment, to make sure that it was firmly sewn on.

They did this to you?

No, not to me. But they have done it to people. That made it finally almost impossible for Jews to go to all the entertainments and cultural offerings that were forbidden after Kristallnacht three years earlier. My friend, Hans Fabisch, and I devised-- it was his original idea-- a method even to get around that. And it was based on the following, that in those days double breasted suits and coats were fashionable. And if you buttoned it the men button their suit jackets, then the left side where the star was on was, of course, on the outside and visible. But if you changed the buttoning, and most were also sewn in such a way that there were button holes and buttons, you could button it either away-- and the way say women's usually buttoned them with the right part over the left-- then the star would be automatically covered up.

It was important to have it that way because upon leaving one's apartment, and also walking in one's own neighborhood, it would have been much too dangerous to walk around without a star because people know you. And you would have been immediately reported to the Gestapo. So what we did is we left our neighborhood, as good Jews with our yellow stars, walked many blocks-- maybe 10-- to an area where nobody knew us, then ducked into an entrance of some apartment building, and quickly changed the buttoning of our jacket or coat and reappeared as Aryan Germans. And then we could go to a movie or anything without detection.

Weren't you a little bit afraid of doing this?

No. In fact, it actually got me excited, like getting my adrenaline flowing, that I was doing something like that. My

father, I should say, was horrified and forbade me strictly to do that because not only did I endanger myself, very often the Gestapo would then also arrest the rest of the family. But I just didn't want to listen to any advice of caution. And also, I couldn't stand being so cooped up.

I should make a reference incidentally in connection with culture and movies. There existed a Jewish [NON-ENGLISH], or culture society. That actually existed already since long before the Kristallnacht, namely since a time when Jewish artists were summarily thrown out from all German theaters and movie production companies, et cetera. And it was founded originally, of course, to give Jewish musicians, actors, et cetera, a way of earning a living in their craft.

And it was always fairly well visited. As I remember and in the summer of 1939, I saw an excellent performance of a K&Auml;m&Auml;n operetta-- K&Auml;m&Auml;n was a Hungarian operetta composer-- Grafin Mariza, Countess Maritza, which was staged by the Kulturbund very professionally. And I enjoyed it very much. And I've seen other things too.

And then after Jews were prohibited from going to other general cultural events and entertainment, et cetera, then of course the Kulturbund became in addition to providing an outlet for fired Jewish artists, became also the only legal way, at least, for the Jewish population at large even to see a movie or a play or a symphony. They had a very nice symphony orchestra, by the way, all consisting of Jews.

But I considered it simply a challenge to do something that I was prohibited from doing by the government. And so we did that. And my girlfriend Ruth went one day to a beauty parlor. [INAUDIBLE] even beauty parlors were forbidden for Jews. So of course, she didn't wear a Jewish star.

And along the way, she was stopped by a policeman. There was a regular policeman in uniform and asked for her ID. And when he saw that she was Jewish, the way she told it to me was evidently embarrassed and told her in an apologizing way that unfortunately, he is forced by law to report that to the Gestapo. Any transgression by a Jew had to be reported to the Gestapo. And he had no way to avoid that.

And so we were terribly scared. And then for weeks, we didn't hear anything. And so our scare slowly subsided. Although I told her that if they really get after her, that she should simply go underground. And then she told me she would definitely not do that because she has no way to sustain herself and doesn't know anyone where to go to.

So on one day, in fact, on the 9th of September, 1941-- was it the 9th of September or 9th of October? It doesn't make a difference. We always met in the morning on the way to the factory. My train actually-- I had to change trains at a certain station and joined another train, where she already was sitting in it. She always sat in the same car. And from there on, we always rode together. And on that morning when I came into the railroad car where she was sitting, and I took one look and knew what had happened, she-- her eyes were totally red from both probably having cried and having been sleepless.

And she pulled, without saying a word, a letter from her pocket book, which had the dreaded Geheime Staatspolizei, the complete word for Gestapo, which is just an abbreviation. And it asked her to appear on that morning at 9:00 in their offices, of whom, such and such. That's all, just to appeal for an interrogation. But everybody knew what that meant.

And I haven't really talked about the deportations. But the deportations had started a month earlier. And Jews working in defense plants were understood to be exempted from deportations. So she had come to work mainly to show our foreman, [? Alexander ?] [? Ziegler, ?] the summons to see what you could do for her. But he coldly told her that there was nothing that he could do for her because the Gestapo does have the complete lists of all Jews employed there by Siemens, and they know also of the agreement that Jews working in defense plants are to be deferred. However they can do what they want. And there's nothing more that he can do.

And then we talked a little bit. The atmosphere was so unbelievably stifling, that I almost felt like somebody choked my throat. And then she said goodbye to our mutual friend, Hans Fabisch, and to me and just walked out. It was the last time I saw her.

Back up briefly, in September, just about a month before this happened, the first deportation train left for the east. And that was characteristic of all transports to the east. Nobody knew where these people went to. It was just said it goes to the east. Now the--

Who was deported, what kinds of groups or categories?

I don't think it was any particular category, with the exception that those working in defense plants were exempted. But otherwise they just-- I think the Jewish community was enlisted in putting together lists for deport--