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Interview with Ernest Fontheim on March 12, 1997. The interviewer is Randy Goldman. This is tape three side A.

The deportations-- the mechanism of the deportation was handled, of course, by the Gestapo at the command level. But it was carried out under orders of the Gestapo by the Jewish community organizations. And they put together the lists of Jews to be deported. Sometimes the Gestapo would make particular demands-- for example, at one time the Gestapo was afraid that Jews who lived along the elevated train tracks might give flashlight signals to allied bombers, and thus directing them to bomb the tracks, which on its face is ludicrous, because they would have then also directed the bombs to themselves, living right next to the tracks.

But anyway, be that as it may, the Gestapo ordered the Jewish community to provide such a list and get these people on the deportation trains. But in general, that was one exception. The community picked the people. It was initially a process where people were notified, sometime ahead of time, by a letter which only said that their apartment has been designated to be cleared. It was sort of as if that was all there was to it, that the apartment was to be cleared. But everybody knew what it meant, of course.

And with a set of detailed questionnaires where all the assets had to be filled in, and so on. And then another questionnaire where all the contents of the luggage-- there were detailed instructions how much luggage in terms of size and weight could be taken along, which items should be taken along, and which could not be taken along. Among those not to be taken along, for example, were anything negotiable-- values, securities, money, cash, jewelry.

And it had to be filled out exactly what the contents of the luggage was, that was to be taken along. Now, the result of that was that there was a wave of suicides, many people who were too scared to go through the deportations, since nobody knew what really happened to these people. And so after a while, the Gestapo discontinued that and then went over to a system where people were just being picked up without any prior notification.

And anyway, they had to be kept in a transit camp before being shipped out because the cattle cars and freight cars that were used for deporting Jews, such a train was holding upwards of 600, 700 people, even up to 1,000 and 1,100. And it took more than a day or two to pick up that many people. So they were housed in a transit camp. At first, the transit camp, in fact, was one of the synagogues that, until the military-- that synagogue, by the way, had been only lightly damaged during Kristallnacht and had been repaired afterwards.

So that was first used for a transit camp. And then the military sort of made a demand to have that synagogue for, I think, storage of some sort or other. And then it was shifted to an old age home of the Jewish community. And Jews were collected there until they had enough people in there to fill a transport. Then they were taken away.

During this process, were you very aware of what was going on?

Yeah, at that point, yes. And in fact, this group of people that I mentioned who were also having various lectures and so on, at that point we decided that we have to somehow do something, at least first of all, to find out what is happening, because people were being picked up and then never heard from again.

Now that in itself has a tremendously terrorizing effect. Somebody-- your neighbor or maybe even your brother or somebody close to you who you still saw yesterday, today he was gone, or she. And not only was that person gone, but I mean, except for the fact that you knew they were transported East, otherwise you had no inkling. There was never a letter or postcard coming back. There was never any sign of life, even.

So that in itself has a terrorizing effect. But we were all very, very naive about the whole process. We sat down and had a big sort of session where we threw out all kinds of ideas. Then we came away with a great idea that whoever of the group is the first one to be deported, then has to see, after getting to the East, to contact maybe German soldiers or somebody who can get a message back to one of us describing what was happening. In the light of how the deportations were handled, it was just unbelievably naive.

And of course, the first one of our group-- there was a girl. I still remember her. And of course, she vanished exactly

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like everybody else. And nothing was ever heard from her. She obviously had no chance to contact anyone. I mean, Jews who were deported immediately-- of course, that was not really known at that time-- but they were immediately put into either ghettos or extermination camps. And in the extermination camps, many were immediately on the spot gassed. And those who were not gassed were kept in that camp for hard labor and had no way to communicate with anybody outside of that camp. That was just totally impossible.

And your family, they were all fine?

Yeah. Of course, again, the thing was that my father considered himself lucky originally because he was exempted from the forced labor because of a doctor's certificate. But now that labor was the only thing that exempted you from deportation, that turned out to have been not so lucky. He went through several stages of such real ironies.

Now, of course, he would not have been in a position, really, to do factory work. However, he knew one of the personalities at the center at the congregation offices. And in fact, there was a woman who was in charge of the sort of deportation decisions and so on. And she gave him an unpaid job there for the community. What he did he, never really talked about. And yeah, he was-- I mean, like in all other things, very closed mouthed.

But I know he had some work at the Jewish Community. And that may have exempted him for some time. Now in April '42-- oh. I have to back up, actually. Now I remember I made a mistake when I talked about the arrest of my girlfriend, Ruth. I know that I said it was in either September or October of '41. It was actually '42. In '41, the deportations had barely started. And it wasn't in October of '42 or September then, I don't know, that her arrest took place.

OK, coming back, my parents were actually arrested in April of '42. And by the Gestapo. And--

Now, I want to interrupt you a second, because on your notes I see that you said they were imprisoned in December '42.

Yeah, well, I'm coming to that.

Oh, I'm sorry. Excuse me.

And they were taken to the collection point, to that synagogue that I referred to. But the Gestapo officers who arrested them said-- oh, yeah. What happened was that my father had agreed with his personal physician that he would either commit suicide or take some strong sedative which would totally knock him out.

And the physician prescribed to him something called [?Veronal?]. I don't think it exists, at least not under this name. So I don't know what it would be here. But he immediately took that and was sort of like in a coma. And so he was [INAUDIBLE], and they couldn't take him along. So they put in a phone call. And I had the Jewish hospital pick him up.

And then my mother and sister were taken. And they told me to come along because they said it's likely that if the father is not capable of being transported that my mother and sister would be sent home again. So that is also one of the sort of weird examples where occasionally they add something that might almost sound like humane in all this murderous brutality.

At any rate, I spent several hours in that transit camp. And it was a horrible sight, also. And the Jews there-- it was a synagogue. And the people who were to be sort of awaited their deportation, they were all at the balcony. I mean, European synagogues at that time-- and I think still today, in fact-- separate the sexes. The men pray downstairs and women in the balcony.

And so they had all of the people for deportation in the balcony. And you could see sort of people up wandering around absent-mindedly and so on and in a daze. And then on the ground floor, which was the area where men used to pray, that's where the Gestapo-- they had their offices and they would periodically call somebody down fill out forms and for interrogation and so on.

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So anyway, after several hours, my mother and sister were told they could go home again. And so that's what we did. And they handed our luggage back, their luggage, and then we went back.

Did you think that when you were in that synagogue that you might all be leaving and that it was just a ruse?

No, I didn't.

That you weren't--

No. I didn't [INAUDIBLE]. But maybe that was just my habitual optimism. I don't know. As time went on, the situation became more and more unbearable. I remember one co-worker in the factory from the Jews, he was probably about five years older than I. He appeared one morning with a totally lost expression. The night before, when he came home from work, he found the apartment empty. He had a wife and a little baby girl, I think. And they were gone. I mean, he couldn't even say goodbye to them. They were gone. And he was supposed to continue working.

And there were many similar horror stories. And they were constantly, of course, circulated. And in fact, since Jews were also no longer permitted to buy newspapers, by the way-- and as we discussed before, also had to turn on their radios. So there was a new way to sort of spread the news. And that was called sort of radio by mouth or mouth radio.

And I mean, the psychological situation became just unbearable. It was sort of a combination of fear of the worst to come and being trapped into something where one has no control and mixed with a desire to do something about it. I mean, many of my friends-- also my friend Hans and I and so on-- we talked about going underground. But to go underground, that means going into hiding with forged papers. Seemed like such an enormous undertaking.

I mean, first of all, to get forged IDs, it would cost a lot of money. And then food would have to be procured on the black market. And of course, none of us had any money to speak of. So it was mainly a lot of talk. And now some people-- mainly those who were politically engaged-- they were able to go underground and be protected by politically like-minded people. That was true especially of communists.

Yeah, and talking about communists, there was a Jewish communist cell actually centered in one of the other Jewish departments at Siemens and headed by a man named Herbert Baum and his wife, and Marianne Baum-- B-A-U-M. And they had been apparently an underground cell for years only of Jews and basically just meeting and sort of like holding seminars about Marxism and the dangers of capitalism and fascism and so on.

And then at some point they decided that wasn't really enough and something had to be done really to fight back against the Nazis. And it was also sort of in the summer, I think, of 1942, in the center of Berlin. The Nazis staged a vast exhibit under the name "the Soviet paradise." And of course, they meant it sarcastically.

And the exhibit was devoted to materials which they had uncovered in their process of conquering large parts of the Western Soviet Union. And much of it may have been true. Much of it was lies, whatever. Then the exhibit apparently was quite successful. There were songs visiting it. So they decided to burn it down. But of course, they were not experts at anything. I mean, they were not experts in sabotage and technical things, and so on. So it was a big tragedy.

They succeeded in putting in a small fire. So the damage was so minimal that the Germans even could keep it out of the newspapers. There had been a major fire. They would have had no choice but to at least report it. But it wasn't even reported in the press. And not only that, but immediately they didn't catch anybody. They thought of-- they scattered certain delayed incendiaries, which you put somewhere and then it takes five minutes or so for the flame to break out.

So they were gone by the time-- so nobody was caught. But the Gestapo had apparently a network of undercover agents also in the underground communist movement. Anyway, the details I don't know. The fact is that they got on their trail. They were arrested, all of them. And the first thing that the Gestapo did is to tell the Jewish community that they want 500 Jewish men immediately. 250 of them will be shot on the spot. And another 250 will be immediately deported to concentration camps.

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And if any sabotage where Jews are involved happens again, they will take 10 times as many people. And that was all that immediately spread through this mouth radio, of course. And I knew some of the people involved, incidentally, because it was centered at Siemens, the bombs were at Siemens. And so that contributed to the demoralizing effect. As a sideline, I want to say that they became great heroes in the now defunct German Democratic Republic, formerly East Germany. And there was a street named after them. And books were written, and so on.

But of course, they are all dead. Actually, one of the members of the group was a girl who graduated with me from that high school. She was in my class. And in fact, I remember that after graduation, I once had a long discussion. She was then already a communist. And she tried to convert me. All I remember is that we had a very lively, hard-hitting discussion. And I didn't convince her and she didn't convince me.

But it never occurred to me that she would belong to them. If she would have convinced me, who knows. Maybe I would have been in that group, also. Anyway, yeah, they were all tried by the so-called People's Court. That's the same court that also convicted those plotters who tried to assassinate Hitler two years later, in July '44. And of course, most of them were executed. A few got some jail sentences. Right.

This is basically the atmosphere. Now also, I mean, I should say about Siemens, coming back to that. I said already that we got no worker food ration stamps, and even less than the general consumer. We got paid less than the German workers who did similar work. And I said we couldn't go to the toilets. And also, we couldn't use their cafeteria. We had to bring our own lunch and sort of eat it at our work desk.

And of course, we had no right to vacation time. But my friend Hans Fabisch, whom I mentioned earlier, who was training to become a physician, he sort of advised me on certain back symptoms, which cannot be traced by a doctor, which are purely subjective, but make you incapable of working. And it has to hurt at a certain point. And when the doctor pushes this way, it hurts more, and that way it works less.

And so I feigned that. And so I received an official sort of a statement. As a Jew, one couldn't just call in-- I'm sick today. You had to have a physician certified a written statement that Ernest Fontheim has blah, blah, such and such a sickness or disease, and is not capable to come to work. So anyway, I got that following his instructions. That was in the latter part of December.

So on December 24, then I was at home. I wanted to come back. I said earlier in this interview that Christmas played a special role in our family. And I meant that in many ways. It played a role as I grew up because we always had a Christmas tree. And Santa Claus came and we had gifts.

Well, on the 24th of December, 1942, my parents were arrested and my sister. And it happened this way. I was actually-- that was when I was on that fake sick leave. And I had left the apartment to make a phone call for a public phone. I said, we don't have phone. Public phones were also prohibited to Jews. But by walking a few blocks and hiding my star, I could then go into a booth.

And I was making a call to the parents of Margot, whom I had met some time earlier. And they had a phone because they were subletting an apartment that was in the name of a Hungarian Jewish woman. And since she was not a German citizen, these anti-Semitic laws did not apply to her, even though she was a Jew.

So anyway, so they had that phone. And I called them up. I don't even know why anymore. Doesn't make a difference. But when I went back, we lived now in that apartment with these relatives of ours that I described earlier, which was a second floor apartment. And as I approached the apartment, I noticed my sister, Eva, leaning out the window and waving me away.

And I knew immediately-- in those days, you knew always what was happening on a signal. And so I walked away. I knew that the people were there to pick my family up. So I walked just maybe 50 yards or so back so that I was still in view and watched what was going on. And then after a while, the janitor-- the janitor actually happened to be also a Jew, but lived in a mixed marriage and was protected, therefore, by the Nazi laws.

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And he came and said, I should come up. The people who came for the pick up were actually Jewish orderlies. And they go strictly by lists. My name-- that was just the names of my both parents and my sister. So I went up and there was a total frenzy at home, of course. And my father was again out. He had done the same thing. And one of the orderlies had already gone down to call the Gestapo to say that he was not-- could not be transported.

And he came back after 10, 15 minutes saying he was told that my father has to be brought under whatever circumstances, even if they have to carry him down the stairs in a chair. And then my parents were frantically packing. I mean, most people had already have most of the things packed, and so did they. But there's some last minute things.

My father was not completely out of a coma but in a very weakened state. And he took my hands and said, we will never see each other again. And then my sister suddenly, out of the blue, threw her arms around my neck and had an incredible crying spell. Her whole body shook. And I kept her close. And I frequently thought to myself, why I simply did not take her and walk out with her? That is a question which I have asked myself ever since.

Then when the preparations were done, my father was actually really carried down the steps in a chair. And the picking up of Jews was done by a moving van from a company that I never forget. The name was [? Sheffler. ?] Of course, the Gestapo, they don't release those vans. And inside the vans, they had long benches where the Jews were picked up, were sort of lined up. And then sitting until it was full and then the van would go to the transit camp.

By that time, the transit camp had shifted from the synagogue where it used to be still and able to a former old age home of the Jewish community.

And your sister, your mother, and father?

Yeah. And actually I decided to ride along in that van for some blocks to be together with them some more. And then, at the corner of [GERMAN], I said goodbye and jumped out of the back. And that was the last time I saw my parents and my sister on December 24, 1942. Christmas Eve.

And the next day, our doorbell rang. And when I opened, I was surprised to see my former mathematics teacher, Dr. [? Behr ?] from the Jewish school. He told me that he was serving as an orderly in the transit camp and had a message for my mother. And he added that it was strictly forbidden for orderlies to make any communication between people in the transit camp and people outside. But since I had been a student for quite a number of years that he knew me already as a smaller boy, he did it out of a gesture of friendship.

He told me, first of all, that my mother had forgotten certain things that he offered to bring in and they would also be glad if I could pack some additional food. And then he added that my mother also told him that she was interrogated the day they arrived there by the Gestapo. And the Gestapo showed particular interest in me. They wanted to know what hours I work, when I come home from work, et cetera.

And I knew immediately that that was a message. And obviously the message was never to go back. So that's what I did. At that point, I had no place to stay. But as I just mentioned earlier, the parents of my co-worker Margot, whom I had been interested in first, live-- sublet an apartment that was actually registered in the name of a Hungarian Jewish woman, and therefore was not on the Gestapo list. And they had a small sort of a maid's room inside of the apartment that belonged to it which they used for storage. But they said I could stay there and sleep there, also.

So that's what I did. On New Year's Eve, December 31, first of all, I knew at that time that no transport had left Berlin. So I knew that my parents were still there. And I was there with Margot and her parents and also with a friend of theirs. I forgot his name. He was sort of an elderly man, about 60-- in his 60s. And his entire family had been arrested.

But he had some contact to the Gestapo and was negotiating with them to bribe them to get his family out. And he was supposed to meet his Gestapo contact the next day. But he also knew the Gestapo had power to do anything. They could just take whatever he had to offer, arrest him, too, and laugh in his face.

And that New Year's Eve was the most horrible New Year's Eve that I ever had in my life. My parents and sister were in

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the transit camp. My girlfriend, Ruth, was already long gone. And I didn't know what would become of me. And that man was there with this horror story. The atmosphere was so unbelievably gloomy. And it's even hard to describe.

I kept in touch with my friend, Hans Fabisch, of course. And he actually had met a physician, a Jewish physician, who he was going to marry. She was a few years older than he and she was Austrian. So that's why otherwise a person of that age wouldn't have had a medical degree in Germany because in Germany, a Jew couldn't study anymore since 1933.

But coming from Vienna, she could study till 38. Anyway, she had a medical degree. And her name was [?Valli?]. And they got married in the first week of January, [INAUDIBLE]. Yeah. And Hans and I discussed the possibility maybe of going underground together. But a basic difference of opinion developed between Hans and myself.

His philosophy was that as long as we were employed at Siemens, we were protected and deferred from that deportation. On the other hand, if he went underground and were caught on some ID check on the street without a star, that meant immediate deportation. Therefore, he felt at this point it was much safer if we stayed legal, quote, worked at Siemens and were protected that way, and then go underground whenever the deferment would no longer be valid, or Siemens might lay us off, or whatever.

I, on the other hand, argued that the Gestapo was not going to offend us printed invitations or announcements saying, now you're no longer protected and deferred. That is going to come overnight. Without that, anybody knows it. And then it's going to be too late. It is true right now it is safer to be walking around with a star and working at Siemens, because that is protection. But because of the uncertainty of how long that is going to last, there's no-- that risk we have to take.

And there was another point, in fact, which leads me to briefly a flashback to our time at Siemens. I had forgotten to mention that already, since the fall of 1942, we received in our department forced laborers from German occupied territories. It started out with a group of French women. And after a while, we also got Polish women to work in our department.

These were all people who were deported, obviously, against all international law and without their consent into Germany to work for war production. And I also referred to that in talking to Hans that it's very obvious. First of all, the Germans have millions and millions of people in the occupied territories and tens of thousands of Jews. So why do they need a few tens of thousands of Jews if they can be replaced from a pool that has millions of people?

And they have already started to introduce these people in our department. And they know already how to do the things that we are doing. So I think that probably the time is imminent, even that these deferments for our work and defense plans are going to lapse. But we did not obviously resolve that difference of opinion. Hans, himself, felt that, for the time being, he was safer that way.

He did, however, do one thing, and that is to order forged IDs, a forged ID, at least for himself, to go-- it was practically impossible to live in Germany without some sort of an ID, because there were frequent checks for identification on the streets. There was a whole spectrum of agencies who could do that, in addition to just the ordinary police. There was a Gestapo, of course, which was essentially a political police. There was the so-called criminal police. These were detectives looking for common criminals.

There was the military police. There was a so-called labor police, and probably other agencies that I wasn't even aware of. So basically, it was definitely necessary to have forged identification papers, because if you were asked for an identification by any one of these agencies, and you were not able to identify yourself to their satisfaction, that meant immediate arrest. Margot's father had a contact that could provide a forged identification as an employee for an organization called Deutsche Arbeistfront, which means in English German Labor Front.

This is tape three, side B of an interview with Ernest Fontheim continued on March 13, 1997. The interviewer is Randy Goldman.

This organization, the German Labor Front was the Nazi answer, basically, to labor unions. They had smashed, of

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course, the labor unions and declared them illegal. And also they declared that in their ideology, this whole idea of class warfare and of a sort of adversarial relationship between management and labor is not in the sense of a Germanic nationalism. Instead, they formed this German Labor Front, which contained members both of the employed laborers and employees, and of management and owners.

And the supposed idea was that in this forum, before conflicts arise, all issues will be discussed in a cooperative way, because both sides are obviously interested in the flourishing of the company. This whole idea might have sounded good on paper, but it was, of course, done mainly in order to smash the voice of the workers and to enable German industry to increase production, and mainly war production, without any disruptions.

So Margot's father had, through some contact, and for roughly the sum of 1,500 German reichsmark, which was the currency at the time, the opportunity-- 1,500 a piece, of course-- to obtain IDs as an employee with the German Labor Front. This was, of course, a very prestigious organization. And so the ID also contained a passport picture of the person, the obviously name, birth date, address, and so on, and then a rubber stamp numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, to be stamped, I think, semiannually, so that it also had the impression of being updated on a semiannual basis.

The rubber stamp came-- was just a number came with the ID itself. So we could sort of revalidate it every six months for ourselves. Hans also agreed to buy this ID and sort of put it away in case when the situation is [? ripe?] he considers ripe to go underground. In the meantime, as I had mentioned earlier, I was already no longer living in our apartment because of the hidden warning that my mother had conveyed to me.

And I lived in a small maid's room of the apartment of Margot's parents. But during the day, commuted to our apartment because I had decided to save as much as possible. And incidentally, I should also add that at that time, my parents and sister were still in the transit camp in that former Jewish old age home.

Only after the war-- in fact, fairly recently with publications of the history and so on-- did I learn of the brutal conditions in that camp. I mean, I never thought that there would be nice conditions. But at least I thought since it was an old age home, there would be beds in there. And they would at least have some form of amenities.

I learned now that some so-called specialists in Jewish immigration from the Vienna SS had been gotten to Berlin on the orders of Adolf Eichmann, and also to speed up the deportation of Jews. And the first thing that the man in charge was a man named [? Alois ?] Brunner, incidentally. His rank was SS HauptsturmfÃ¼hrer.

The fact that he was in Berlin, in fact, was known at that time. But what was not known is that his first act after arriving and looking at the transit in that former old age home that he ordered that all furniture be thrown out the windows. And that was literally done. They were thrown out of the window, even though even there was a shortage of furniture for Germans.

And there were just bare floors so he could pack more Jews into the building. And so even in that transit camp already, they must have lived under very miserable circumstances. And let me see.

How long was your family in that camp?

That comes to-- their transport left on the 12th of January. It was a Tuesday, and an unbelievably, unusually cold day, even for Berlin. And the departure of a transport became known within hours always in Berlin, because that couldn't-- you know, there were, what, 1,000 people were marched from the transit camp to the nearest-- they didn't go to a regular railroad station but to a freight yard where they were loaded on like cattle.

As I had said earlier, the arrest of my parents took place on December 24. And I guess in order to allow the SS some Christmas vacation from their strenuous activities, no transport went away from Berlin between December 24 and January 12. So they were there almost three weeks, 2 and 1/2 weeks.

Were you at work when they left?

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No. As I explained earlier, I was on that faked sick leave. And I simply never went back. The sick leave, of course, was limited to-- I forgot what it was-- a certain number of days, maybe a week. But by never going back then, I was hoping that my absence wouldn't be immediately noticed, because obviously if somebody was just absent, they would immediately send orders for the arrest of that person.

So where were you when the transport left? Did you see this procession?

No, no, no. I didn't see-- I just heard that also through the mouth radio that I had mentioned also at some point, that when I was actually considering how primitive it was and that we didn't even have telephones was incredibly efficient, how it went from these things meant for mouth to mouth. Let me see where--

During that time, as I said, we-- I lived, then, in that maid's room at the apartment of Margaret's parents, which was really very far away and a distance from our apartment where we lived. So every day, I went there to pack things. And my plan was to have as much of personal effects and so on picked up by a moving company.

That moving company had been a client of my father's when he was still practicing law. I still remember the name was [NON-ENGLISH] Zimmerman, which means brother Zimmerman. The owner, actually, was a Mr. [? Schutt, ?] who was very, I must say, was a fantastic man. And he knew, of course, that we are Jews. And he stuck with us. He had already from our nice apartment that we-- where we were thrown out a lot of furniture stored in a storage place under a different name so that it couldn't be traced.

And I went to him and told him that my parents had been arrested and would be deported. And I wanted to save more things. And he immediately agreed. And the pick up van was supposed to come on January 19. And I was supposed to designate all the pieces that were supposed to be picked up. And there were certain pieces of furniture that I thought maybe at one time I might want to sell, and also a trunk full of all kinds of personal articles. It also contained the diary of my sister. And she had kept a diary for a long time, and also particularly the letter that my sister had written to me when she was as a harvest helper away from Berlin. And I had written to her of the arrest of my girlfriend, Ruth.

And so I was busy then every day for a few hours in the apartment. And always left considerably earlier than I would have come back had I worked so that I wouldn't be running into some trap by the Gestapo. On the 18th of January-- it was one day before I had ordered the van-- the moving van-- to come, I was, again, doing some last packing fit to finish up for the pick up on the next day when one of the women I had mentioned earlier that there were quite a number of people living-- had been living in that apartment.

One of the women came and reported that the infamous pick up moving van was in the Brandenburger Strasse. That is a street where my friend, Hans was living. I think I had mentioned that the pick-ups of Jews for deportation was done by a furniture-- a furniture moving van of the firm [? Scheffler. ?]

And Brandenburger Strasse, as I said, was the street where my friend Hans was living. Also that was in mid-morning. And I knew that Hans was at work at Siemens. But his wife, [?Valli?] did not work and might be at home. So I immediately grabbed my coat and raced towards several blocks away from where our apartment was. And then I turned the corner into Brandenburger Strasse and saw that van parked right in front of their house.

And it struck me like a lightning. I stopped for a few seconds, considering-- now that house also, like all houses where Jews lived, of course, was a so-called Jew house, which meant that there was a large number of Jewish parties. And I figured that the probability that they were just in their apartment is probably small. And at any rate, I would never be able to face my friend if I didn't do anything I could to get his wife out.

So they lived in a-- it was a walk up on the fifth floor. I raced up the steps, rang the bell, and they had sublet one room just in an apartment, which was rented by a Mrs. [INAUDIBLE]. And Mrs. [INAUDIBLE] opened the door. Her face looked horrible, as white as-- even more whites than this wall here, like this cup. I've never seen her like that.

And she looked completely dejected. And all she said, what are you doing here? Get away quickly. And then, instead of turning and running, I asked, is [?Valli?] I want to talk to [?Valli?]. And then she repeated, and get away. And upon

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that, I saw behind her a man in an SS uniform appearing. And at that point, I turned around and raced down and was on the landing below when I heard a thunderous voice in a Viennese dialect saying, halt immediately. And I turned around. I saw an SS officer leaning over the balustrade with a drawn pistol pointing at me.

And I got such a shock of scare that almost my knees buckled under me. And I walked back up. And he got me in, closed the door. And the first thing-- your papers. And then I pulled out my forged ID from the German Labor Front, which he looked at carefully and compared my face with the picture on the ID. And then he barked at me what I was doing there, you know, because there was supposed to be no contact between so-called Aryans and Jews.

And of course, the question totally caught me by surprise. And I was so devastated and fearful anyway that I couldn't think straight. So all I could blurt out was that, there's a Jew who lives here still owes me some money, which in retrospect was stupid. And the guy didn't even catch it, because if he owed me money, that meant that I must have loaned it to him. And if I loaned him money, what business did I have loaning money to a Jew? But he didn't pursue it, but instead, he took my ID, put it in his uniform pocket, and said, I want to ask you some more questions tomorrow. I want you to come to my office at Gestapo headquarters such and such street address room number so-and-so. I forgot that.

But I do remember at 9:00 tomorrow morning, I want to see you there. And then you'll get your ID back. And then I left. And I felt as if I had sort of escaped from hell. That was one of the two or three scariest episodes in my entire life. I went down. But at least one thing, while we were standing, that little conversation took place inside their door in a little sort of like a vestibule.

And the various rooms went over it. And in Hans' room, I didn't see a person. So it seemed to me that [?Valli?] wasn't there. So as I raced down as quickly as possible-- because I thought, maybe the guy changes his mind. I decided to-- then I walked out of the house to the street. And to the next corner was several houses. So I walked to the next corner and around the corner. But then I positioned myself there around the corner so that I could see who approached the house.

And I was hoping that if [?Valli?] would come, that I could signal or shout at her and get her away. It was also a cold winter day, the 18th of January. And I stood there. In the meantime, that van had already left. But it was known that sometimes if a person that they were looking for wasn't there, they left somebody behind. So that's why I stuck there until my legs were really like just columns of ice and I couldn't stand it anymore.

And at 4:00 also was shift change. I felt I had to notify Hans. And of course, that was a tricky thing, because I was by that time away without-- from work-- without permission. So I couldn't be seen there. So I went to the elevated station that we went to when we went to work at Siemens, and then walked towards the factory, but didn't walk all the way but sort of hid in the entrance of an apartment building which was still a block or two away from the factory, but where people at the shift change would sort of stream past.

And of course, by that time, it was winter. It was already fairly dark. So I stood there and then when Hans came by, I whistled to him and he stopped and was surprised to see me. And I told them the events of the morning. And of course, he got very depressed and agitated by that. And we went together back. And then when we arrived in front of his house and looked up-- there was also in wartime, windows had to be darkened in order not to give away locations to enemy airplanes.

But often-- I mean, not often. Always there was sort of a small slit of light coming just from the edge where the curtain just quite didn't hit the wall. And we saw some light coming out of his apartment. So we both felt, oh, somebody must be home, at least. So we rushed up. And on the floor below, Hans turned to me and said, you know, why don't you wait here? I'll go up and if everything is clear, I'll call you.

So I stood one floor below and watched him. And he put the key into the lock, but hadn't turned it when the door opened from the inside. And I saw a tall, gray-haired civilian opening the door who didn't belong there, never seen before in my life. And he immediately looked down and shouted to me, who are you?

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And then I turned around and ran as fast as I could. I never ran as fast in my life, I think. And that was the last time I saw Hans And it is sort of a sideline, that was the 18th of January, 1943. Exactly to the day five years later that my high school friend from that orthodox high school on the 18th of January '39-- four years later-- left Berlin to emigrate to England.

So I left, I guess, the two best friends that I had in my life. I lost them on the same day, on the 18th of January. The only thing is the one who left for England, left for life. And he's still alive. He's in Jerusalem now. So then I went back again to Margot's parents. And there was a terrible argument. Her father accused me that I was reckless, that I should have never-- by having that ID confiscated, that means now that ID may even be useless now because the Gestapo knows-- they are obviously going to find out that this is a forged ID. And I was endangering everybody else.

And so we had a big argument about that. And then-- and not only that, but I probably overreacted and overestimated the efficiency of the Gestapo. But at that time, I thought they could probably lift my fingerprints from that ID. And all Jews had been fingerprinted already years before. So they had a fingerprint file of all Jews. And experienced criminologists can match fingerprints. So it occurred to me that what if they match my fingerprint, find out who that owner of that ID really was, and then come to the apartment?

And if the moving van is just there, that will be-- they will immediately find out that this is being picked up, you know, by that firm of [? Zimmerman. ?] And that will lead them to me somehow. So I called up the firm and canceled the pick up. And that was one of the most horrible mistakes in my life. It wasn't the furniture but it was the personal things-- sorry. The personal things that were contained in the trunk.

The trunk contained my sister's diary, her letters, including the letter that she had written to me after the arrest of Ruth. And I never went back to that building, simply because I was afraid that it might be staked out, while the Gestapo-- as far as I know-- never looked just for Jews who were in hiding in particular. But in a case where there was a forged ID from an important Nazi agency, they would surely be interested in finding out how that ID was obtained, from whom, et cetera, et cetera. So that would have been worthwhile to stake that address out.

I just, in retrospect, don't believe that they were that efficient that they would have had all of that figured out within less than a day. But at that time, I felt strongly that it was too unsafe to go back and also too unsafe to have the moving company come because that would have led them to me. The result of it is that I have no personal belongings of my sister whatsoever. I have pictures, of course, but that's all.

We intensified now the search for a place to hide Margot's parents. And incidentally, of course, I immediately had to practically move mountains to get another ID. Margaret's parents were also planning to go underground, but didn't-- had one or two possible sort of options, none of which was ideal.

Then I came up with an idea. And that was the former office supervisor of my father's law office was a Mrs. Frida [INAUDIBLE]. She was actually a marvelous person. She had been in his office as far back as I can remember. I don't know whether she was there since before I was born or since I was a little boy, but as long as I remember, as a little boy, whenever I was taken to the office, she was already working for my father. And then in the last years, she was his office supervisor.

And she held to us even after my father lost his license to practice. And of course, then she lost that job. And she visited us frequently. And I remember often she brought us food, even, that she had taken from her own not very generous rations. And she owned a primitive weekend cottage in a village about roughly 35 miles southeast of Berlin. And all I knew was that she owned that place. I had never been there, what it was like, or so. But I went to her.

And of course, I told her also that my parents and sister had been arrested. And I told her that whether we could make some arrangement that I and also a family of friends there-- that's the couple and her daughter-- could live in that cottage. And she said that because my father was such a marvelous boss for decades for her, and she also considered herself as a friend of the family, that she would do anything to save my life.

On the other hand, she wasn't so sure whether that cottage really was the right place. And she repeated again that it was

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very primitive. And maybe we ought to look at it. So first of all, of course, I introduced her to Margot's parents. I think it was even the next day we all went to her apartment and sort of got acquainted. And then we agreed on a day when we would together travel out and look at the place. She said she hadn't been there even for a year or two, and maybe in a fairly rundown state.

So we went out there. And it was sort of a settlement. This is sort of a German custom, actually, that there were settlements of colonies-- sort of colonies of cottages with very small pieces of land-- like gardens-- around them, which sort of, say, lower middle class Germans would own to have a place to go there on weekends.

And so we went there and looked at the place. It was, again, a cold winter day. And the first thing we noticed was that the roof was leaking and the cottage was really very primitive. There was, of course, no inside running water. There was a pump in front of the house in the garden. And of course, there was no electricity. There was an oil lamp there, but for that, one had to buy sort of a particular kind of petroleum, which was almost impossible to get. Or also one could use candles, which also were hard to get.

And then for heating, basically there was a kitchen stove, which served both as a stove for heating and as a stove for cooking. It was sort of a cast iron sort of rectangular body on cast iron legs. And on top, there were sort of concentric rings of iron, which could be taken out, and pots of different sizes put in there to heat things and cook things.

And that was all there was. And the furniture, I guess, was very primitive. There were two rooms and a sort of a veranda. But we were desperate. So anyway, we said we would have to make do. And she agreed to let us have the place. And of course, she impressed on us the need to be extremely careful. But I mean, we were aware of that ourselves.

Our punishment would have been Auschwitz if we would have been not careful. It would have been discovered. And she would have probably also wound up in a concentration camp. And--

What about the neighbors?

Yeah. I'm coming to that. I mean, that was just [INAUDIBLE]. So she let it. And she didn't take-- she took a small rent. I forgot what it was anymore, maybe it was the order of 40 to 50 mark per month, which at that time was nothing. And the garden, incidentally, contained a number of marvelous fruit trees, some cherry and also plum trees. And she told us we could use the harvest. And the harvest was so rich that, in terms of black market money, that was almost more than the 40 or 50 mark that we paid her for the rent.

Yeah, OK. So then that was agreed upon. And then we decided we would move out there as soon as possible. I mean, you know, we had to settle certain affairs. Well, I didn't. I was out of our apartment. And that was it. And everything in there was gone, as far as I was concerned. But the only things I had taken, of course, personal items like clothing along already to the maid's room at Margot's parents' house. So I was all set up to move there.

But they had to pack their things yet. And that took a few days. And then actually, on the 30th of January, 1943, we moved out to that-- the name of the village, incidentally, was Senzig. S-E-N-Z-I-G. And now a completely different life started for us. I considered it at the time a real adventure. First of all, I was finally off that continuous pressure that was increasing by the month of whether to be picked up and to be deported.

And I felt for the first time in years like a free person. And I also felt that I somehow I want control of my life now, which I wasn't before. And furthermore, I mean, the threat was lifted. And I could do what I wanted to do. Not exactly, actually. But at least in a limited way.

Yeah, there were obviously many, many things now to consider. The first item was money. I have to, again, sort of backtrack a little bit. My father had stored away some what was called black money in the years before his arrest, because all Jewish assets, even if they were not confiscated, were blocked by the German authority, basically the German equivalent of the IRS, the Treasury Department.

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That meant that these assets still belonged to the particular Jewish owner, but he could not-- he or she could not freely dispose of them. Each family had-- was given by the Gestapo a maximum amount of money it could spend per month. And that was all from the bank account. Obviously, that was all in preparation for confiscation. They wanted to prevent the Jews stash away money.

And that was based entirely on the size of the family. Like, we were four people, so I don't know what the amount was. But my father had a certain amount of money-- maximum amount that you could spend. And anything that he sold or so on had to be paid into that blocked account, also. But my father did particularly, at the time when our big apartment was given up, he sold many items under the hand and established black accounts with a number of friends-- basically three. Two of them were former-- no. One of them was a former client.

That was a very interesting man whom I talk about a little bit later. He was a furrier. And in fact, he had the largest and most prominent fur business in Berlin. One of his customers, in fact, was none other than Hermann Goring, one of the top Nazis and commander in chief of the Air Force, in addition to many other offices that he held.

And his name was Walter [? Lange. ?] And in fact, he had a Jewish wife. And he told us that Goring called him up in the summer of 1939 telling him, if you want your wife to be safe, get her out now. And I'll see to it that anything that she wants to take out, she can. At that time, an ordinary Jew who emigrated could take out only very limited amounts of valuables and so on. And he shipped his wife out with, I don't know, oriental rugs and other valuables to England. And they had a son, by the way, and the son also.

And so they were now in safety in England-- safety except for German air raids, maybe. But of course, he conducted-- kept conducting his business. And I forgot what the exact amounts of money were, but it was a fairly sizable amount that he kept in a separate account for my father. And my father had told him and also the others that if anything happened to him, then I should have access to these assets.

The second person was actually the father of the German lawyer whom I had mentioned earlier, who had warned my father of his imminent arrest after Kristallnacht. And I think I mentioned at the time that the father of this lawyer had been a minister of the interior in one of the pre-Hitler governments of the Weimar Republic. The son, the lawyer himself, who had warned my father, was by that time, of course, drafted and was an officer in the Wehrmacht.

But the father was an elderly gentleman. And he kept also a sizable amount of money for my father, and also was informed that I should have access to these assets. The third person was my father's former accountant and tax advisor. He actually had the smallest amount, but also-- I think it was somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 Deutsche Reichsmarch, which was, at that time, fairly sizable.

The interesting thing is that he was the only one who cheated me of the money. Obviously because of the danger for them and for us, no receipts were exchanged. I mean, it was all just by word of honor. And when I came to claim, actually, part of the money, he told me with a straight face-- and in fact, that was at the time when my father was still in the transit camp. And he told me-- and it was a straight face-- that unfortunately, my father did not follow his advice to let them keep the money. But he picked the money up about three, four months ago. And he advised my father that it was not a good idea and that he should-- it would be better for the safety of the money if he would keep the money.

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