

This is tape number 5, side A of an interview with Ernest Fontheim on March 13, 1997. The interviewer is Randy Goldman.

So all that needed to be done was to sew up the wound and send me home, I thought. But Margaret's father was with me. We were in a sort of a holding area. And a nurse approached with a needle.

And he knew something my-- I mean, Margaret's father-- that I wasn't aware of, namely that after such an injury, one needs a tetanus shot. And the tetanus shot is given into a person's rear end.

And so he knew immediately they would ask me to lower my pants, and that would surely have been a 100% giveaway to anyone in Germany who I really was, once they would have discovered my circumcision.

So he had a quick presence of mind, and I was lying on a stretcher, and he turned me around on my belly and then pulled my pants off before the nurse could get to me. And so I got the shot into my rear end. And nobody saw anything else of me.

And then I was sewn up. And since hospitals anyway were short of beds, obviously because of the large demand for wounded soldiers, they were glad that I didn't have to stay. And we were glad that I didn't have to stay for different reasons.

I also want to mention a cousin of mine. He was actually the son of the couple where we stayed in that apartment in the Jew House. He was several years older than I. He was by that time, I would guess, in his mid or late 30s. I was just 20 or 21 then.

And he lived with his girlfriend, Bella [? Rittov. ?] His name was Albert Mark. And Bella [? Rittov's ?] husband had already been arrested and had been for years in a concentration camp. And she lived now with my cousin. And they decided to go underground in Bavaria.

And he told me that before they left that he considered Berlin too dangerous because he had lived there much longer also as an adult. And they had figured out a way, apparently, that they thought was foolproof. And that was that he had some medical sort of statements from doctors that he was suffering from some lung disease, which required his recuperation in the country.

And then he had some ID, I guess, on the name that matched it and so had his woman friend. And we decided we wanted to keep in touch, of course. And that was a big problem because he was planning sort of to move around from different sanatoriums. And I didn't want to give anyone my address.

So the solution was that is something that can be done in Germany. I don't know that exists here. You can address a letter to somebody under a code name at general delivery at a given post office. I still remember my code was the letter F, like in Fontheim, 58, F58.

And at the particular post office in Berlin. I mean, that was also a risky thing because if somehow he had been found by the Gestapo with such a letter, they could have waited for me there. But I guess one did all kinds of stupid things.

So anyway we corresponded that way. And then one day the correspondence stopped. And then I got a letter from Bella, his friend, that something happened to him, and he is very sick. And she is returning to Berlin alone.

So that immediately told me that he was arrested. And was a big tragedy actually because what happened, she told-- and we met in Berlin, and she told me that he-- apparently, there were some questions raised at the place where they were staying.

But they were still able to get away. But they left all of their assets. I mean, they had to carry with them always certain valuables. I don't know what they were. But what they needed to sustain their life. And he said he had to go back

quickly to retrieve these things.

And she had warned him and tried to keep him from doing it. His point was that without the assets, how can they even continue living. And she felt somehow they'll make it. Anyway, the result was that he went back and never returned.

So obviously, he walked into a trap there. So she was now alone in Berlin. And we kept in touch. We saw each other periodically. And when the time came that she mentioned to me several times that she had a very good friend who was a jeweler.

And I needed some money from that furrier where I had converted all of the money into that lady's evening handbag. And so I wanted to sell it. And she said that man gives very good prices and so on. Anyway, my first intent was not even to sell it immediately but just to get it appraised.

So I gave the handbag to her, and we then agreed to meet the next day. And she would bring the handbag back and the appraisal price from her jeweler friend. Well, guess what? She never appeared there. I couldn't believe that she would cheat me out of that handbag. I mean, it was just incredible.

And as I found out shortly thereafter, she didn't. The problem was, Stella Goldschlag It turned out she-- that Stella actually transferred from Siemens where she worked and where I had met her to a different factory for some reason.

And at that factory, Bella had worked. So they knew each other. And apparently, Bella must have run into Stella and got snatched away. And she was arrested, transported to Auschwitz and never came back.

Can I ask you something here? Was there a different feeling about being betrayed by fellow Jews than there was by being arrested and deported by the Nazis?

Oh, totally. I mean, as absurd as it may sound, but that's what I expected from the Gestapo to do, if they arrest me, that they would deport me. But for a Jew to do that, to turn on other Jews, that was such an unbelievable act of betrayal that, I mean, it just-- I mean, if you ask any Jew who lived underground in Berlin whether they knew her or not, everybody knew her by name at least.

There's not one that I can think of who would excuse her or even say that she should have gotten anything less than execution after the war. I mean, she just didn't deserve to live her life is based on the lives of hundreds of people who are not alive anymore because of her.

I mean, to think of it, even now still, drives me crazy that she is alive and she has apparently a pleasant life and has some sort of a government pension. Yeah. One thing, I have to back up a little bit.

On the 27th of February 1943, that was just about a little bit less than a month after we went underground-- remember, we went underground on the 30th of January '43-- on the 27th of February, the SS made a general sweep of all factories which employed Jews, under extremely brutal conditions.

The 27th of February, of course, was a winter day. And it was a cold day. The Gestapo simply collected the Jews, without giving them the opportunity to go back to their dressing rooms to pick up their outer wear of coats or whatever they had.

They were just like that taken to various transit camps that had been readied for that because that regular transit camp obviously wouldn't have taken these thousands and thousands of people. And then they were shipped out in a series of transports in the first week of March, 1943.

And after that, Berlin was essentially judenrein. It's a tragedy because, I mean, it's a tragedy for everyone, but I also have to think back again at my good friend Hans Fabisch who had hoped that he was safe working in a factory.

Well, he himself wasn't safe anyway, but even if he would not have been arrested on that day, it was the 18th of January

'43, he would have been arrested a little bit later and without announcement. None of these people knew it.

And incidentally, Stella Goldschlag in that factory, she was smart enough, when the Jews were herded down, apparently nobody thought of bringing up the rear. And she stayed back. She worked there, by the way, with her mother.

She and her mother stayed back and walked slower and then ducked into one of the ladies' restrooms and then left at the end of the shift, at the end of the day when thousands of workers sort of streamed out of the factory gate, and that way they escaped being deported. And that day, then they went underground and then sometime later she was caught, actually by another catcher for the Gestapo.

Do you want to just-- I know this is jumping forward, but because we're talking about Stella, I understand she was caught after the war. How did that come about?

That is all explained as a book was written about her. I mean, she wasn't caught. I mean, she voluntarily went to the Jewish community to get papers as a victim of fascism and to take advantage of many of the sort of restitution measures that were then taken or given to the Jews.

And that was an unbelievable act of naivete, how she could have thought to get away with it. I ought to say one other thing. You know, there were Jews also during the years when Jews were deported and picked up, there were Jews who picked up other Jews. Like, my parents were picked up by Jews.

That can't be compared to what Stella did because these Jews picked up Jews who were not in hiding, who were basically you might say at the disposal of the Gestapo. I mean, the Gestapo knew where they were, and they could have picked them up.

Just through those Jews made life easier for the Gestapo. But nobody believes that the Gestapo would have given up the Holocaust or the murdering of the German Jews even if these Jewish orderlies would have refused the pickup.

I know that quite a number of authors, even Raul Hilberg, and particularly Hannah Arendt, have criticized very strongly the collaboration by Jews in the deportation process. And not only in Berlin but in the Eastern ghettos and in other places. However, I think each case has to be judged individually.

And many of these orderlies were simply not given any choice. They had a tragic task to fulfill. Similar, in fact, you can compare it to the so-called Sonderkommandos, or special commandos, in the concentration camp.

These were the Jews who serviced the gas chambers and the crematorium and extracted gold teeth from the corpses and so on. They could have refused and would have been shot probably. And the Gestapo still would have or the SS over there would have obtained everything they wanted to obtain.

In the case of Stella, these were people who otherwise in all likelihood would have survived the war. So it is a totally different thing. And in the strongest terms, also in moral terms, make a strong difference between her actions and the actions of the orderlies who had the tragic task to pick up Jews for deportation.