

This is tape four, side A, of an interview with Ernest Fontheim on March 13, 1997. The interviewer is Randy Goldman. Yeah, then my father asked about-- as I explained earlier, my former mathematics teacher Dr. Baer was an orderly employed in that transit camp. And he brought messages back and forth between my father and myself. And also, every day I made sandwiches for them, and he would take them in.

And I sent a sort of, obviously, a cloaked message just saying that the accountant said that he had picked everything up. And my father sent a message back, that is definitely not so, and he has everything. So I went back to the accountant for a second time and told him the message of my father.

And he became, then, at first, just unfriendly, but when I kept persisting, he pointed to the telephone and said if I don't leave him alone, he has one phone call to make to the police, and then I can explain to them that he owes me money. Well, at that point I turned around and left. I guess that's one of these unfortunate experiences.

So money was a problem. Another problem was, of course, how to arrange our lives there. These plots in the settlements were very close together. You cannot live there literally in hiding and avoid people. In fact, that would have aroused suspicion. Neighbors are traditionally, in these settlements, very close-talk to each other. And so we decided, we first of all have to have a believable story, who we are and so on.

So we concocted a whole curriculum vitae for ourselves. And the story was our papers incidentally all were made in the last name of Hesse, mine too. H-E-S-S-E. And the story was that this was a couple with their daughter, Margot, and I was a nephew, in other words the son of Mr. Hesse's brother. And my parents had been killed in an accident while I was still a baby. And I had been raised by my aunt and uncle.

But they were almost total strangers to me. I just met them a few months before, so I had to train myself to address them in the familiar German Du form. And also, instead of calling them Mr. or Mrs. Hesse, I had to call them Uncle Hermann and Aunt Lucy.

And incidentally, the name Hermann Hesse also was chosen because from the telephone book, Mr. Hesse found out there existed a real Hermann Hesse at a Berlin address, and that was the address that we gave. So if somebody just made a cursory check, say with our ID, there existed such a person at the address that we gave.

OK, we also had to have credible stories of what our lives were like. For example, in my case, a German, which I pretended to be, would normally be inducted into the army. And of course I was a civilian. And after my ID was taken away by the SS from the German Labor Front, I acquired, after a few months, another ID as a technician in one of the major German defense plants in Berlin.

And that, of course, was in itself an excellent alibi because a person of such technical expertise would be deferred for military service. However, I should also add that the ID requirements were much more rigorous. For example, every male of military age-- and I don't remember any more up to what age that was, but surely much more than my age at that time, which was 20-- every such person had to have military papers.

If the person was actually a member of the Wehrmacht, it means of any one of the three branches-- army, navy, or air force-- the person had to have a Militarpass, military pass, with picture identifying the unit, et cetera, et cetera. If the person was exempt from military service for whatever reason, then also a military paper with a picture and other personal information stating that reason-- be it deferment for job reasons or maybe for health reasons, somebody may have had only one leg for example-- the paper would have to state what the reason was.

And that also had to be carried on the person and shown on request. In the case of job deferment-- in fact, that paper was only issued for a limited time. I forgot exactly, but I believe it was six months. So after, it had to be revalidated every six months. That made it very difficult to obtain forgeries.

First of all, forgeries of military papers were very real hard to get in the first place. And then it was only valid for six months. Then it had to be revalidated. And as I said, I had now obtained an ID as a technician for a defense plant in

Berlin. And with that, I lived for the rest of the war showing it the many times that I was asked for an ID.

And in fact, it was convincing enough so that there was never a follow-up question. But I was aware of the fact that each time the official asking me to identify myself, could have asked, where is your Wehrmacht ID? And then I had already prepared one fall-back, and that was that I would actually go through the pockets of my jacket and pretend to look for the paper, and then was surprised in my face and say, ah, I must have left it in the coat that I wore yesterday.

And at that point, the official could have said, well, I believe you this time, but be sure don't forget it again. He could, however, also have told me, in that case, I have to take you along to check you out, in which case, I would have been done. And in fact, that never occurred. And in all of my cases where I was controlled for ID, that ID that I had and the one that I obtained later-- that I discussed, then-- were sufficient.

I think that also had to do with the fact that I had learned-- while living in Nazi Germany since '33 and by being in that Nazi gymnasium, or high school, for two years from '33 to '35-- I had learned exactly the correct Nazi demeanor. They were in many ways very naive, almost bordering on the childish.

For example, whenever I was asked for an ID, before I did anything like showing my ID, I would, and with military demeanor, click my heels-- I had special heels for that with sort of iron or steel plates to provide the impressive military click that German soldiers had-- stretch out my right arm, say a snappy, Heil Hitler, and then I would show mine. And such silly little things would make just the right impression and would dispel, in most cases at least, any suspicion that I could be anything but a convinced and truthful Nazi.

Yeah, that was my case. Then the case of Mr. Hesse, Margot's father. He was actually by profession a tailor and pattern maker and had owned a woman's coat factory in earlier years in the '30s. And then when forced labor came, he was actually drafted into a military uniform factory and had also, even though he was a Jew, a position of sort of supervisory position there because of his background and knowledge.

So he carried that, continued that, and also said that he was in such a factory. And in addition to that, of course, he had the ID of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront, which was sort of like a secondary position he pretended. Margot's mother had an undefined office job in Berlin. And Margot herself actually was by training a baby nurse, and she worked in sort of a German nursery. These started to spring up now. Today they would be called daycare centers because many German women were not exactly forcibly drafted to work in factories, but they were strongly coerced and urged because there was a tremendous need, obviously, for factory workers because German males were in the army.

And because of the fact that many of these women worked, there was a need for a daycare center. So Margot pretended to work in one of those. But that alone, to have kind of a job, wasn't really enough. I mean, the thing is that village where we lived was about three to four miles away from the nearest commuter station to Berlin. And people either bicycled from the village and parked the bicycles-- at the railroad station they were bicycle racks-- or they took a postal bus that went down the country road which the village was. And certain schedules-- I forgot what it was-- but not very frequently. I think once an hour or so.

And now I went in to Berlin, actually, twice a week to maintain contact with black market sources to obtain food. And so I made it a point, then, always to take-- there was a bus and people saw me at the bus stop. And of course, I pretended to go to work to my factory.

On other days when I did not go there, since it was also known that I had a bicycle and I would bicycle out in the neighborhood, I simply spread the word that whenever I had a chance I liked to bicycle. I would take the bicycle to that commuter line station and park it there so that people wouldn't wonder why I wasn't there regularly.

I forgot what Margot's father's alibi was, but he and his wife also went into Berlin twice a week to catch up there and keep contact with their black market sources. Margot herself was number one as a most Jewish-looking of the four of us. And on top of it, she was at that time always extremely nervous and afraid. And so she stayed out there and never went into the city.

And that created somewhat of a problem, but what she had to do was to stay inside the house. I mean, people didn't check up really literally. And she just stayed inside the house all day and only appeared outside after, I don't know, five or six, when people normally would be home from their jobs.

Another very important issue was that of police registration. In Germany at that time-- and, I believe, even today still-- every person has to be registered with the police at his or her place of residence. And a person can only have one place of residence. Now, all the people out there who lived in these houses-- I mean, these cottages, some were as primitive as ours, others may have been a little bit more fancy-- they actually had apartments in Berlin where they were registered with the police.

And they moved out there because, just about the time when we went underground, air raids increased tremendously, particularly the American Air Force, which was stationed at airfields on the British Islands, and would regularly attack Berlin. Later on, actually on a daily basis in early '43, it wasn't that frequent, but still frequently enough for people to be scared. So therefore, people preferred the safety of some village-- which surely wouldn't be bombed-- to being in Berlin and being trapped in an apartment building.

But that, of course, posed a problem for them because, as I said, by law everybody has to be registered. And a person can only be registered at one place with the police. So if a person moved, there was actually also a de-registration form. The person had to de-register at his or her old residence, and then the person actually received a copy of the de-registration form to present at the new place where then the person would register.

Well, if the people would have done that, would have de-registered in Berlin, they would immediately have lost their apartments, since as a result of the air raids, many people lost their apartments. And there was practically no new building going on because of wartime conditions, and all of the war materials and labor were really put into the war effort to build tanks, planes, and whatever else was needed.

So there was an acute and increasing shortage of apartments, so if somebody moved out of his apartment, the first thing was that it would be snapped away by the housing authority, and the apartment would be given over to some bombed-out family. And, of course, people wanted to maintain their apartments. To make a long story short, the result was that all of these good Germans who lived out there, lived there essentially, quote, "illegally."

They did not register there because they couldn't because they didn't want to de-register and give up their Berlin apartments. The local police, which was in charge of that, of course knew about that and simply looked the other way because it was understandable. You know, people didn't want to lose their city apartments.

And that was a perfect argument for us because we couldn't register for different reasons. We were underground Jews. But we had that perfect argument. Of course we had our apartment in Berlin, and as I mentioned earlier, the address that we gave-- the fictitious-- there was actually a Hermann Hesse living there. So somebody could check us out in the telephone book, and we were there only for a few of the air raids.

So actually, I always felt that was the first time in my life that the Americans came and helped me. Yeah, and then what we did in the beginning was, we had several sessions in that little cottage where we interrogated ourselves on all of these issues-- I mean, who I was, and I was a nephew and that my parents had died while I was still a baby, and I was raised by my aunt and uncle and where I worked and where they worked-- so that it became part of our nature.

We constantly asked ourselves these questions so that nobody would ever make a slip up or give some long answer or even an answer contradicting somebody or somebody else who said something. I should say also, by the way, the date that we moved out there, I mentioned earlier, was the 30th of January 1943. It was an extremely interesting date.

First of all, it was the 10th anniversary of Hitler's assumption of power that he was named Reich Chancellor. And secondly, and more important for us, it was a day in which Field Marshal Paulus, commander of German 6th Army in the Ukraine, surrendered his army in the city of Stalingrad. The huge Battle of Stalingrad, which had raged from October through January-- that means four months-- the Germans had lost and was the first major military loss for the Germans.

And that made us unbelievably ecstatic. In fact, we decided that after that loss, the war can last longer than next summer, meaning summer '43. I think it was that optimism that made us keep going. If we would have known it'd last another over two years, I don't know whether or what we would have-- I guess we had no other choice anyway, but it kept our spirits up.

Yeah, then the food situation. Well, as I had mentioned earlier, also food was rationed. The ration coupons were given out to people who were registered with the police. The food rationing officers had actually a duplicate of the police registration file, so obviously since we were not registered with the police, we couldn't get food ration cards, and therefore, we had to buy all of our food on the black market.

The black market does not mean that there was actually a market somewhere where people traded. I mean, that would have immediately been exploded by the Gestapo. Black market simply means that people were trading in rationed food but without ration coupons.

Who were these people? Well, there were all kinds of people. First of all, fellow underground Jews. For example, somebody might have had a terrific source for baked goods and breads but nothing else, but that person would then trade in breads and sell them at a profit for him and use that maybe to buy sausage from somebody else who had that source. And so I mean, we were quite a circle of underground Jews. And so that was also a source for black market food.

Then various sympathetic gentiles-- I had, for example, a housemaid of my maternal grandparents. In fact, my maternal grandmother died fortunately a natural death, only a few months before the deportations started. And her last maid, she had been with my grandmother for many years. And she was a very faithful family friend.

And she was the last one who could afford even to buy black market food, but she was a very modest and simple person. And she claimed she didn't even need all the food that she was getting on her ration cards. So I went there. One of the stops that I did on my Berlin visits was her little apartment. And she always had some food.

First of all, she always fed me a warm meal. And then she also gave me something that she had saved from her rations. Then there was the butcher of the Hesse family near where they lived. Now, they were very decent people, very strongly anti-Nazi. And when they told them that they were going underground, they immediately promised to supply them as much as they could with meat, but the problem was they couldn't really go there because they were known in the neighborhood. They lived around the corner there from that butcher.

And everybody knew them. If they would appear there without a star, somebody would surely denounce them. So before we actually went underground, I was introduced to them. And as I had mentioned earlier, our family lived in a totally different part of Berlin. So not a soul knew me there. So I was introduced, and there was also a ruse agreed upon how I would go about getting food from her.

But people were very jealous in those days. And so I would come into the store and say to her that my mother was in here this morning and left an order for sausage and meat and gave you already the food stamps. And she would say, yes, that's right. I have your order ready.

Then she would go in the back and pack whatever she felt like up and charged me just the regular amount of money for these items which were all under price control. I should have said earlier, on the black market, roughly the price of food was 10 times the regular price controlled price. It varied a little bit. It also depended on what kind of food, but that was a good average.

And she could have made a lot of money with that. Instead she sold it to me exactly at the price that was under price control. And that was also purely, I mean, out of support. And then another important item incidentally which people never think about is shoe repair. Not only were shoes rationed, but shoe repair was rationed.

In other words, if you needed a new sole, there was a ration coupon that you had to hand in for a sole for a shoe. And we

didn't have that. Well, here our old shoemaker from our area had agreed to support us. And the thing was, he was actually a secret communist.

And, of course, he was not active in the underground Communist Party, but he had been a Communist earlier and maintained his sympathies. And his shoe shop was not as close to our old apartment as that butcher was to the Hesse's apartment, so I could go there without fearing to run into anybody. So we had all our shoe repairs.

And in the long run that is as much a life saver as food. What are you going to do if your shoes fall apart? You can't get new shoes. You can't repair them. That basically condemned you to stay at home, so we solved that problem with him. And then there was a whole bunch of people who we relied on to obtain food. And for the money, as I said, we paid. I used the money gradually that I obtained from the assets that my father had that I talked about earlier.

Let me ask you a question here. Was there any difficulty in figuring out which people you could trust or not trust?

No, I mean the difficulty might have been in somebody whom I ran across sort of unexpectedly somewhere. But the people that we had contact with, we knew we could trust.

But what about people you ran across, like your old family friends?

Yeah, I mean, that Berlin was a city at that time still close to five million people. In a sense, even though New York is much bigger, it's also similar in the sense you don't run into people. And, of course, one thing, we had to be very careful where we went. I mean, I never went into our old neighborhood, and they never went into theirs.

And also, then there were certain areas I come to discuss a little bit later where Jews were sort of, quote, "known" to be often, and we tried to avoid these areas also. But there was a possibility, and you didn't trust anyone at all.

What about in this village where you were living?

Yeah, OK. In the village, OK, that was-- I sort of said already how we concocted our story there. And we decided from the beginning, then, to just act like normal neighbors, and anything else would have been impossible anyway. So we actually started a whole social life there. We met people and invited each other-- we were invited. We invited people for, I don't know, a game of cards or whatever.

The most interesting person, actually, we met was the local Nazi party chieftain for that village. Margot's father was a very good accordion player, and he played often. And I guess in this cottage the walls are thin anyway. Somehow it became known that he played the accordion. And that Nazi, actually his name was Harry [? Gladenik-- ?] a very nice, charming fellow, in spite of the fact that he was a rabid Nazi.

He came over and said he heard that here someone plays accordion, and he loves accordion music. And they have actually every Saturday evening a party at his house with dancing and so on and why don't we come over sometime and participate in that. So we were frequent guests, then, at the home of that Nazi, dancing with some of the women there.

And what was for me most important, more important than the dancing at least, was the food. They had, what seemed to me, limitless supplies of food. I don't know what their sources were. But part of the source, in fact, was the sister of Harry [? Gladenik, ?] that Nazi.

She lived with them, but her husband who was also a real professional Nazi ideologue, was an official in the German occupation of the Soviet Union and had his ways there of obtaining meat and sausages and all kinds of other goodies that were, even for good Germans, hard to get in Germany. And he sent regular packages. And so that was all served there, and we always enjoyed going there and had a wonderful time with these people.

And when you went to these parties, you felt comfortable?

Yeah, totally. I totally sort of divorced myself from my real self and chatted with them. And later on I think I felt sort of

elation that I was able to put up such a front. I mean, this whole-- in the beginning, I changed [INAUDIBLE] in the later part of the war. In the beginning, this whole life of deception sort of had some tremendous attraction for me.

Now it sounds almost childish, but I felt somewhat like a secret agent in enemy territory trying to pretend and something that wasn't the case and fooling all the enemies.

But there certainly is an element of risk there? Yes? Well, the element of risk was there anyway. I mean, there-- but, I mean, after having lived by that time a year and a half before we went underground with the threat of deportation-- which was a constant risk and something that was out of my control, even-- I felt like a free person then.

Did anybody there know of your situation--

No.

--other the person whose house it was?

No. And she wasn't really known too well. She had just bought it a year before and was there a few times. So she obviously knew us, but, no, nobody else knew us.

During this period, were you in contact with other Jewish people who had gone underground?

Yeah. Right. There was one fellow-- actually, he was an interesting fellow. Unfortunately, I lost contact with him after the war. His name was Heinz Jacobius. He was the most versatile person, underground Jew, that I encountered. He lived in the middle of the city with an Aryan girlfriend.

And of course, he also was not registered. In the city, it was even more complicated than in the country where we were because the janitors of buildings, sort of, were legally obligated to see to it that every tenant was registered with the police. In fact, he had to countersign the registration form that one he had to fill out. And if somebody regularly comes by, the janitor was supposed to watch out. So they were somewhat like spies also. They were supposed to notice it and report that person.

But that Heinz Jacobius, he was a tremendous black market artist, and he just fed that janitor so well that he surely had no interest in killing the goose that laid his golden eggs. Yeah. Actually, and then his house was hit by incendiary bombs during an air raid. And of course, that scared him because if that house would have burned down, then that would have destroyed the whole arrangement.

And during wartime, incidentally, the fire department-- and that was made known also-- never did anything to protect or put out fires in ordinary apartment houses because they were needed for war, important objects, either government or military installations and so on. And so the whole population had been trained in extinguishing fires. And he apparently distinguished himself, went out of his way-- and I don't know whatever he did-- that, anyway, the local party organization gave him a special order of merit that people got for going out of their way, beyond the call of duty in putting out the fire, which they did.

The reason I asked you about your knowledge of other Jews who had gone underground, is I was wondering whether there was any sort of informal network for information purposes for any sort of political or sabotage purposes or anything else.

No, I mean, there was what you might call an informal network. I knew some, and then others knew some others. But it had nothing to do at all with any attempt at sabotage. We were totally devoted to only surviving and not being caught. I mean, sabotage would have endangered us even more.

But what about access to information?

Yeah, well that's what that served. But on the other hand, you had to be very careful if you-- I'm coming to something

that I haven't mentioned yet, but the Gestapo employed a number of Jewish spies. And if you met a Jew whom you had not seen on a, more or less, continuous basis, you didn't know whether that person was legitimately underground-- like I was-- or whether that was a spy working for the Gestapo and ready to hand me over.

So for that reason, the unwritten law was, first of all you did not disclose to anyone where you lived. And secondly, if you met somebody, say just on the street, from earlier times, you would try to avoid that person.

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

Another important aspect of our stay there was the total change in lifestyle. I mean, I was even in the apartment where we were forced into in this Jewish house. We had running water. We had running water toilets, even running hot water, central heating, and all these amenities.

And suddenly, from one day to the next, transferred into that primitive cottage. It was a tremendous, I don't know, culture shock is probably the wrong word. So living style shock would be probably better. We had to, as I said, get our water from a pump outside. And we learned that if it freezes, then the pump freezes, and we had to do all kinds of shenanigans to unfreeze the pump, like pouring hot water through a priming hole.

We had, obviously, no water toilet, but an outhouse which was very primitive and in winter very cold. And as I also said, there was of course no electricity. We had, for a lot of money, to buy petroleum on the black market to run one petroleum lamp, and also had candles, which we had to pay a lot of money.

And so it was a total change in lifestyle, and I found that at the time very romantic and felt that living in a big city apartment house with running water and central heating made us only degenerate. And now, at least, these horrible times had one advantage-- they make us return to nature and that we really appreciate what is heat. Heat is not just some pipes that radiate heat, but in our case, wood has had to be cut with an ax and with hard work. And that's how you create your heat. And water had to be obtained from a pump, and sometimes you had to unfreeze it.

And I remember at the time, I was very romantic about all of this. And thought I was a great thing that was happening to me that I was returning to nature, some form. OK, let me see. Yeah, I had mentioned earlier also these so-called black accounts that my father had with various people.

Now, it turned out that the black market prices were continuously increasing. There was an inflation even in the black market. And so I was aware of the fact, a fixed sum of money would shrink in purchasing power over the years. And I wanted to avoid that. So the money, which I had with that former client, a furrier, client of my father, I decided to invest in something that would keep its value, at least would increase with inflation-- they would keep its purchasing power.

And through a friend, I had the opportunity to buy a women's evening handbag made out of high carat gold and platinum, little elements like in the chain. And for that handbag, I paid 12,000 Reichsmark. And then I gave it back to the furrier because I didn't want to have it for fear of something happening. And so he kept it.

But he also offered me to do some work on his estate. He had a fantastic estate outside of Berlin, East of Berlin, in a very fancy area with big mansions. And he said he needed any way some workers, and if I came he would feed me for the day and pay me also. And in addition, he also dealt on a large scale in black market. There would be always some things that he could give me along.

So once a week, I went out to his estate. Now, on the estate, he had actually three workers already. One was a Polish couple. They were real peasants. And in fact, he detailed me to that Polish guy. And he told me what to do. And his wife was, I think, sort of a cleaning woman in this house.

And then he had a single Polish girl, a young woman. Her name was Maria. And she was the cook and also, sort of, homemaker. And incidentally, I have to add, that he had all these workers was only a result of his connections. I said earlier, he supplied Goring with furs, because according to the law at that time, forced foreign laborers could be used

only in either agriculture or defense plants. And agriculture meant not for the people for their own backyards, as he did, but agriculture in the sense these were suppliers of food for the population.

So he was legally not entitled to them, but had them anyway. But I mean, the system under the Nazis was shot through with corruption, and anyone could get anything he wanted. And incidentally, the film Schindler's List is an excellent example of how Schindler, even in Auschwitz, with a number of diamonds gets his workers out of the concentration camp again.

So as I said, I went there once a week and worked under the supervision of the Polish peasant. And that peasant, he talked German haltingly, but fairly well. And he was obsessed because he was a great Polish patriot. And he was obsessed with, I mean, the terrible fate of Poland.

And in his theory, the cause for the terrible fate of Poland-- it had two causes. One was the communists or the Soviets, and the other one was the Jews. The Germans for some reason never occurred to him, even though they were the ones to attack Poland. And so I had to listen to his anti-Semitic tirades and sort of appear to agree with him.

And another aspect there was that Maria, the maid, every time when I was ready to leave, she called me to her room to give me some food and also something to eat right there and something to take along. And I was convinced that she must be secretly in love with me, but I didn't want to have anything to do with her, I mean, for many reasons. First of all, I wasn't attracted to her. And secondly, I felt any involvement of that kind can only be dangerous.

One of the other underground friends-- we had a whole circle of people who were underground, not a circle in the sense that we actually lived together, but we kept in touch with each other. And one of them was a fellow from my high school graduating class. His name was Gerd Cohn. He lived also with non-Jewish girlfriend, and he had all kinds of contacts also for black market foods and necessities.

And one day, he told me that he met a group of foreign forced laborers who were a tremendous source of black market food. And in fact, there was a plant somewhere to illegally slaughter a pig and sell it off by the way. He was going there. He had to commit himself, however, to a given amount of pounds of meat. And I discussed it at home, and I gave him a certain order-- I forgot what it was-- x number of pounds.

And incidentally, the listener to that will from that, I guess, gather that I don't eat kosher, which is true. I never did eat kosher, and actually I always enjoyed ham. But at that point, we didn't even have the luxury of being very choosy.

Anyway, to make a long story short, on the appointed day when I was supposed to come to pick up the meat, his girlfriend was in hysterics. He didn't come back. And the next day he didn't come back either. And of course, there was no way-- where do you go to find out? Now, this other underground Jewish friend of mine, whom I had mentioned earlier, Heinz Jacobius, who also did all kinds of things in the underground-- he had some sort of a line-- and I didn't know what it was, really-- to the Gestapo, where he could find out things.

And I asked him to make some inquiries whether this Gerd Cohn ever appeared. The thing is that all Jews who were arrested for deportation ultimately wound up in the transit camp. And he made those inquiries, and there was no Gerd Cohn who ever appeared there.

So it was clear that he must have been the victim of a crime. And there was actually a German newspaper article about two weeks later or so that a torso with a head missing and the hands missing. And these would be the identifiers, the hands, because of the fingerprints, and obviously they had because of the facial features. It was found floating in a river. Oh yeah, and the article mentioned a certain scar-- I forgot from some operation-- and friends of his knew that he had such a scar.

So apparently, he must have had some horrible fate. And the suspicion was that these foreign laborers, apparently-- He had, first of all, a large amount of money with him to purchase that large amount of meat that he had ordered. And in addition to that, he had some excellent forged ID, which could always be reformed into a different name or different picture and maybe other things that we were of value to those guys.



So the opinion among people who knew him and the circumstances was that this was a trap. There never was a pig and that he was murdered-- that he was lured into that trap and lost his life that way. A horrible fate.

Let me ask you something, since you had mentioned a few minutes ago, that most people who were arrested went initially to transit camp.

Yeah.

Were there random crimes or murders by the SS or against Jews, or was it all done in an organized fashion?

No, they actually--

Deportation?

Yeah, no, that's a good question. No, the Germans somehow abhor random violence. And in fact, the Kristallnacht even, which was a case of random violence, was criticized within the Nazi circles very much. In fact, actually at the ministerial meeting, the cabinet meeting, two days afterwards, Goring severely criticized, I think Goebbels was mainly behind that, because of all the destruction.

It turned out that the kind of glass that is used for shop windows was, at that time, a glass that was not even made in Germany. They had to buy it in Belgium. It meant they had to use foreign exchange. And then Goring turned to Goebbels and said, it would have been better if you would have killed a few more hundred Jews rather than cause all of that destruction which now we have to, you know.

Anyway, to come back specifically to your question, that process was very orderly. The Jew was arrested. He was put into that camp until enough people were together to put together a transport, and then they were shipped off. I mean, they may have been beaten up maybe in some sadistic urge by some SS men, but--

But this isn't in camps or ghettos where if you said something wrong, you could have been shot? This didn't really happen in Berlin?

No, I mean, if you did something wrong, I mean, they had a bunker there, which was a nickname for part of the basement. I think it was only four feet high and only a few square feet. People were put in as punishment, particularly if there were escape attempts, that sort of thing. But they were not shot randomly like you saw on the film in Schindler's List. That was not-- they were always shipped for orderly killing.

Let me see. Yeah, I had mentioned already that if one met some Jewish person in the underground who one hadn't seen for a long time, the initial reaction was always to be suspicious. Coming now probably to the saddest chapter of the underground, and these are the Jewish catchers, or spies. The Gestapo kept a small herd of them. And they operated also out of the transit camp.

Incidentally, the transit camp had shifted in the meantime. It was no longer in the old age home. I think the old age home was then used for other governmental purposes. And the transit camp was shifted to the Jewish hospital of Berlin, which was then the last Jewish-owned building in the city. And part of one wing of the hospital was turned over to the Gestapo to maintain the transit camp. And the spies also had their rooms in that transit camp. And they lived there, but they could come and go as they wanted, of course. And more importantly, they obviously didn't wear the yellow star as they normally would have had to.

And their task was to track down other Jews who were underground. And the sad story is that first of all, they were incredibly more effective than the Gestapo because the Gestapo basically, in tracking down a Jew, was sort of like a blind person trying to find something. They had really nothing to go by, while the spies, all of them had themselves been underground and hadn't been caught.

They knew many of the tricks and trades of underground Jews. They knew where to go to and so on. And they had a much better nose. Plus many of them of course knew other underground Jews anyway and would just give those names to the Gestapo.

Now, the most notorious of these was a woman. Her maiden name was Stella Goldschlag And unfortunately, I knew her fairly well. Part of the time that I was at Seimens, she also worked for Seimens. At that time she was married to a man whose last name was KÄ¼bler, so then her name was Stella KÄ¼bler.

Stella was a strikingly beautiful woman. She was tall, slender, had long, golden blond locks, wavy hair, and blue eyes, and a very pretty face. At Seimens also she was sort of the center of attention. I came to know her even though she was not in my department but in a different one. In fact, she was in the same department where some members of the Baum group-- this underground Jewish communist group-- were working that I had mentioned earlier.

But in my class, in the orthodox school that I went to in the '30s, was a boy named Klaus Goldschlag. In fact, I remembered him very well. He was a top student in our class. And I know he left and emigrated to Canada. And Goldschlag is not exactly a common name, so when I met her first I asked her whether she is related to him. And then she said that yeah that's her cousin.

And so we talked several times about him, and then also sometimes about other things. But otherwise I had not much in common with them. I don't think she had, to my knowledge, any intellectual interests or music interests. And the circles that I circulated in, she surely did not belong to.

But through the mouth radio, sometime in the maybe mid-'43, I heard that she is working for the Gestapo as a catcher and that really scared me. And in fact, I know that at one point I almost encountered her. What happened was the following thing.

Even in walking around in Berlin, I developed various strategies to avoid being recognized. And one was, in a big city, of course, there's a lot of pedestrian traffic, people walking this way, people walking that way. And when I walked down a street, I would look at the faces of the people not who would just be in front of me, but three or four people down behind them, so that I could possibly recognize others before I was recognized by them.

That was one. The other strategy was that I always had a handkerchief at hand. And if some real emergency arose, I would pretend to have to blow my nose, but in such a way that I covered most of my face with my handkerchief, and I wouldn't be recognizable that way.

So one day, I was walking down the street-- I even remember the name, Pfalzburger Strasse-- and I saw, again looking back several people beyond the one that immediately faced me, and I saw what seemed to be Stella. I couldn't 100% identify her, but obviously I didn't want to take a chance to get closer to her. I immediately decided turning around or running away would be the worst thing to do.

And I was lucky. Just at that point where I recognized her, I passed a store, so I just went into the store pretending-- and I remember it was a green grocer, so he had potatoes, vegetables, and things like that. And I turned my back to the window and pretended to look at various items in the store. For a while, the saleswoman, or probably the owner, already asked me what I wanted. And I said, well, I just want to see what you have and so on.

And then after quite a while, after she must have long passed, I excused myself and looked out, and she was gone. I mean, there has been a book written about her, and she has really caused the deaths of many people. Now, she was, after the wars, tried in a German court, where first she was tried by the Russians who everybody hoped would just finish her off. Instead they gave her just a 10-year sentence from '46 to '56.

Then she reappeared, and then there was an unbelievable clamor for her to be put away. And then the Germans meticulously said, well, a person cannot be tried for the same crime twice. But they were in the meantime, many other arrests that she made which had not been covered by the Soviet trial. And she was then tried for those cases, and then she was found guilty. And the judge gave her another 10 years. But applying the 10 years that she already served under

the Soviets, she was immediately set free.

And it is known that she lives now under an assumed name somewhere in West Germany. That is some of the worst. And she should have been done away with, preferably hanged, immediately after the war. Supposedly, after some research that other people did, she is guilty of hundreds of lives that she gave over to the Gestapo.

Let me ask you a few questions here. Do you think that while you were working together at Seimens that she was involved in this kind of activity?

No, not at all.

It was later?

It was later, yeah. She--

What sorts of stories did you hear at the time about what she was doing? What kinds of things was she doing?

Well, I mean, what she was doing was to walk around Berlin, and she knew where Jews were likely to go. And for example, it became known that a very safe place was, of all places, the Berlin State Opera. And the Gestapo would never bother with that. And most Jews were music lovers, so you could have a pleasant evening even listening to good music and be safe.

The problem was that Stella knew that, too. So she appeared there one day, and they arrested the whole family of a middle-aged couple and teenage son, or something. That was exactly the-- And she would pull-- She had a small revolver that she would pull on people if they didn't exactly-- And then one person tried to run away, and she shouted, stop him, it's a Jew. And there were some men who just grabbed that person.

You knew her a little bit. What motivated her to do such evil things? What was it about her? What was she like?

What was about her? It was self-preservation. I mean, that's how she survived the war, I mean, by having others killed. Now, as she claimed after the war also that she did it mainly to protect her parents. Yeah, well she had a bargain initially with the Gestapo and SS official who commanded the transit camp.

And the bargain was that her parents could stay also. They got a room there. And they could stay there with her. She was an only child. And then at some point-- I forgot when that was. I think late '43, maybe early '44. The Gestapo told her that they can't protect the parents any longer. And then she managed to have them transported to Theresienstadt instead of to Auschwitz.

But they were then transitioned later to Auschwitz. I mean, the parents are sort of a tragic thing. I mean, they can't be blamed for what the daughter did. But she maintained her own life that way, by killing others. Now, there were many other people-- a good friend of mine, Ismar Reich, who was underground and was caught.

And he was immediately offered freedom if he could name some others. And he simply refused. And he said he wasn't even beaten. I mean, it was fine. You don't want to? Fine. You go to Auschwitz. Now, he was a very clever, resourceful guy. He was with some friends there, and somehow they succeeded in smuggling some tools with them.

And then why the train rolled, they started to saw-- these freight trains are basically wooden siding. They sawed some planks off, and when the train slowed down somewhere, they jumped out and saved themselves that way.

Were there a great number of these catchers?

I mean, too many probably. I don't know how many, but maybe 10, 15 or so.

But you knew of others?

Yeah, oh yeah. There were others, too. Maybe this is a point where I might indicate an incident that we had. We decided that in the long run it may not be safe if we stayed just at one point all the time. So we decided we ought to look for a substitute place, in case we had to leave.

So I contacted-- I'm not sure whether I mentioned that, or maybe I did, my father's, one of his clients, were members of the Hohenzollern family. It was actually the sister-in-law of the last German Kaiser and her son. And they had an estate halfway between Berlin and Potsdam, a suburb which used to be the summer residence of Persian kings.

And they were very good friends of our family. And we made an appointment and Margot, her mother, and I went there and discussed. And I knew apparently something, that she had separate servant's quarters somewhere. And I discussed with her the possibility whether there might be some place for us to spend maybe not long periods, but maybe a week or so at a time.

And it was somewhat inconclusive and so on. I mean, she also had to be careful, obviously. So on the way back from there-- that estate was off of a country road connecting Berlin and Potsdam and where a bus only came, I don't know, once every hour, if that much. And we knew when the bus was coming and maybe there was another half hour left, or so.

And there was a little country inn, and we did have also illegally-obtained ration coupons, so why don't we go in and then maybe have a piece of cake and a cup of coffee and talk there. So we went in, and Margot's mother immediately-- there was a revolving door, I remember. You go through the revolving door and then you walk in.

She, instead of walking in, right away revolved back out. And that immediately rang a bell, so I didn't ask any question, and then Margot didn't either. We immediately revolved out, and then the mother said that there was a couple sitting that she knew. They were Jews. She doesn't know what their background-- who they are. But one has to be careful.

So we walked out, and then walked along and decided maybe to walk to the next bus stop in order not to wait right in front there. And as we walked, and we walked fairly briskly, we heard footsteps coming from behind, closing in. And it was the man. And he said he saw us come in, and he had the impression maybe we were afraid of him, but there was no reason. We shouldn't be afraid. He is himself in hiding. And we should just feel free to come in.

That of course was a giveaway already. No Jew at that time would have told somebody else whom he hadn't known-- like, he didn't even know me-- that he was in hiding. He should have been as mistrustful of me as I would have been of him. Anyway, he implored us to come back, and we just refused, and as an excuse we gave, we only discovered that we are actually late. We have to get back to Berlin to meet somebody, or some excuse like that. And we were walking to the next bus stop.

And the man then gave up and returned to the restaurant where there was actually the previous bus stop was there. And we were hurrying up because it was already getting the time for the bus to come. And we were still some distance away from the next bus stop, when we saw the bus coming. And so we speeded up, but never made.

But as the bus passed us-- in those days, buses were not closed where you entered. It was sort of open. And there was an open platform at the back. And as the bus passed us, we saw that man standing on that bus, so then it was obvious that he was trying to follow us and was to trying to take the same bus with us. So we were glad we didn't make it to the next stop.

Instead, after the bus had cleared there, we walked off this country road. There was a forest. Now, I had the basic map of Berlin fairly well in my head. We didn't have a map along because it didn't occur to us that we needed one. But I knew that in the direction that we walked-- that was walking east from there, just through forest. I mean, it may have been several miles-- we would come to a suburban commuter line where you could catch a train because we were sure that if we would have taken the next bus, he would have alerted police at the next suburban station for that line, which was actually Wannsee.

So that's what we did. We walked for hours through the forest, roughly keeping in the direction, until we came to that suburban line, which was a totally different line. And there we boarded the train and got back. But such incidents, I mean, of that kind happened fairly frequently.

Another incident that just occurred to me now was for heating our stove. Of course, we bought firewood which was expensive, and even some coal. And in addition to that, I went and collected dead wood branches from the forest around that village there. And even for that one, needed an official permission of the forestry department.

I still have that. It's almost like a joke. It permits the bearer, Gunter Hesse-- it was my name then-- to collect dead branches that are lying on the floor. But of course I didn't confine myself to dead branches. I often just broke off live branches and even small trees, and we would then hack them into pieces and let them dry out before using them in our oven.

The problem was that I was once observed by the Forester, but he didn't stop me. I never saw him, even. And he didn't stop me, and so I didn't know that I was observed. But one of the settlers in our settlement was a good friend of his. And the Forester told him that he noticed that I was violating the law and taking live branches and he would have to report me.

Now, basically that was probably a kind of offense with a little fine. But the problem was, if it was reported, I didn't exist legally, and that would have immediately endangered our existence there. But we had a tremendous source for cigarettes. Cigarettes were of course rationed. Margot's father was a chain smoker, and so he spent a lot of his money on cigarettes.

And he went to that other settler and told them again a lie story. I mean, the story was that if I got fined for that, then my military exemption will immediately be taken away from me, and I'd be shipped to the Eastern Front. And by that time, the Eastern Front was by everyone considered sort of like a death sentence. And people had understanding for that.

And if he can do something about it, we'll supply the necessary cartons of cigarettes. And the Forester had a certain price. I forgot what it was, several cartons. And of course, the guy had to get his cut, too. And in this way we avoided that I was cited for that offense of taking live branches.

And then another incident occurred, once in splitting wood with our ax. We didn't really have a proper base for splitting wood, but just sort of a relatively soft wood stump. And once, when I apparently hit the wood that I wanted to split particularly hard, I split not only the wood but also the stump, and the ax went right into my foot at my ankle. And there was a really big, open wound, which obviously, first of all needed to be sewn up. And secondly, also probably my bone would have had to be X-rayed in case the bone was damaged.

So one of the neighbors there who had a car, drove me to the nearest hospital. And then, of course, we were afraid. If they say I have to stay overnight, then again there was a need for identification and so on. So I was X-rayed, and fortunately, they discovered that the bone wasn't damaged.