United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Ernest Fontheim
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PREFACE

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ERNEST FONTHEIM
March 13, 1997

Answer: . . .was Eva Irene. She was born in 1927. My family background was that I am, my parents were completely assimilated in German culture and in the German way of life and there were very few of Jewish observances. My mother went with us to the synagogue on the high holidays, that is the only thing I remember. I remember much more distinctly, however, that we celebrated Christmas, we had a Christmas tree every year, Santa Claus came and distributed gifts and I grew up really knowing very little about being Jewish except I knew that I was Jewish. My, also my father had a very extensive library, he was actually generally very widely read and widely educated. I do not remember any Jewish books, the books that we had were just general literature, German writers, Shakespeare, of course. The particular pride of my father was a 54 volume edition of the collected works of Goethe, the German playwright and philosopher of the early 19th Century. We were, as far as I can tell, relatively well off. We went on summer vacations every year and I particularly was sent during the summer vacations, from maybe the age of 10 on or so, to a camp. These camps were usually all Jewish camps. They were headed usually by a Jewish sports teacher and were located, they were different from American camps in that they didn't have a specific camp location, but instead the head of the camp, the sports teacher, would contract with some vacation owner of a building, of a vacation house, in the mountains or near the sea to rent that house for a period of about four weeks, I guess, or six weeks, and then he would take the kids to that place and, of course, with a number of assistants and so on. I personally would have liked much better to be going on vacations with my parents, but my father

worked very hard and I was always told that my father needed complete rest and relaxation and that it was just too much of a commotion if we kids would also come along. And usually what happened was, after a few days of being home sick then I got sort of sucked into the activities of the camp, made some friends and, in some of the cases, actually some school friends of mine from the school in Berlin were at the same camp, so I had already ready-made friends there. From then on, I usually enjoyed these vacations. My contacts with Judaism really became stronger basically out of two events. The first one was Hitler's assumption of power in, generally, 1933, where in the school where I was I was made to feel that I was different. The first year there was very little Nazi activity in the school. The school I went to, incidentally, was the Mommsen Gymnasium named after the German historian of the Roman Empire, Theodor Mommsen, who actually personally was a very liberal minded historian. And Gymnasium, in German means really classical high school. That school received, got a new principal in the year 1934, he was a retired Army colonel who had fought in the First World War and also was a through and through convinced Nazi ideologue. And right after his assumption of the principal-ship, he announced in a school assembly that it is his goal to make the school a sort of example for Nazi ideological indoctrination. At that point, many Jewish kids were taken out of that school by their parents and sent to other schools. I stayed in and after one year of that principal, only two kids, Jewish kids, were left, another boy and I. The principal introduced all kinds of new activities like, for example, before the beginning of the school day, the entire school had to assemble for sort of like a military roll call. Behind the school building there was a big sports field and we assembled there and had to stand at military attention and while the principal read

a particular paragraph that he had selected for that day out of Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*, as sort of motto for the day. And during lunch hour, after we had eaten our food, we usually marched, the entire school in military formation, through the streets of the neighborhood, singing Nazi songs. After one year of his principal-ship, as I said there were two kids left, and he asked us to come into his office and that, in Germany, where the principal in general is a much more fearsome authority than you see now. In addition to that, of course, we knew where he stood, for us it was a somewhat intimidating experience. When we were in his office he told us that he could not really see having Jewish children in his school, which he wanted to make as a purely Germanic or Aryan school serving as an example for all other schools in Germany. But, he also had no legal way to expel us from the school, so he thought about it and came to the following conclusion, that there were basically two options. Either our parents withdrew us voluntarily or he would simply resign the principalship because he would not be able, under those conditions, to carry out his goals, and with that message we were sent home. Our fathers got together on the telephone and discussed that this was obviously a veiled threat and we were never sent back to that school.

Question: I was surprised when you mentioned that you were sent to a Jewish camp.

A: Yeah, well, after 1933, there was increasing pressure really for, to keep Jews and non-Jews apart. I think maybe in '33 or '34, I may still have been in a mixed camp, but after that, such camps simply didn't exist anymore. Actually, there was an additional reason, that all youth activities for Germans were progressively taken over by the Hitler Youth Organization. They went on summer excursions, on hikes and so on, and German children initially were just sort of socially pressured to participate, but I think in the

mid-'30's, I don't remember the year, maybe '36 or so, it was actually made compulsory, that every German kid, as a boy, had to be in the Hitler Youth and it had a parallel girls organization which was called, it was a German word, Bund Deutscher Mädel , it means Association of German Girls, and girls were compulsorily in that organization. And if there were any organizations outside of the Hitler Youth, they definitely would not be permitted to have any Jewish children in them, so that was not a religious thing, these camps. Actually, I remember one camp where I was where the head was actually a woman sports teacher and she was a very strong Zionist and she would have Friday evening Shabbat ceremonies and carry on other Jewish activities. And in all the other camps, they were Jewish only to the extent that both the head and teachers, as well as all the kids, were Jews, but otherwise, there were no Jewish related activities.

Q: Now, prior to Hitler, do you remember any instances of antisemitism, did you get along well with your neighbors and your schoolmates?

A: Yes. No, I mean, I don't remember such instances. I always got along, the strange thing is that practically all, with one exception, all of my friends were always Jewish kids. That happened somehow naturally, I don't know. There was truly no, I wasn't told by my parents to have Jewish friends exclusively, but that's the way it turned out. But even after Hitler came to power, I had, I mean I had no, I do not remember any incidents where I was either attacked or had any violence on the part of my German school children. In fact, initially, my reaction to the Nazi seizure of power was that I felt sorry for myself for not being an Aryan, I mean, a German kid, and that I couldn't participate in all the what I considered fun things that they were doing, games and so on, and it was really only after I was expelled from the German school, actually, let me back up. I said

earlier that my relationship to Judaism changed drastically for two reasons. I mean, one was Hitler's accession to power and, which basically forced me to confront my Jewishness, the other was my bar mitzvah, which came up in 1935 and which required me to take, several times a week, preparatory lessons, both for my, for the parshah which I was going to read from the Torah on the Shabbat during services on my bar mitzvah, as well as additional sort of Jewish history and some Hebrew. And that, and then on top of it also, in 1935 was my expulsion from the Mommsen Gymnasium by this antisemitic principal, and my parents then transferred me to a very orthodox Jewish school. That has always been a puzzle in my mind, my parents never explained it. There were other Jewish schools which were much less orthodox, but they transferred me to the most orthodox of Jewish schools in Berlin. In fact, it was a school associated with a sort of separatist congregation, the, all of the, the rest of the Jewish community was in one large sort of super congregation, I think that is in most European cities like that, where Jewish communal life, is handled by one big congregation and that congregation also is responsible for building synagogues according to different needs. I mean, there were one or two reform synagogues in Berlin and many what was called liberal synagogues, that was the sort of predominant denomination. In spite of the name, the liberal synagogues were about very close to what is called conservative here in this country. The service was almost entirely in Hebrew with only one or two prayers in German, however, in most liberal synagogues, organs were also present and otherwise, the service, also the selection of prayers, was basically the same as that in the conservative synagogues and much more extensive than in the reform synagogues in this country, but all of the synagogues were essentially the responsibility of this central congregation and also there were a number of

orthodox synagogues. But the school into which I was transferred to was from a separatist, very orthodox congregation affiliated with the Agudas Yisrael which is a worldwide sort of umbrella organization of orthodox congregations. I think the reason was that school had an excellent reputation, while it obviously taught a lot of Judaism, Hebrew and Jewish history and so on, but they, of course, they still were governed by the German education law and had to provide, therefore, all of the curriculum that regular German schools had to offer in mathematics and science and literature and so on. But, obviously, that was a tremendous change for me, a change of cultures. Coming from the militaristic Nazi school, now to a very orthodox Jewish school which, at the beginning when I came there, seemed to be without any semblance of discipline. I, myself, have always been somewhat of a rebel in the sense that I resented authority, and even in the Mommsen Gymnasium, which was governed by this Prussian ex-officer, there were a number of boys to whom I also belonged to, sort of tried to get away with things. Now when I came to that Jewish school, I really reveled in the fact that there seemed to be no discipline at all and people even talked back to their teachers and I must say, I enjoyed that very much and in spite of that, the funny thing is I learned. The thing is that the excuse for extreme discipline is always that it is needed in order for the kids to learn, I mean I realize there has to be a certain amount of discipline, but in the German schools, at least at the Nazi time, that was an ideology by itself, in its own right, discipline, of course, as a preparation for later military.

Q: Now, didn't you experience antisemitism from your schoolmates at the Mommsen school?

A: I don't, no I didn't. In fact, one, I remember that one of my non-Jewish, we weren't really friends, but we sort of spent some time together frequently in school during intermissions and so on, recess is the word, recess, he was, he had joined the Hitler Youth and he had given me a small Hitler Youth pennant with a swastika which I proudly displayed. And, unfortunately, it turned out that on that day we had, at home a party, I forgot what the cause was, there were relatives there and, of course, all the people who came were Jews, and in the middle of it, I burst with my swastika flag and holding it proudly and marched in there. And I remember that my mother took me very forcefully by my arm, took me out to my room and gave me a horrific beating and told me that I should never dare to bring that flag home and she tore it up and I felt terribly sorry for myself and felt as a victim of, but as I said, that was in the beginning when I felt that being Jewish was basically a punishment and it took a number of jolts for me to realize really what was behind that and also what my Judaism really meant to me. The antisemitism that I encountered was mainly from the teachers. That principal, maybe I forgot to mention that he also taught, that was I think common in German schools, and he was our math teacher and he made frequent antisemitic remarks and derogatory remarks about Jews in his mathematics class. And then we had a German teacher who was, if anything, even worse and, on the other hand, some of the older teachers were very democratic. Our Latin teacher was an elderly gentleman, in fact was the only teacher with whom, to whom my mother took me after I left school, very, from one day to the next, to say goodbye. And he lived only a few blocks away from us and we went there and he was, I still remember, very nice to me and shook my hand and wished me all the best of luck for my future. So, I think some of the older teachers were definitely not

Nazis and most of the younger ones were. In addition, of course, the principal who was an elderly gentleman, he must have been already in his late 50's at that time.

Q: How did you feel hearing these remarks by your teachers? Do you remember?

A: I felt hurt, basically. I felt that, I mean, it was really like a physical slap in the face, except this was not physical but emotional. I mean, I felt, even at that time, that the men had no reason to attack me that way.

Q: Did you talk about this with your parents? Did they make some sense out of it for you?

A: I don't remember it, but it's possible that I did. I don't, I mean there are many things that I don't really understand about my parents and I feel in a way terrible about it. Of course, in the beginning I was too little, but later on I was a teenager and then finally an upper teenager and even 20 years old by the time they were arrested. And, but I don't really understand many of the actions they took and their motivations. That is one of the things I have been trying for years and years sort of to reconstruct, no understanding now how they thought and what their mental sort of outlook was to explain why they acted the way they did. It's very difficult, for example, my father's decision during the first years of Hitler not to emigrate was based, that is one thing, one of the few things I can understand, as strange as it may sound. But the thing was that Jewish lawyers, a large group of, the majority Jewish lawyers were disbarred within a few weeks after the Nazis took power. There were two groups of lawyers which were exempted, one were the front line soldiers from World War I, which my father was not, the other one were lawyers who had already been admitted to the bar under the Kaiser, that means before the outbreak of World War I and that's the category my father fell in. And many of the

lawyers who were then disbarred lost their livelihood over night and the only thing they could do, unless they wanted to dig ditches in Germany, was to emigrate, and most of them did. On the other hand, my father always considered himself lucky that he was exempted because at each stage of the Nazi development of their antisemitic policies, the Jews always were under the illusion that this is the way, okay, the Nazis want to do business and that's, but we can live with it and that's the way it's going to remain. In retrospect, the fact that my father was in one of the exempted groups, was not his luck, but it was his death sentence because otherwise he would have left Germany. In fact, one remark I still remember vividly, when the others urged him to emigrate, he would say, here I am a lawyer, if I go to New York, all I can become is a dishwasher, and what shall I do with German law in New York? You know, logically, that made total sense, in '35, who would have ever thought of gas chambers? Plus, the thought also was that since Hitler was constantly breaking agreements with the Allies, and particularly with Britain and France, that one of these days they would have enough and just take care of him. At that time, their military force was still much bigger than that of Germany and my father thought if I stay here, then I'll just pick up where I left off in '33 and all of that, you know, if I think back, really made sense. In the framework, I mean putting myself into the framework of my parents at that time and, of course, ignoring the history that occurred later which you know is just hindsight. I mean, obviously, my parents also were, and that may have been in general in those days, very sort of withdrawn in terms of say financial things and so on. I mean, they never discussed any of these things with us even as I got older, but I am now certain, looking back that the income of my father from his law practice, must have plummeted. Because, first of all, many of his clients were

gentiles and there was, if a German gentile, so called Aryan, appeared in court with a Jewish lawyer, that already was not one strike, but 10 strikes against him. And most of the judges were fierce Nazis. So, who would want a Jewish lawyer? And so I'm sure that most of the non-Jewish clients must have left him. Of course, he may have picked up some Jewish clients because from those Jewish lawyers who were disbarred, I don't know how that evened out, but I'm fairly certain that his income must have declined after '33. He had actually a very well going practice, he had, I remember he used to talk about one of the most famous German movie actresses he represented in her divorce and then he had some members of the Hohenzollern family, that was the family of the last German Kaiser. In fact, the nephew of the Kaiser and his mother who was a sister-in-law of the Kaiser, were his clients. And, in fact, they stuck with him until the end, that's very interesting. But his, their cases did never involve court appearances, he drew up personal wills for them and made property arrangements and advice and things like that, where he didn't really appear in public for them.

Q: Let me ask you, Hitler came to power, can you kind of describe to me the progression of events and regulations and policy that altered your life and your lifestyle.

A: In the beginning, I must say also one thing, is my parents, in retrospect, must have made heroic efforts to insulate us children from all of these events. Initially, we didn't notice anything, in fact, that is a little story that I didn't really plan to tell you, but I was, in January of '33, I was 10 years old then and I had scarlet fever, it's a childhood disease which doesn't exist anymore, but in those days kids had it. And our pediatrician who was also a distant relative, it was still in the days of house calls, came every day and looked me over, looked into my throat and so on, and he came at a certain time, in the morning at

some point. And it was sort of a regular routine, the bell would ring, my mother would come into my room with him and then he would examine me. On one day, and now I know it was the 30th of January, 1933, instead of coming in, my mother and he were outside the door of my room, but with the door closed, and sort of in a low voice which I couldn't understand, kept talking and talking and talking. And finally they came in and I was very sort of disappointed, not only because of the change in routine, but somehow I wasn't that important and they talked and then I asked them what's the matter, and my mother said in a grave voice, Hitler has just been appointed Chancellor. And at that time, it sort of went in here, out there, it didn't mean anything. I knew I was 10 years old, so I, the German, there had been several elections before so the house walls and public places were plastered with election placards and so I remember having seen, vote for Hitler and vote for Tählmann who was the Communist party leader, and vote for this man, and Germany also had many parties. And, so vaguely the name Hitler rang a bell, but I had no idea basically who he was, what he stood for and so on. Now, coming specifically to your question, the first real change was that eviction from the Mommsen Gymnasium. Before that, the laws, there were laws of course, as I said, about disbarring lawyers, didn't affect me and, unfortunately, it did not affect my father either. Then there were many other, there weren't too many laws, until '35, in '35 the so called Nuremberg laws were passed which actually defined Jews as second class citizens, but that also had no immediate effect, the main effect was also that Jews not only could not marry gentiles, I mean, Aryan gentiles, but even the act of intercourse without being married was a punishable offense, but obviously, I was 12, 13 years old then, that was the last thing on my mind. And second class citizenship had, of course, trickled through and had many

other effects which at that point did not affect me. But, as I said, the eviction from the school did and but also, our lifestyle never changed, I mean we went, my parents went on their summer vacations and my sister and I went to our camps and we had, I mean we were clothed, we had food to eat and, in fact, oh yeah, one big change also was that the Nazis were totally obsessed with the idea that the Jews were sort of spoiling the German race and most Jewish families, at least middle and upper middle classes, had maids and in those days maids were usually live-in maids, and one of the outgrowths of the Nuremberg laws was that any Jewish household which has a male, a Jewish male in the household, was forbidden to have a German maid who is below 45 years of age. So, we had, I think we had one at that time so we had to dismiss her and took an older woman. You could take an older one, I mean it was all that obsession with that maybe a Jew would then father an illegitimate child with such a maid. I don't know, maybe there were such cases, but they were, it was almost a sickness with the Nazis. Anyway, I then started at the Jewish school and I remember there were several kids besides myself in my grade who started new there. Now, we were up to grade level in all the general subjects like math, German and so on, but in the Jewish subjects, and particularly in Hebrew, our classmates were already freely translating the Torah, the Tenach, the entire bible, from English, from Hebrew into German, and I could barely sort of read stammeringly and so did the others. So they instituted a sort of second track Hebrew for us assimilated kids; and for the first class the principal, a Dr. Schlesinger came in to give us a little pep talk about the importance of knowing Hebrew for Jewish children. And after he was finished, he said, okay, tomorrow will be the first, now he dismissed us, tomorrow will be the first real class and we are supposed to bring, he wrote on the board a certain grammar by so and so

which you could buy at some book store that he named, and a copy of the Chumash. And as soon as he said that, my arm shot up and he pointed at me and I asked, what is a Chumash. And that question completely floored that principal. He couldn't imagine a Jewish boy asking, being so unbelievably ignorant that he wouldn't know what a Chumash is. And so all he could, yeah and also, he was a short, very thin, wiry man with a reddish goatee, bald head but a fringe of red hair around the back of his head and his entire head, as I remember it, turned red just as his beard, he walked toward me and finally, I guess he took some time to think about what to say, and then he said, you are a Jew and you don't know what a Chumash is? And, of course, that question totally demolished me and I sat down and felt as if I had said something. . .

End of side one of tape one.

Q: This is an interview with Ernest Fontheim on March 12, 1997, tape one, side B.

A: Yeah, my immediate reaction was that I was totally embarrassed by the principal's remark and, but soon, as a result of the very strong Jewish education which was part of the curriculum in that school, I started to become more and more interested in that. The name of the school, actually that is very important, was Adass Jisroel, it means Jewish Congregation, a Jewish Community. And we came to the point even where I decided that I wanted to become a rabbi when I grew up, which very much upset my father, particularly. I started to go regularly to Shabbat services in. * * * Berlin had many synagogues and, as I said before, there was only one congregation which ran all of the synagogues in Berlin and also the rabbis, therefore, were not confined to one synagogue, so one didn't have to put up with the same rabbi Shabbat after Shabbat the way it is here, for example, in this country, where each congregation has its own rabbi, but instead, the

rabbis circulated. But, obviously, Berlin is a big city and it was taken for granted that they would take public transport to go to the various synagogues which were widely scattered in different parts of the city. So, I particularly became very fond of two rabbis who were both very dynamic and also gave me a lot of moral support in their sermons. One was Dr. Max Nussbaum who later emigrated to this country and became rabbi in Hollywood, California. And the other one was Dr. Manfred Swarsenski who came to this country and actually founded a synagogue in Madison, Wisconsin. I never saw Nussbaum again, but Swarsenski I visited in the mid-'60's when I went to a scientific conference in Madison. I knew he was there so I contacted him before and we set up a luncheon, we spent several hours together just talking and reminiscing. I, yeah, in that, so the years went by from '35 to '38 and by 1938, I must have been about in 10th grade and in October, 1938, the German police arrested all Jews who had Polish passports, overnight, without any prior warning, in fact, they came in the early morning hours. And put them on, into railroad cars which were all ready prepared beforehand and they were shipped off to Poland and the only thing the German saw to it was that they had their Polish passports with them because by International law, the Poles had to admit anyone who had a valid Polish passport. And there were quite a number of kids from my class affected by that and even a few teachers who didn't appear the next day.

Q: What were you thinking when all this was happening?

A: It was terrible, I mean, I still remember, I mean these kids, that was actually the first fore taste of the later deportations. I mean, people just vanished overnight, the day before nobody knew anything, they didn't know, we didn't know and on the next day, they just didn't appear in school. Our Hebrew teacher was one of them and then several kids, one

of them, but that's beside the point here, I met again 30 years later in Israel where he is, by now he must be retired, he was a professor of classical languages at Hebrew University.

Q: What's surprising me about what you're telling me, is that you, what I'm understanding here is that until 1938, your life went on pretty much the way it had before except for that you changed schools? You haven't described any real hardships or laws or regulations that affected you personally. Is that true?

A: That's true. I mean, that was my, I mean first of all, it's 50, 60 years later, what I remember, but I think my memory is pretty good as far as that is concerned, that doesn't mean that these regulations didn't exist, but they didn't really touch me personally and, as I said, after I've read a lot of what happened in those days, and I see now that my parents must have made a monumental effort to keep things away from us, that's the only explanation I have. One thing that I noticed also maybe in my life, and that was that earlier, I think in either late '37 or early '38, all Jewish stores were required to put the names of their owners in letters of a prescribed size on the store window in, and not in an artistic way, so in a way that identified the store as a Jewish store because no other store, in white paint of a prescribed size, but again, we didn't have a store, I just noticed it, that this is what was happening. Another thing that happened also, was that all Jews were forced to adopt an additional middle name, males the name Israel and females the name Sara. In this country there are many non-Jews, Jewish women, who are called Sarah, but in Germany, the name Sarah is totally unknown, it was purely a Jewish name and Israel, anyway, so, and also the law stipulated not only that we had to take those names, but that we had to use it, particularly in all communications with government agencies or also

with commercial enterprises and so on. Like, I had to call myself Ernest Israel Fontheim, written out. And my father had to do the same thing. It was, of course, also a humiliation and in addition to that, it was a sort of signal for the recipient, this is a Jew who is writing to me.

Q: Could you play in public parks, could you ride the busses?

A: Yeah.

Q: You could do all this?

A: Right, at that time there were no restrictions of any sort to our life, we could go to movies, theaters, I could go to, now there were places which on their own initiative, had posted signs, Jews, "Juden unerwünscht", that means Jews are not desired here, actually to translate it literally, but what it means really, Jews forbidden. That was already, there were, for example, many benches on parks, because again the Nazis with their obsession with sex, had that idea that maybe a German woman might sit on a park bench and then some Jewish man might sit next to her and start to, some dirty business with her and so a German woman cannot be expected to sit next to a Jew on a park bench. But whatever, that started up and then, as I said, certain, maybe some restaurants, but we didn't go much to restaurants anyway, so. . .

Q: Did you know about the book, that huge book burning earlier?

A: At that time, I don't remember it, I remember it, obviously having read about it, but that happened I think in '33 or '34 and I was 10 or 11 years old and so. . .

Q: So your family insulated you to the extent that you weren't particularly distressed or fearful?

A: That's correct, yeah.

Q: Could you sense any change in your parents or relatives or friends?

A: Oh, yeah, I mean that I should mention. They were, there was a stream of people who emigrated, you know, some uncle, some cousin, you know, and there was always farewells and friends of mine, their parents emigrated and, of course, the kid then went along. I should say I had a best friend in this Adass Jisroel school, he was a boy, a very interesting boy, in fact, we became best friends initially because we both were new in that class, but from totally different backgrounds. He came, his parents had moved from Vienna to Berlin, they were Austrian Jews, but the parents were, of course, born before World War I like all of our parents and before World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire included southern Poland and particularly, most of Galicia, the province, and his parents actually were orthodox Jews from Galicia who had, however, left there I think before the war already and settled in Vienna and so they were then, by citizenship, they were Austrian Jews and they came to Berlin, it might sound strange since Austria at that time was still a democracy, but his father had some business, I think he sort of administered buildings and as an Austrian, he was not subject, he was a foreigner, foreign Jews were not subject to all these antisemitic laws. So we, and in fact, this friend also influenced me in that, and I took him also to services to a liberal synagogue with the organ and he found that very impressive and so we influenced each other. And we stuck together, he was a very bright boy and on the 13th of March, 1938, that was the day Hitler marched into Austria, I'll never forget that. I visited him, I saw his father sit in the dining room with his head in his hands like that and crying because he knew that his game was up now, now he was also a German and subject to all the laws. And to see a father cry is an incredibly powerful experience for and also a devastating experience for a

boy. Totally devastating. And then the parents finally decided to send their boy out to England, you may know, England had relatively liberal immigration for Jewish children and they, they were of course orthodox, and they enrolled him in a Yeshiva in Scotland and ostensibly for him to become a rabbi which he never did, but that was the rules under which he could get out and into England. And that was actually the first personal blow in my life. And also for that reason, I never forgot the date, it was January 18, 1938. And I was at the railroad station together with his parents, of course, to say goodbye and he was my best friend and I lost him. But, of course, the year 1938 then had many other, all of those things happening, I mentioned the arrest and deportation of the Polish Jews and then just a few weeks later, two or three weeks later, came the infamous Kristallnacht Pogrom. Of course, the two events were not unrelated. Among the people who were arbitrarily arrested and shipped to Poland was an elderly couple, Grynszpan, who, and the Poles, of course, claimed they didn't know what to do with all those Jews, so they put them into camps in inhuman conditions and they had lived in Germany, I'm not sure whether in Berlin or some other city, anyway, they had a son, Herschel, whom they had sent to Paris to relatives because it became, Berlin became too oppressive, and he lived with an uncle in Paris. And when the parents wrote to him a letter of desperation and he became so furious he obtained a gun and decided to assassinate the German ambassador to Paris, but you know, if a 16 year old boy enters an embassy and says he wants to talk to the ambassador, that's not whom he's going to see, obviously, and so they ushered him into some underling from, a consular secretary or something, his name was Ernst vom Rath, and history probably would never know him if it hadn't been for Grynszpan to pull his pistol and assassinate him there. And the German government, on the other hand,

used that as a pretext to stage these pogroms and that was starting the night, from November 9th to 10th, for several days. I mean, synagogues were burned, Jewish shops and now, of course, you see, since the Jewish shops all had to be labeled with the names of the owner, it never said Jewish shop, but it was known that the stores which had the name of the owner in this particular prescribed way, these were the Jewish stores so it was clear for the mob which windows to smash and loot.

Q: What were you doing during the time of Kristallnacht, what did you see?

A: Yeah, on that day in the morning, where we lived there were, at least on my way to the station, I had to take a commuter train to the city, to that school, I didn't pass any shops, they were all just apartment houses, so I knew nothing. That was the morning of the 10th, now, it was a Thursday. So I took the train and I went to school and as soon as I was in the school, I realized what was on, first of all, many kids weren't there and those who were there told horror stories of passing shops that had been smashed and looted. And then the next thing that was unusual is, as you know, the school day starts at eight sharp, the bell is ringing and then the normal thing would be that the teacher would appear at the crack of the bell, no teacher not just in our class, but in the neighboring, in no class any teacher was to be seen. And after some time, I don't remember it was a half an hour, whatever, all the teachers came from the teacher's conference room with the following instructions, that there was unrest all over Berlin and the safety of the school cannot be guaranteed and furthermore, we should go home but we should go home alone, if we go in groups that might attract mobs and just a single boy, you know, can sort of slip under, unrecognized and also we should not go to friends because our parents might get worried, we should only go the shortest way and fastest way home so the parents

know we are safe, and there won't be any school for the time being, we will be notified when the school will start up again.

Q: So you went home?

A: Yes. The commuter train was an elevated train and it passed by the synagogue where I had my bar mitzvah and what I saw there was really one of the worst horror shocks in my life. It was a beautiful building with huge, three huge domes, sort of in Moorish style and from the center dome came a huge thick column of smoke. When I saw that I became so obsessed that I forgot the warning that was given to us to go straight home. At the next train stop I left the train and I raced back to the building, to the synagogue and what I saw there is there was a mob of people across the street, held back by a police line and the fire department was there hosing down adjacent buildings so to prevent the flames from doing damage to German property and no hose was directed at the synagogue and that, I just stood there, I was totally sort of hypnotized. That was something; I couldn't even imagine that something like that could happen. And then, there were many antisemitic sort of shouts from the mob, I mean like, I don't know, throw out the Jews or kill the Jews and it never occurred to me that I was one in the middle of that mob. And then suddenly somebody said that in the house where, against which the mob was sort of standing looking at the synagogue, on the ground floor somebody knew there was a Jew living. So there were immediate shouts, let's get them. And then the mob turned its back to the synagogue and burst into the house itself and then I heard sort of heavy blows against the apartment door and I was way outside, I couldn't see what was happening there. And all I could think was, I hope that the door is going to hold and I remember that was sort of as if I was trying to influence the door to hold, but of course, it

didn't and I could hear sort of splintering wood and then after that there was total silence, it lasted for minutes, not a sound. And then I heard again shouts like, get them, get them, and then there was an elderly man, all I remember seeing, he had a huge bald head, he was probably sixty, or I don't know how old he was, and then from all sides there were blows and his face soon was completely bloodied. And suddenly there was a young man who shouted, you cowards, so many all fighting against one single guy. And then some others tried to attack that man and sort of pushed him away. And then once he was pushed through the crowd, there was police already waiting in a car as if this was all staged, I have no idea and he was pushed off into the car and the police drove him off. And after I saw that, I turned around and went back to the train and went home. So the year 1938 was really for me, it was a big turning point. It started out with the emigration of my best friend which was a tremendous personal loss for me, then the arrest of the Polish Jews, who I also knew quite a number including some of my teachers and then the Kristallnacht. So I stayed home as we were told on Friday. And on Saturday one of my friends had a birthday party that already was long planned and so I went to it, and we had hardly come there when somebody, I think one of the boys came in saying that his father had just been arrested by the Gestapo and that the Gestapo is arresting the Jewish men. So the party never took place, we all immediately raced, in those days, Saturday was a weekday, so my father was in his office and actually it was not too far, it was several blocks from where the birthday party was supposed to take place. So I raced to his office and just when I came in, he said he had just received an urgent telephone call from a colleague, a German, an Aryan colleague to see him immediately on an important matter and he asked me to come along. I was at that time 16 years old and so we went, that

colleague was two blocks from my father's office and was a certain Dr. Külz. He was a few years somewhat younger than my father and his father, Dr. Külz's father, had also himself been a lawyer, but more importantly, he had been Minister of the Interior in one of the pre-Hitler governments of the Weimar Republic and in Germany, like I think in many European countries, the police is within the Interior Ministry sort of an agency, I mean like somewhat comparable to the FBI here, which is in the Justice Department. But there the police, the entire police organization, is national, it's not local like in this country. And anyway, the father still had close contacts to high police officials and had learned, therefore, of this action against, for the arrest of Jewish men and in those days, also, everybody was paranoiac, partly with justification, that the Gestapo was listening on telephone calls, so therefore, the son who my father actually knew the son better than the father, who had, I think, done legal cases together with him, and the son did not say anything over the phone, just told my father to see him in his office on an important matter. And my father then was ushered in and asked me to stay outside in the waiting room and they were quite a time together there and then they came out again and my father told me that that lawyer had warned him not to go back to his office or, of course, not to his own apartment and to, it is safe, however, to stay at places where there are no Jewish males. Fortunately, my father's sister, who was a widow and she had three children, two daughters and a son. One daughter had already emigrated to Argentina, and the son had just left a few months or so before Kristallnacht also for Argentina. So it was just his sister and the remaining daughter. So in other words, there were no males in that household. So my father immediately went there, and the Gestapo came both to our apartment and also to the office to inquire and, of course, we told them he left and didn't

tell us where he was going, and in those days the Gestapo still took these relatively stupid excuses and just reappeared a few random times maybe hoping to catch him, but didn't, and that was the second great stroke of luck that my father had after having been permitted to practice law. The thing was that the Gestapo immediately let it be known that those Jews who were arrested were put into concentration camps, with the Berlin Jews mainly in the camp Sachsenhausen which is north of Berlin. And the treatment, of course, was horrible, full of sadism and physical brutality. However, in those days at least there was no killing, no mass killings, I think a few Jews actually did die due to just mistreatment, but I mean which is horrible enough in its own right, but at least most survived and the Gestapo let it be known that anyone whose family can produce an emigration visa to another country will be immediately released and will have to leave the country within one month, giving him one month's time to wind up affairs and so on. So, but as I said, my father was lucky, he was warned, he was never arrested and, of course, the Jewish relief organizations from the Joint here in America to the local ones in Germany, now put high pressure on and the first priority to get those Jews immigration visas to somewhere, anywhere in the world, just to get them out, I mean those who were in concentration camps, to save their lives, to get them out.

Q: Was there a strong Nazi presence in the streets, I mean were there marches, were there Gestapo?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, I mean that is, no Gestapo, by its very nature is a secret police, they were in civilian and they were, I mean not conspicuous, even though they themselves were everywhere and they had a whole army of informers who were not actually Gestapo but reported to them. And that was a network, throughout Germany, maybe I neglected

to say that, that belongs much earlier. As soon as Hitler assumed power, there were frequent marches by the SA on, they had a fascination with marches, as I said, this Mommsen Gymnasium, after that Nazi officer took over, one of the things he introduced, as I explained, was during the lunch hour, after eating lunch, we always marched around the street singing songs. But the SA, at every, whatever occasion or even no occasion, they would march around and one of their favorite songs, incidentally, was
"Und wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt, dann geht's nochmal so gut."
which translated means, if Jewish blood squirts from the knives then things will go quite as well. I mean, to sing a song like that, I mean I listened to it even at that time, but the older I get, the more incredible it seems to me that somebody, I mean even who hates some group, to make that into a song is so unbelievable that it defies description.
Another song which was a favorite was, I'll say it in German first,
"Wir werden weiter marschieren,
auch wenn alles in Scherben fällt,
denn heute gehört uns Deutschland
und morgen die ganze Welt."
that means, we will continue to march and even if everything breaks down and falls into pieces, because today Germany belongs to us and tomorrow the entire world. And so, and they had all kinds of other songs, obviously, I mean these are the things that I never forgot.

Q: So even if you were insulated, this had to be fairly alarming.

A: Yeah, I mean I found it, I mean there were other things that were alarming also. There was a weekly newspaper called Der Stürmer, the storm trooper, maybe you've

heard of it. It was published by the Nazi governor of the province of Franconia, a man named Julius Streicher, and which was full of antisemitic articles and also totally fixated on the sexual aspect of antisemitism. The paper, I mean apparently calling to that Jews had infinite sexual appetites and particularly for little innocent blond German girls to seduce them, that was somehow a Jewish command to do that, I mean it was just incredible, I mean the man must have been sick himself, or whoever wrote these stories. And, of course, sometimes they were true. They would intermix it with some true stories, where sometimes a Jew was convicted of some crime. Usually the crimes Jews were convicted of were such things as smuggling money out. In Germany foreign exchange was strictly controlled, because the whole economy was managed and controlled, but you know Jews, rather than letting the Nazis take it all away from them, sometimes tried to smuggle some money out and in some cases they succeeded and in other cases they were caught, and that was always touted as a big crime against the German nation. And of course, the story always was that the Jew, they came with nothing and now they are rich, so that is all just taken away from the Germans. And stories like that, and then of course, there were also true stories of where a Jew somehow was caught having had a relationship with a non-Jewish girl and if that happened, then the Jew usually came to a concentration camp and those Jews who were there for, there was actually a term, a German term for that, which translated means sort of defilement of the race. And they were mercilessly tortured and punished and usually, if they weren't shot outright, just died of torture. So that newspaper was not just sold at newsstands, but they had sort of display cases on various strategic points, like in busy railroad stations and so on. And

usually I ignored it, but sometimes I sort of went there and read it and somehow I did not relate it to me, it's a funny thing.

End of tape one

Tape 2

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

A: What I, what affected me actually more than these vicious articles in the Stürmer, were antisemitic articles in the general press and I also felt at that time and still feel today, that they probably were much more effective in influencing people than the Stürmer articles because the articles in the Stürmer, most of them at least, were so outlandish that, and also they were always accompanied by horrible caricatures where a Jew looked like a, maybe a mixture of a gorilla and a human being and totally distorted, that I am sure many people just couldn't take it seriously, on the other hand, that antisemitic articles in the general press, which were more sort of subdued and not as outwardly ridiculous, and therefore, also probably appeared more reasonable, probably influenced many more people toward increased antisemitism. And they were, for example, I have to admit that to some extent, even I was influenced by the constant refrain of the German press was that the Jews were in charge of all the countries that were fighting against Germany, particularly of course, the United States, and there was a whole succession of names that always appeared, one was that, of course, of Felix Frankfurter, the supreme court justice, another one was Herbert Lehman, the governor of the state of New York, I remember, and there were one or two others. Oh, yeah, of course, Bernard Baruch, the financier and they made it appear as if they are, these people

were sort of behind the scenes manipulating and, of course, Roosevelt himself, whose name was often distorted as Rosenfeld, implying that if he wasn't a Jew at least he was of Jewish descent. And after the war, particularly after meeting American soldiers, and many of them Jewish, I was surprised actually to hear that there was large scale antisemitism in this country and that the influence of these Jews was a relatively minimal. Oh, I forgot one name, of course, that was Henry Morgenthau, the Secretary of the Treasury at that time. He was probably, I would say, from what I can judge reading history, the most influential, in the government at least, of the United States and I think he was fairly close to President Roosevelt. But it was nothing like that and as the Nazis, and I was, I have to admit now, disappointed because somehow that part of the Nazi propaganda I had started to believe somewhat. And then, by the way, the same thing in the Soviet Union, you know, there were lots of Jewish names, many of these were actually exterminated by Stalin himself, and particularly, many of the original revolutionaries, and starting with Trotsky, of course. And there too, actually, the fact that there was wide spread antisemitism in the Soviet Union, never made it into the German papers, it wouldn't have fit their purposes. Okay, now, the Kristallnacht was not only a, just devastating horrible event in my personal life as well as the lives of all Jews in Germany, but it represented a watershed because that was followed by a avalanche of new laws and regulations totally restricting Jews. What affected us first of all was that the remaining Jewish lawyers were now disbarred. So suddenly my father was not only living in an antisemitic hotbed like Germany, but on top of it, he was unemployed here and my parents made, then from then on really, desperate efforts to get out of the country. And, but it was, by that time everybody had woken up and I remember once standing in

front of the British Consulate in Berlin which was in the embassy compound, arriving there at six in the morning, just to get some form to fill out and I think by eleven or twelve or so, finally it was my turn to receive those forms. I don't know what ever happened, but I don't think, but obviously they didn't go to England and neither did I, so I stood there for nothing. And then, also, that was followed by laws making it illegal for a Jew to visit any place of amusement or entertainment or general culture, that included the whole spectrum, I mean from theater, symphony, opera to circuses, county fairs kind of thing, you name it. Also, public beaches, swimming, public swimming pools, movie theaters, public parks even. Parks were much more popular in Germany than they are here because most people in this country, or at least a high proportion, live in their own homes and have their own gardens, in Germany the vast majority, at least at that time, lived in apartments and so parks were visited by people just regularly, just for recreation, just like people here might just sit in their back yard. Anyway, they were now outlawed for Jews. I, from the beginning, I and all of my friends, totally ignored the, that law and we just kept going. I remember one rather humorous incident, in the summer of 1940, the Rome State Opera from Rome, Italy, gave a one week guest appearance at the Berlin State Opera and I had been an opera fan and on the day when the ticket sales started for the Rome Opera, obviously everybody knew you had to be there early, so I was there, I think, at five in the morning or so, and there was already a long line, and while you stand in line, of course, for hours, sort of trotting from left leg to right leg and vice versa, you start also with people around you to get acquainted and talk and so on and the advantage of that was that you could then ask somebody to hold your place while you, it's just easier to take a little walk than to stand at the same spot, so I did that also. And while I then

took my walk, I walked along the line and I saw three other boys from my Jewish high school classroom and it was sort of an unwritten law, you know, one Jew might get away, two Jews is already like a synagogue, so we just waved at each other with a grin, without really getting together. And most people I knew did that, but there was a danger. I mean, if the Gestapo caught somebody, I mean the least thing was a concentration camp, but as a young person, first of all, I was always sort of defying authority and plus, a young person is always more reckless than an older one. Yeah, let me, actually, in my personal life, what happened then, finally the schools were permitted to operate again and, but then, shortly, that was probably late '38, that date I don't quite remember any more precisely, but then in early '39, most Jewish schools were closed by the Gestapo, including the Adass Jisroel school, to which I was going. And there was only one Jewish high school left operating and that was the official high school of the Jewish community of Berlin, but by that time, my parents were really in high gear trying to emigrate and they had the idea that it would be good for me to go to the American School in Berlin. The American School in Berlin, also it was very close to where we lived, it was run by an American principal and it mainly served children of diplomats, I mean not just Americans, obviously, but also British and others who would know English, and also children of businessmen who were stationed in Berlin. And therefore, the tuition was, of course, very high and I remember that was the first time sort of I heard about that this was a sort of a big sacrifice for my parents to put me in that school, and actually, I was scared because I would be thrown suddenly into a totally English environment, I mean, the teachers were all Americans, some maybe British, actually, and English was the language. Most kids had English as their native tongue and I had had three years of

English at the Adass school. But fortunately, things turned out to be not quite as bad. It turned out the school followed the curriculum of sort of the basic American school system and the German gymnasium was really a much more rigorous and elitist school and was at least a year if not more ahead of it, so many of the things, for example, in Latin and biology, I remember, we had had already much earlier, so the material itself was often, just for me, a review of things I had learned earlier and, therefore, that made it easier for me to concentrate on the language. I think I made quite a bit of progress there, I don't know exactly how long I was, I wasn't there very long, probably from about February, March '39, until the start of the summer term, which was, I think, May or June '39. In '39 also, was a lot, the first summer in my life where my parents didn't send me to a summer camp. And on the first of September, 1939, of course the German Wehrmacht entered Poland, attacked Poland, and I still, I listened to Hitler's speech to the Reichstag in which he explained his rationale and I never forget the words which he said, "since five o'clock this morning, we are shooting back", I mean the fairy tale that the Nazis told the world was that Poland had attacked Germany and that had been going on already for days and weeks, and while he patiently sort of tried to look the other way and tried to come to a peaceful solution and finally he is not taking it anymore and they are shooting back. I mean, it's unbelievable. Okay, anyway, that was a Friday, September 1, and I should say actually two days before, on August 30, that was my father's birthday, 1939, must have been his 57th birthday, and at that time already everything was much more subdued and we didn't have a party at home. We just went out to some nice restaurant downtown. And while we were sitting there, suddenly a newsboy came in with stacks of news, extra editions, shouting extra, extra, you know, and every table bought a paper and

the big fat headline was, general mobilization in Poland. And so, everybody knew already, see and in Germany, general mobilization was never officially announced because the Nazis had already quietly mobilized and then on the first, as I said, Germany attacked Poland, it was a Friday. On Sunday the 3rd, we took our customary Sunday excursion, we walked through the forest near where we lived to one of the cafes at the riverbank of the Havel River and at that time also, most if not all of the restaurants in Germany were sort of wired for public address systems. And while we were sitting there, it was early afternoon I think, the public address system went on with an important announcement from the German government, and it said that the British Ambassador had, at 11:00, I still remember the time, submitted a diplomatic note saying that, requesting that German troops be taken back to the original German-Polish border within a certain number of hours. If Germany refused to do that, then Britain in line with its treaty obligations to Poland, will consider itself at war with Germany. And the French Ambassador had submitted a similar note also. As we were sitting there, I remember that my father broke out into tears and that was the first time that I saw him cry. And he said, this is the Second World War in his lifetime and that he was not going to survive it. What prompted that remark, I never, it was the Holocaust was still so far away as to be unbelievable, but obviously, he must have sensed something. And then we went home. And then the outbreak of the war was followed then by many more restrictions. One was we had to turn in our telephones, we had to turn in all appliances, of course in those days, people had much fewer than today, but still I mean that included such things as vacuum cleaners, phonograph players, I don't know what else one had in those days, it was before

washing machines and dishwashers, but whatever one had, it had to be turned in. And in addition to. . .

Q: Radios?

A: Oh, yeah, radio, yeah, I think radios, too, yeah, right. And then some, up to that time I think Jews religiously obeyed all these things, and that was the first time where people started to sort of balk and not everything was turned in. I knew of many cases where people didn't turn in everything. Also, jewelry, valuables, you know, gold, silver, diamonds, things like that, had to be all turned in. And it was just turned in for a receipt, in other words, there was not thought of even to, for the government to buy it, it was just stolen. And of course, one victim of the outbreak of the war was the American School in Berlin which did not reopen because even though America itself at that time was not yet in the war, but Germany was in the war and Germany was considered a war zone, there was the possibility of air raids and so on, so anyway, the school didn't reopen. And then at that point, I wanted to go back and do my high school graduation so I went back to the high school of the Jewish community and graduated there in March, 1940. There's a big difference between a high school graduation in Germany, or I think in any European country, and also England, and that in America. In America, it is simply sort of an automatic thing, after completing 12 years, 12th grade of school you graduate. They had a rigorous examination, I still remember it was a fearful thing and I studied day and night and, I mean, passed it of course, but it was, it ranks in my memory together with my Ph.D. prelims, I mean each one at their own level. Also, it's a state administered exam, so they, from the state education authority, a sort of high official appeared there. Yeah, and the way the graduation sort of examination goes, was the following. There was first

a set of written examinations, each three hours long, one was a German composition, which incidentally, we had several essay topics to choose from. And the topic I chose was the discussion and evaluation of the work of a leading personality of modern times, and I chose Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism. And later on my father chided me for it and said, since that will be read by a German examination commission that was a mistake that I did that, it might harm me and I said, well, the people know who I am, I am a Jew and they know that, that's a Jewish school, so anyway, my father was always very concerned with such things. And actually, I got a very good grade for that. And mathematics and so on and that takes place over a period of about a month, these various exams, spaced. And then after that, about I think, after the last exam, maybe two or three weeks, comes the oral. And the German examiners, I mean, they get all the written tests and then one of them appears for the final oral examination. And the oral examination was handled in such a way that the examination commission which consisted of all the teachers that we had in 12th grade, the school principal and the German official were sitting in the examination room and we were called in one by one, we were 14, 13 or 14, I forgot, I think 13, we were called in. And before that started, we were all called in together and the German official made a little speech and he was a tall good-looking guy, with a white thick mane of hair, and such a huge swastika party member button here. And, which didn't particular make us, or at least me, feel easy. And he, I don't know, he said a few things, but then he went on to say that he has read so far our written examinations and he wanted to make us a compliment, he said they are far above the average of what he has seen and he wanted to particularly compliment us because he is aware of the difficult circumstances under which we are living. And then

he dismissed us and that man was obviously, you know, he must have been a holdover from the Weimar Republic, he was old enough anyway for that, and many of these guys were pressured into joining the party or losing their job, and so they all, not all I guess, but many, compromised and joined the party, but that man obviously, to have said that, took already courage. So, anyway, that was the examination and then after that, I was, anyway very Zionist inclined, so I volunteered for one of the preparatory camps for emigration to Israel, or Palestine in those days. And there was, they were named by the Hebrew name Hachsharah means preparation. And, but I discovered that I was totally unsuited for communal living, I felt totally unhappy. I mean, the living there was sort of to simulate kibbutz style living, you know, and I was constantly homesick and didn't like it at all. And then for me, fortunately actually, that camp was dissolved for some reason and people were distributed partly to other camps and partly to a work camp in a suburb of Berlin and that's where I was put and that was in a southern suburb of Berlin and we were just a small group of boys, there wasn't more than 10, detailed to work in a forest which was managed by a forestry official to cut down certain trees that were diseased. And I still remember that must have been the healthiest time of my life. It was by that time, midsummer of 1940, and we were working all bare-chested, just some shorts on and sawing down, that was in the days before chain saws and all that, I mean it was really hand sawing, these long band saws where one man grabs the handle at one end and the other on the other and you go back and forth. And then after the tree has been felled, then with an ax all the branches had to be cut, apparently they were diseased, but still could be used for some purpose, because we had to hack off with axes all of the branches and then with a special peeler, peel the bark off so that just the bare trunk remained. And

the local forester was sort of a fairly decent guy, I mean he got us as Jews, oh yeah, I should have said that with the outbreak of World War II, of course, immediately food was rationed. And not only food, also clothing, everything, shoes, everything you can think of, all consumer goods were rationed. And Jews from the beginning, got less than the, the ration system was a three tiered system, the lowest was called the general consumer and then a higher, the next step up was workers cards, these are for like factory workers, they got certain items more like I think fat, milk, maybe meat, I don't know. And then the highest category was heavy labor, these were people like construction, miners, you know, in the coal mines, this sort of thing. But, first of all, Jews were not entitled to any worker's cards even if they did do some work where Germans would have received them. And then our rations were actually shortened even compared to the general consumer. But the forester there, since he wanted also to get work out of us and he knew you know hungry people are not as strong, so he got actually through the local Nazi "Bauern" or farmer leader, peasant leader, whatever, extra rations for us of farmers bread and sausages which were actually delicious. And we were sort of a really nice little community there and I spent the summer there and occasionally we had furloughs where I could go into the city to visit my parents and so that was over, I think, in the fall of 1940. And then my parents still hoping that maybe something will come of the emigration attempts, my parents did all kinds of things that I never really was aware of fully. And there was, in Berlin, a mechanics school from ORT, O-R-T, you know that exists still today in many countries, and they had a school sort of for mechanics and machine working and so I started there sometime in the fall of 1940, and by that time, however, already the Germans started to draft Jews into factories, namely to replace

German workers who had been drafted into the Army, to the Wermacht. But, my parents were lucky, they somehow they were able to produce doctor's certificates so to exempt them from the "Arbeitseinsatz", that means forced labor, basically. And I was exempted because I worked in that mechanics school.

Q: I just want to ask you a couple of questions here. What was your sister doing throughout all of this, was she just at home with your parents?

A: No, yeah, actually, it must have been telepathy, I just thought of my sister. She went, first of all, when she went to school, initially she started in the German public school, but was then transferred by my parents to a Jewish school, but a much less religious Jewish private school and when all of these schools were dissolved in early '39, just like the school I was in, she was transferred to another school, a Jewish school of the Jewish community. And then there she was until, but that came later, I think in '41, all schooling for Jewish children was simply outlawed by the Gestapo. But until then, she went to school and had her friends, in fact, she had already a little boy friend.

Q: Your sister was a little bit younger, so at that point when schools were outlawed, were there underground schools or people just stopped going?

A: When schooling was forbidden, no I think first of all, she was sent also to the country for, there was, some young Jewish kids were sent to help in harvesting, you know, things in the country. And then when she came back from there, the deportations were already going strong.

Q: And your parents, were they supportive of your going to these little Zionist camps?

A: Yeah. They were supportive, but that time they wanted to get me out, in fact, we already applied for a passport and, in fact, that is one also incident I remember where we

went, the passport office was actually part of the Jewish emigration office, which was headed by Adolf Eichmann, and we applied there for a passport for me and for someone here to come along, probably because I was a minor or something. And while we were standing in line, I mean you went sort of from one position to the next filling out forms and answering questions or whatever, while we were standing in line two very tall and very good looking SS officers sort of walked across the waiting room where people are standing in line, and for some reason, one of them just got pulled to my father for some reason, and walked towards him and asked him why we were waiting there and my father answered that this is my son and he is preparing to emigrate to Palestine and then he said, oh, and then he answered, he asked my father, is he going with the Hechalutz? And sort of in perfect Hebrew, and my father said, yes and then he just turned around and walked away. And I don't, my father didn't seem nervous and so on, but I'm sure he must have been extremely, you know, that guy was, he looked very aggressive and I mean like the image of an SS officer. Anyway, so in fact, that passport I still have, part of my cherished memories, with a big J which after the war I found out, we actually owe the Swiss more than the Germans. Did you ever read about that? That the Swiss pressured the Germans to put the J because Germany and Switzerland had a treaty for tourist visas, not to need visas for tourism, but that apparently Jews discovered and went there as tourists with their German passports, but then didn't leave. And the Swiss didn't like that and so they told the Germans to do something, put a J in or whatever so that they can immediately recognize the passport of a Jew and then they can refuse them. These nice, neutral Swiss. Yeah, anyway, coming back, where was I? Oh, yeah, I went to ORT to learn mechanics. And actually that turned out to be one of the more useful things I

learned in my life, probably more useful than Latin or, I don't know, but anyway, I learned how to operate a lathe, although that I have never done later, and operate various tools. And, as I said, at that time also they started to draft Jews, and on April 30, 1941, also, oh no, I'm sorry, I have to back up there. I want to say that in February of 1941, we received a notice that we have to vacate the huge apartment that we still occupied on the Kaiserdamm. That was one of the major boulevards of Berlin, within a few days. That was an action that was actually originated by Albert Speer who was a German armaments minister and also in charge of construction in Berlin and he always tried after the war to sort of pretend that he was just a professional and did his thing for the armaments, but had nothing to do whatsoever with persecution of Jews or other minorities. Which is a big lie, I mean that was one of the things which he did, to kick Jews out of their apartments and Jews who were kicked out in this way, had to move in then, were restricted to move into so called Jew houses. These were apartment buildings where at least 50% of the tenants were already Jews and then also, you couldn't by any means, of course, displace a German family in such a house. But you had to move into sort of a sublet, into an apartment already inhabited by another Jewish family. And that was a big blow, that was a huge, we had a huge apartment, of course, I never had mentioned that so far. But it was an eight room apartment and there were many art pieces in there that my parents had collected, of course, in better times, many oriental rugs and I did mention the big library that my father had. And so, I mean just to, and of course, if I think today for example, if we had to move out of our house, which I think in square footage may be smaller than that apartment, that would be a nightmare within a few days. You know, you accumulate so many things, personal things, documents, whatever, pictures, and but

in addition to that, a new apartment had to be found, a new room or rooms in another apartment. Anyway, to make a long story short, we thought we had an ideal solution, moving into the apartment of an uncle of my mother. Now, he was, the man was the brother of my maternal grandfather and his wife and it was a much smaller apartment, and they were living there and they had a son in the mid or late 30's and then two single women were already living there also who had been kicked out somewhere else.

End of side one of tape two.

Q: This is an interview with Ernest Fontheim, March 12, 1997, tape two, side B.

A: Of course, we were not the only family living under such circumstances, it was throughout the Jewish community that Jews were cramped together. That, I guess, was the equivalent of a ghetto, in Berlin it would have been impossible for the Nazis to sort of institute a real ghetto in an area where only Jews lived because Jews never were concentrated in one area to such an extent, so they would have had basically to clear some area of non-Jewish Germans and anyway that would have been too disruptive. So, instead, they crammed then the remaining Jews at that time simply into a much smaller number of apartment buildings. That immediately led to innumerable conflicts. First of all, I think I indicated before, that food was rationed and so it was very important for each family to keep its food supply identified and separate and there were frequent suspicions and some even, sometimes even accusations that somebody else ate somebody else's sausage or at least part of it or that something was missing that should have not been missing. And, in fact, the kitchen became known throughout the community as the battlefield of the apartment. Because it wasn't just the problem of keeping the food supplies separate, then there was a problem even of preparing dinner for example.

Usually people eat more or less at the same time and they don't eat dinner at four when nobody needed the kitchen. And so there was a source of friction in that respect. And of course, with clean up and this was particularly, these things all might seem to be petty, but at that time, the nerves of all or most Jews at least, were so frayed already by years of oppression and innumerable Nazi anti-Jewish measures, that it never took much for people to fly into a rage and to, that was really actually a very tragic outcome of that, but that's what happened in many families, it happened in ours. The fact that we lived with relatives had absolutely nothing to do with it and I think my mother and her aunt became fierce enemies while we lived there. I would like just to back up briefly to a somewhat earlier time when we were still in the apartment, in the big apartment on the Kaiserdamm Boulevard. When I mentioned that after the outbreak of the war, the telephones were taken away from Jews, a few days after that measure was instituted, our doorbell rang and when we opened the door, the man who lived in the apartment upstairs above us was at the door, he was a wealthy bachelor, middle aged, I have no idea, but the way I remember him, he was probably then around 50, and he asked to talk to my father in private under four eyes. So my father and he went into my father's study, and they spent some time there, and we were all puzzled because there had never been really any social or any other contact with him. And then after, I don't know, some minutes he re-emerged, and they were both, both gentlemen were chatting sort of pleasantly, and our upstairs neighbor said goodbye and left. And my father then turned to us with total surprise on his face, saying that Mr. Kopf, that was his name, just offered that we could use his telephone, he just heard that our phone was taken away and he felt that was terrible, and if we had the need to call somebody, we should feel free and not only that,

but he even gave us permission to pass his number on to a few, but absolutely reliable, people who may have a need to call us, in that case he would send his maid down and someone could come up and answer the call. And that was, in those days and under those circumstances, was extraordinary because the man surely risked, particularly in the second part of the offer. So there were sometimes such cases also. Another thing that I wanted to mention is that in the same building, on the first floor, the Ambassador of a small Central American country was living. I'm not 100% certain any more, but I'm fairly sure that it was Costa Rica, I can't swear it, anyway, my parents when the situation became worse and worse, particularly after Kristallnacht, my parents decided maybe an approach to that man might be helpful in opening some doors, and although we barely knew him except you know when we crossed paths on the stairs or so on, my father made an appointment and went to see him and all I know is that nothing ever came of it. Okay, back now to February, 1941, after our eviction from the big apartment and our move into that much smaller apartment. That, yeah, that was in February of 1941. Two months later, in April, precisely on April 30, 1941, the apprentice workshop of ORT, where I was apprenticing for sort of mechanic and machine shop work, was ordered closed by the Gestapo, and all students in there were supposed to report to the labor office. The Nazis, incidentally, had instituted a special labor office for Jews shortly after the outbreak of the war, whose task it was to deal with Jews exclusively and to give them, give Jews jobs mainly in the defense industry or also in other sort of generally considered unpleasant work, like for example, the city garbage department, garbage pickup and similar things, and also they ride the railroads, certain unpleasant jobs in connection with the railroads on tracks and so on. Many Jews had already been drafted to work, my parents succeeded

in getting exemptions by doctors, by getting certificates from doctors, I mean neither one of them really was very healthy by that time any more. And, now for our advantage was, I mean our, meaning the students, the apprentices at the ORT school, that we were considered to be sort of already trained mechanics and, therefore, could get some better jobs and all of us wound up at one of the Siemens factories. Now before the war, the central Siemens factory was in Berlin, although they did have factories in other parts of Germany, but in Berlin was the central factory, and also the central administration building of Siemens was in Berlin, and it was a huge complex, it took, it was many square miles large, fenced in of course, many, many buildings manufacturing all kinds of things. In general, Siemens is an electrical equipment manufacturer along the same lines as General Electric maybe, at least used to be, before they started building such things as jet engines. Of course, they were entirely into war production at that time and one day after our, after the ORT school was dismissed, we already, we had to report to this labor office and there we were given, you know, pieces of paper telling us where to report the next day and at what time and so on and so that's how I wound up at Siemens.

Q: Did you have any choice in this?

A: None whatsoever. In fact, the labor office also was run strictly along Nazi lines, I mean we were treated very badly there, I mean with words, nobody was beaten there, but just sort of insulted and we were just told where to work. Some others who were there, by the way, were told to work also, were sent to other factories, but I happened to wind up at Siemens.

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

A: At that time, the deportations hadn't started yet, so actually I felt, for two reasons, I mean to put it mildly, disappointed. I mean one was that I had just been about, I don't know, seven or eight months at the ORT school and was just sort of getting into it learning all kinds of aspects of the trade, of being a mechanic, and that would be interrupted now. And the second thing, of course, that I knew I would be working for the German war production which didn't really make me obviously happy. At Siemens, the Jews who worked there, and I think that is true of all other defense plants also, did not work sort of scattered around throughout the factory here, maybe one machine operated by a Jew and next to him by a German worker. Instead, the Jews were all in one particular department where all workers were Jews except for the foreman, of course. And in this way we also could be easier controlled. Number two, we were not permitted to walk through the factory area unescorted. Now, that meant the shift started at 6:00 a.m. and it was already quite a walk from the factory gate to the building where we were working. So we had to be at the gate at 5:45 to be picked up by a guard which then led us to our department where we then punched in, we had to punch in before 6:00. If somebody missed that guarded walk from the gate to the department, then a separate guard had to be sent and the foreman made a point of waiting after 6:00 and the person had no way to get to the department and then he would send somebody down, the person then would come and, of course, punch in after 6:00 and there was a rule that every late appearance has to be reported to the Gestapo and so that was a very powerful incentive to be on time. Even at that time, at which deportations hadn't started yet, because nobody wanted to get entangled with the Gestapo. Furthermore, since we were not permitted to walk through the factory alone, that also meant that there was no way how we could walk

to the toilets or restrooms whenever the individual need arose for a person. Instead, twice a day, we were also under guard, conducted to the toilets. One was at 9:00 and the second time after the lunch hour, around 1:00 or between 1:00 and 2:00. That meant if somebody, for example, needed to go in between, that person had to report to the foreman and depending on the foreman's mood at that particular instant, he could either tell the person, well, you just have to wait, sorry, until the group goes, or he could give him a dressing down and say, well, okay, I will detail somebody to take you down there. At this point, by the way, all the workers, or the Jewish workers were men. Later on I will mention that we also had many Jewish women and, of course, that was particularly humiliating in that case if a woman had to go to that male foreman and tell him that she has to go to the restroom and then for him possibly to sneer and to detail somebody to take her down to the ladies room.

Q: What was the actual work you were doing?

A: We built a part of electric motors called commutators. We didn't know what they were used for, there was a rumor these were motors which were built into submarines, you know, for their electrical supply, but that whether that was true or not, we didn't know. Anyway, these commutators present an essential part of an electric motor.

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

A: To my knowledge not, I gave it a brief thought and rejected it outright because while being there, of course, I also acquainted myself with the system, they had a very thorough and sophisticated quality control system whereby any part that was produced before it left the factory, went to a controller, somebody who checked it out electrically and so on, that

would have been, anything that I would have done to, you know, sort of make it misfunction, would have been discovered by that person. So, first of all, it wouldn't have achieved anything because it would have never gone to a place where it could have done damage and secondly, as far as I remember they could trace who made it. So I would have wound up in some horrible way without even achieving any purpose in doing so. Yeah, I mean, the atmosphere, there were still a few German workers in that Jewish department, actually, some even women, they had started to use women in factories, which used to be also unheard of in Germany, but simply because of the labor shortage after the war broke out, since you know most of the able bodied males, of course, served in the Wehrmacht, in the army. And also, German workers, some actually were quite nice, I have to say, and some others were very hostile, so it varied from person to person. In the, as I said before, that happened on the 30th of April, 1941, and in the summer of 1941, there was rumor running around, we are going to get Jewish women. So, obviously, there was big excitement, notwithstanding the fact that for these women it probably was not so much of a pleasure, but at least we looked forward to some positive diversions. And the rumor turned out to be true and so later on that day, I think in the afternoon, a whole group of girls and women led again by a guard, of course, came in. One of them particularly caught my eye immediately, she was in appearance exactly what I had always looked for sort of in a woman as far as appearance is concerned, sort of dark brown, close to black hair, and brown eyes, curls and looking in general, a very pleasant facial expression and sort of a very Semitic expression in her face, which I always enjoyed in a woman and still do, in fact. And it turned out, so I sort of concentrated my attentions the first few days on her, I found out that her first name was Margot and I also

found out that she had a steady boyfriend, which didn't surprise me. So this immediately cooled my interest, as least for the time being. We worked then together, I mean, we were usually interspersed, there may have been a woman here and a male here and so on, several males and so on, and among ourselves a real camaraderie developed, the chief foreman was a man, his name was, I'll never forget, Alexander Siegel, and this, he was about in his, retrospectively guessing, in his late 30's, I would say, possibly 40, and sort of a real rough neck, extremely nice to all females, who also after the war really didn't find much reason to complain about him. And very gruff to males, and myself, I again started to rub him the wrong way and me the wrong way, so I was sort of on his list to bark at whenever he found a pretext for doing that. Yeah, I also met, that is very important, a male, in fact that was already on the first day that I started to work there, a male, I mean a man a few years older than I, his name was Hans Fabisch and we became really extremely close friends, it was my first close friend since I lost the one whom I had in high school, who emigrated to England. And we really went through thick and thin, we were, we became close personal confidants, we shared our recreational hours and did a lot together and talked a lot and he was probably one of two or three best friends that I ever had. He was, as I said, a few years older than I and he had decided to study medicine and was already, he had all kinds of medical books at home and had started to sort of self-educate himself in anatomy and other similar medical subjects. Oh yeah, that reminds me of something else. Since we graduated from high school, there was really no educational outlet for us. Universities, of course, we were prohibited from enrolling in or even attending classes, and there was really nothing else except, you know, my apprenticeship to become a mechanic. So, with a group of other friends and also

particularly former classmates from my high school graduating class, we developed sort of a set of informal talks which were held in different apartments of us sort of moving around. At that time I didn't use that word, but later on it occurred to me it was almost like an underground university. First of all, our German teacher, who was actually a very highly educated man and also in philosophy, he taught us sort of a course in philosophy and it was partly that he talked and partly it was done already in seminar style, where he would assign certain topics to one of us and that person had to report back at the next time and give a little talk on that. And this Hans Fabisch, whom I just mentioned, he had connections to various medical doctors and we got talks from, I don't know, various medical subjects, you know, of general interest and so on and then somebody else, I forgot who that was, knew an architect, a Jewish architect, these were all of course Jews who talked and they were also happy because they were thrown out of their professions and had nothing to do, particularly this former German teacher whose name, incidentally, was Kurt Levinstein, he, the others sort of rotated, but he consistently, week after week, he never took a penny and he taught with extreme enthusiasm, which sort of was infectious even. And that was a tremendous sort of intellectual outlet for us which otherwise we had really no outlet for. Another person that I would like to mention is a girl who was a few years older than I, I think about four years, her name was Ruth Perl, and she was part of that circle that also went to classes and she sort of became somewhat close to my friend, Hans Fabisch and myself. And as time went on, I think closer to myself, and we sort of started to strike up a friendship and we occasionally went to movies together and it sort of developed that we became quite close and she was my first girlfriend and we shared a lot of both personal thoughts, general thoughts and everything,

also entertainment and so on. Oh, yeah, an important factor by the way, also, was music. All of us in that circle and in various other circles were lovers of classical music and that went also for Ruth, and it was in wartime, practically impossible to buy records. So people in private apartments, I mean also many non-Jews, sort of started business swapping, used records that is, and so I enriched my collection by, and by the way not just swapping, but also selling, so I bought quite a number of records in those days that I didn't have before. It should be remembered, of course, that the quality and the kind of phonograph was a totally different world from what we have today. I mean, there was obviously no high-fi, there was obviously, there was only one speaker out of an inferior phonograph, and the phonograph was sometimes even hand driven by winding it up, and if it was electric, then it was kept illegally by the way, because it should have been turned in. But we managed to have sort of house concerts, also periodically, where we actually made up a program like for a philharmonic concert, say some Beethoven symphony and maybe a piano concerto by somebody else and different people would then bring those records and then we would all assemble in somebody's living room and listen to it just the way one would have gone to a philharmonic concert, which of course, was also forbidden for Jews to go to. A drastic change in the situation of the Jews occurred with the introduction of the yellow Star of David as of September 19, 1941. The law was very specific that every Jew as defined by the Nuremberg laws has to wear such a yellow star on his outer clothing whenever the person is in public, and it specified even exactly where it had to be worn, on the left hand side at about the level of the heart and also it couldn't be tagged on by pins or safety pins, but had to be firmly sewn on, and this way they wanted to avoid that people might put on a star and then later on take it off again and

the Gestapo was known to walk up to Jews with a star and sort of try it with their hand, with their fingers to get under it to see whether there is a space between the star and the garment to make sure that it was firmly sewn on.

Q: They did this to you?

A: No, not to me, but they have done it to people. That made it finally impossible to, or almost impossible I should say, for Jews to go to all the entertainments and cultural offerings that were forbidden after Kristallnacht three years earlier. My friend Hans Fabisch and I devised, actually it was his original idea, a method even to get around that. And it was based on the following, that in those days double breasted suits and coats were fashionable and if you had, if you buttoned it the way, I mean men buttoned their suit jackets then the left side where the star was on was, of course, on the outside and visible, but if you changed the buttoning, and most were also sewn in such a way that there were button holes and buttons, you could button it either way, and the way say women usually button them with the right part over the left, then the star would be automatically covered up. That, it was important to have it that way because upon leaving one's apartment and also walking in one's own neighborhood, it would have been much too dangerous to walk around without a star because people know you and you would have been immediately reported to the Gestapo, so what we did is we left our neighborhood as good Jews with our yellow stars, walked many blocks, maybe 10, to an area where nobody knew us, then ducked into an entrance of some apartment building and quickly changed the buttoning of our jacket or coat and reappeared as Aryan Germans and then we could go to a movie or anything without detection.

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

A: No, in fact, it sort of actually got me excited, like getting my adrenalin flowing that I was doing something like that. My father, I should say, was horrified and forbade me strictly to do that because not only did I endanger myself, very often the Gestapo would then also arrest the rest of the family, but I just didn't want to listen to any advice of caution and also I couldn't stand being so cooped up. I should make a reference, incidentally, in connection with culture and movies. There existed a Jewish Kulturbund, or culture society, that actually existed already since long before the Kristallnacht, namely since the time when Jewish artists were summarily thrown out from all German theaters and movie production companies, etcetera. And it was founded originally, of course, to give Jewish musicians, actors, etcetera, a way of earning a living in their craft. And it was always fairly well visited, I remember in the summer of 1939, I saw an excellent performance of a Kalman operetta (Kalman was a Hungarian operetta composer) Gräfin Mariza, Countess Mariza, which was staged by the Kulturbund very professionally and I enjoyed it very much. I have seen other things, too, but of course, and then after Jews were prohibited from going to other general cultural events and entertainment etcetera, then, of course, the Kulturbund became, in addition to providing an outlet for fired Jewish artists, became also the only legal way at least, for the Jewish population at large even to see a movie or a play or symphony. They had a very nice symphony orchestra, by the way, all consisting of Jews. But anyway, I considered it simply a challenge to do something that I was prohibited from doing by the government. And so, we did that and my girlfriend, Ruth, went one day to a beauty parlor. Even beauty parlors were forbidden for Jews, so of course, she didn't wear a Jewish star and along the way she was stopped by a policeman, it was a regular policeman in uniform,

and asked for her ID and when he saw that she was Jewish, he, the way she told it to me, was evidently embarrassed and told her in an apologizing way that unfortunately, he is forced by law to report that to the Gestapo, any transgression by a Jew had to be reported to the Gestapo and he had no way to avoid that. And so we were terribly scared, and then for weeks we didn't hear anything and so our scare sort of slowly subsided, although I told her that if they really get after her, that she should simply go underground and then she told me she will definitely not do that because she has no way to sustain herself and doesn't know anyone where to go to, so anyway. On one day, in fact, on the 9th of September, 1941, the 9th of September or the 9th of October, doesn't make a difference anyway, she, we always met in the morning on the way to the factory, my train actually, I had to change trains at a certain station and she, and join another train where she already was sitting in and she always sat in the same car so from there on, we always rode together. And on that morning, when I came into the railroad car where she was sitting in, I took one look and knew what had happened. Her eyes were totally red from both probably having cried and having been sleepless, and she pulled, without saying a word, a letter from the, from her pocketbook and which had the dreaded head Geheime Staatspolizei, the complete word for Gestapo, which is just an abbreviation. And it asked her to appear on that morning at 9:00 in the offices, room such and such, with, that's all, just to appear for an interrogation. But everybody knew what that meant. And she, now I haven't really talked about the deportations, but the deportations had started a month earlier and Jews working in defense plants were understood to be exempted from deportations, so she had come to work mainly to show our foreman, Alexander Siegel, the summons to see what he could do for her. But he coldly told her that there was

nothing that he could do for her because the Gestapo does have the complete lists of all Jews employed by Siemens, and they know also of the agreement that Jews working in defense plants are to be deferred, however, they can do what they want and there is nothing more that he can do. And then we talked a little bit, the atmosphere was so unbelievably stifling that I almost felt like somebody choked my throat, and then she said goodbye to our mutual friend Hans Fabisch and to me and just walked out. It was the last time I saw her. And, yeah, back up briefly, in September, just about a month before the 7th, the first deportation train left for the East and it was characteristic, it was characteristic of all transports to the East, nobody knew where these people went to, it was just said that it goes to the East.

Q: Who was deported, what kinds of groups or categories?

A: I don't think it was any particular category with the exception that those working in defense plants were exempted, but otherwise, they just, I don't even know, I think the Jewish community was enlisted in putting together lists for deportation. . .

End of side tape two.

Tape 3

Q: This is an interview with Ernest Fontheim on March 12, 1997. The interviewer is Randy Goldman, this is tape three, side A.

A: The deportations, the mechanisms of the deportation was handled, of course, by the Gestapo at the command level, but it was carried out under order 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 was 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, that 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 negotiable, anything negotiable value, 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 awhile the Gestapo discontinued that and then went over to assist them, 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 upward of six, seven hundred people, even up to a thousand and eleven hundred. 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 until the military, yeah, 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.

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

A: Yeah, at that point, yes. And in fact, this group of people that I mentioned who were also having various lectures and so on, we, 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 whom 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 had a terrorizing effect, so 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 somehow 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, that 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 like everybody else and nothing was ever heard from her. She obviously had no chance to contact anyone. I mean, Jews who were deported were immediately, of course, that was not really known at that time, but they were immediately put into either ghettos or extermination camps. And in extermination camps, many were immediately on the spot gassed and that who were not gassed were kept in that camp for hard labor and had no way to communicate with anybody outside of that camp. It was just totally impossible.

Q: And your family? They were all fine?

A: 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 certificate, but now that labor was the only thing that exempted you from deportation, that turned out to be 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, now he knew one of the personalities at the central, at the congregation offices and, in fact, it 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 he was, I mean like in all other things, very close mouthed, but I know he had some work at the Jewish community that may have exempted him for some time. Now, in April of '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 was

in October of '42, or September, I don't know, that her arrest took place. Okay, coming back, my parents were actually arrested in April of '42 and by the Gestapo.

Q: Now, I want to interrupt you for a second. Because on your notes, I see that you said they were imprisoned in December of '42.

A: Yeah, well I'm coming to that.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. Excuse me.

A: 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 here now, 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, so he was, obviously they couldn't take him along, so they put in a phone call and 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 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 weird examples where occasionally they had 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. 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, men pray downstairs and women in the balcony, so they had all of the people for deportation in the balcony and you could see sort of people up wandering around absentmindedly 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 to fill out forms and for interrogation and so on. 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 me our luggage back, their luggage, and then we went back.

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

A: No, I didn't. It didn't occur to me. But maybe that was just my habitual optimism, I don't know. Now 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, circulating and, in fact, since all Jews were also no longer permitted to buy newspapers, by the way, and as we discussed before, also had to turn in 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 a 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 ID's and 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. 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. Oh 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, 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 to fight back against the Nazis. And in the, it was also sort of 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, you know, 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, and the exhibit was apparently quite successful, there was throngs 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 in technical things and so on, so it was a big tragedy, they succeeded in putting in a small fire somehow, the damage was so minimal that the Germans even could keep it out of the newspapers. If it 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 sort 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 found a network of undercover agents 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 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. And if any sabotage by where Jews are involved happens again, they will take 10 times as many people. And that was a horror that immediately spread through this mouth radio, of course, and I knew some of the people involved, incidentally, because it was centered at Siemens, and the Baums 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 the, 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, you know, 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. Alright, this is basically the

atmosphere, now also 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, 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. And, but through my friend Hans Fabisch, whom I mentioned earlier and 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, it has to sort of hurt at a certain point and when the doctor pushes this way it hurts more and that way it hurts less, and so I feigned that and so I received an official sort of a statement, yeah, as a Jew I couldn't just call in, I'm sick today, you had to have a physician certified written statement, you know, that Ernest Fontheim, you know, 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 24th, then I was at home. I want 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 we, 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 from a public phone, as I said we didn't have a 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 sometime 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, all these German laws, these antisemitic laws, did not apply to her, even though she was a Jew, but so anyway, so they had that phone and I called them up, I don't even know why anymore, it 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 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 came, the janitor actually happened to be also a Jew, but lived in a mixed marriage and was protected therefore by, through the Nazi laws. And he came and said I should come up, the people who came for the pickup were actually Jewish orderlies and they go strictly by lists and my name, there were just the names of both parents and my sister. So I went up and there was 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, I don't know, 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 most of the things packed and so did they, but there are some last minute things. My father was not completely out in 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'll never forget, the name was Scheffler. Of course, the Gestapo presumably leased those vans, and inside the vans they had long benches where the Jews that 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 in April, to a former old age home of the Jewish community.

Q: And your sister, your mother and father?

A: 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 Güntzelstrasse and Trautenaustrasse I said goodbye and jumped out the back and that was the last time I saw my parents and my sister on December 24, 1942, Christmas Eve. On the next day our doorbell rang and when I opened, I was surprised to see my former mathematics teacher, Dr. Baer, from the Jewish school. He told me that he was serving as an orderly in the transit camp and had a message from 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 his student for quite a number of years and 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, etcetera. 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, in whom I had been interested at first, lived, 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, aside of the apartment but it belonged to it, which they used for storage, but they said that 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 60's, 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 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 his horror story. The atmosphere was so unbelievably gloomy that it is even hard to describe. I kept in touch with my friend Hans Farbisch, of course, and he actually had met a physician, a Jewish physician whom 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 any more since 1933, but coming from Vienna, she could study until '38. Anyway, she had her medical degree and her name was Valli and they got married in the first week of January, wait a minute, yeah. And Hans and I discussed the possibility maybe of going underground together. But a basic difference of opinion developed between Hans and myself. He, his philosophy was that as long as we were employed at Siemens, we were protected and deferred from deportation. On the other hand, if we went underground and were caught in 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, you know, 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 send us printed invitations or announcements saying now you are 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 is no, that risk we have to take. And there was another point, in fact, which leads me to briefly flash back 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 occupied, 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 a few tens of thousands of Jews, so I, 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 work in defense plants 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 ID's. 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 the 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 on the, 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 the, an organization called Deutsche Arbeitsfront, which means in English, German Labor Front.

End of side one of tape three.

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

A: This organization, the German Labor Front, was the Nazi answer, basically, to labor unions. They had smashed, of course, the labor unions and declared them illegal and also they declared that 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 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 some contact and for roughly the sum of fifteen hundred German Reichsmark, which was the currency at that time, the opportunity, fifteen hundred apiece, of course, to obtain ID's as an employee with the German Labor Front. This was, of course, a very prestigious organization and so, and the ID also contained a passport picture of the person, the obviously name, birthdate, address and so on and then a rubber stamp numbered one, two, three, four, five, 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 what 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 a, some so-called specialists in Jewish emigration 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 they, that the man in charge was a man named Alois Brunner incidentally, his rank was SS Hauptsturmführer. 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 camp 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 windows, even though 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.

Q: How long was your family in that camp?

A: 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, a thousand 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.

The, as I had said earlier, the arrest of my parents took place on December 24th and I guess in order to allow the SS some Christmas vacation from their strenuous activities, no transport went away from Berlin between December 24th and January 12th, so they were there almost three weeks, two and a half weeks.

Q: Were you at work when they left?

A: No, I, 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.

Q: So, where were you when the transport left, did you see this procession?

A: 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, actually considering how primitive it was and that we didn't even have telephones, was incredibly efficient how it went from, these things went from mouth to mouth. Yeah, let me see. During that time, as I said, we, I lived at the, in that maid's room at the apartment of Margot's parents which was really very far away in distance from our apartment where we lived, so every day I went there to pack things, yeah, 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 Gebrüder Zimmermann, which means Brothers Zimmermann. The owner actually was a Mr. Schütt and 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 where we were thrown out, a lot of

furniture stored in his storage place under a different name, and 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 pickup then was supposed to come on January 19th 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, 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 to finish up for the pickup 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 pickup, moving van, was in the Brandenburgische Strasse, that is the street where my friend Hans was living. I think I had mentioned that the pickup of Jews for deportation was done by a furniture van, a furniture moving van, of the firm Scheffler and Brandenburgische Strasse, as I said, was the street where my friend Hans was living, although that was in midmorning 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, it was several blocks away from where our apartment was, and then I turned the corner into Brandenburgische Strasse and saw that

van parked right in front of their house. And it struck me like lightening, I stopped for a few seconds, considering how 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, and they lived, 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. Striem, and the door, Mrs. Striem opened the door, her face looked horrible, as white as even more white than this wall here, like this cuff, 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". Then she repeated, "get away!" And upon 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 and 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 the Jew who lives here still owes me some money which

in that respect 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 will 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 I had 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 off 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, 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 on the corner so 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 toward 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 him the events of the morning and of course, he got very depressed and agitated by that. Anyway, we went then together back, and then when we arrived in front of his house and looked up, there was the. In wartime windows had to be darkened in order not to give away locations to enemy airplanes, but often, I mean not often but 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 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 yet, when the door opened from the inside. And I saw a tall grey 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? 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 as 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, no four years later I guess, left Berlin to emigrate to England. So I left I guess the two best friends that I had in my life, I lost on the same day, on the 18th of January, the only thing is the one who left for England, left for life and he is 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 obviously are 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, 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 I really, who the owner of that ID really was and then come to the apartment and if the moving van is just there, they will immediately find out that this is being picked up, you know, by that firm of Zimmermann and that will lead them to me somehow. So I called up the firm and cancelled the pickup and that was one of the most horrible mistakes of my life. It wasn't the furniture, but it was 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, etcetera, etcetera, 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 this 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, and of course I immediately had to practically move mountains to get another ID. Margot'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. It was a Mrs. Frieda Kunze. 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 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. 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 I didn't, all I knew is that she owned that place, I didn't know, 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, that's a couple and a daughter, could live in that cottage. And she said that, you know, 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, she repeated again that it was 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 that it may be in a very rundown state. So we went out there and it was sort of a settlement, this is a sort of 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 to 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. 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 a 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, obviously, was very primitive, there were two rooms and a sort of a veranda. And we were desperate and 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 and, but I mean, we were aware of that ourselves. Our punishment would have been

Auschwitz if we would have been not careful and would have been discovered and she would have probably also wound up in a concentration camp.

Q: What about the neighbors?

A: Yeah, I'm coming to that. I mean that was just a visit there. So she let it, and she didn't take, she took a small rent, I forgot what it was any more, it may have been on 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 even the, 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. And yeah, okay, so then we, that was agreed upon and then we decided we would move out there as soon as possible, having, you know, we had to settle certain affairs, but 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 I had, the only things I had taken, of course, personal items like clothing along already to the maid's room at Margot's parent's 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 am in 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 back track 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, by basically the German equivalent of the IRS, the Treasury Department. 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 withdraw from the bank account. Obviously, that was all in preparation for confiscation. They wanted to prevent that Jews stash away money. So 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 he 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'll talk about a little bit later. He was a furrier and, in fact, he had the largest, probably the most prominent fur business in Berlin. One of his customers, in fact, was none other than Hermann Göring, 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 Göring called him up in the summer of 1939 telling him, if you want to, 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 know oriental rugs and other valuables to England and they had a son, by the way, and the son also, 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 he, I forgot what the exact amounts of money were, but it was a fairly sizeable 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 sizeable 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 five and ten thousand Deutsche Reichsmark, which was at that time fairly sizeable. 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 ever exchanged, I mean it was all just by word of honor. And when I came to claim part of the money, he told me with a straight face, and in fact, that was at the time that my father was still in the transit camp, and he told me with a straight face that unfortunately my father did not follow his advice to let him keep the money, but he picked the money up about three or

four months ago and he advised my father that was not a good idea, that he should, it would be better for the safety of the money if he would keep the money.

End of side tape three.

Tape 4

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

A: Yeah, I, then had my father asked about that, 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, 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, you know, 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 and 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. We, these plots in these settlements are 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 on, so we decided we, first of all, we have to have a believable story, you know, who we are and so on. So we concocted a whole sort of curriculum vitae for ourselves and the story was, our papers

incidentally were all 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 and so. They were almost total strangers to me, I just met them a few months before, but I had to train myself to address them in the sort of 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, that actually Mr. Hesse found that 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. Okay, 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. Now I, 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 from 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 Militärpass, military pass, with picture, identifying the unit, etcetera, etcetera. If the

person was exempt from military service for whatever reason, then also a military paper with 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 rare and 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 I, 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 pretend to go through the, I would actually go through the pockets of my jacket and pretend to look for the paper and then with surprise on my face 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 will discuss then, was sufficient. I think that also had to do with the fact that I had learned by 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 sort of 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 in this 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, I would stretch out my right arm, say a snappy Heil Hitler, and then I would show my, and such silly little things would make just the right impression and would dispel any, 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 women's coat factory in earlier years, in the '30's, and then when forced labor came, he was actually drafted into a uniform, military uniform factory and had also, even though he was a Jew, a position of sort of a 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. In addition to that of course, he had the ID for 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 day care 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 day care centers. So Margot pretended to work in one of those. But that alone, to have a job, a credible 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 their bicycles then at the railroad station, there were bicycle racks, or they took a postal bus that sort of went down the country road which the village was at certain schedules, I forgot what it was, but not very frequently, I think once an hour or so. And now I went into 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 the 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 around the neighborhood, I simply sort of 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, he and his wife also went into Berlin twice a week to catch up with their and keep contact with their black market sources. Margot herself was, number one, the 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, in 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 air fields in, 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 frequent 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 these people would have to, so if you, 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 the person would then 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 raw material 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 it 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 fear of the air raids. So actually I always felt that was the first time in my life that the Americans came and helped me. So, alright, that was, 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, you know, I mean who I was, 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 and so that became part of our nature, we constantly asked ourselves these questions so that nobody would ever make a slip-up or give some wrong answer or even an answer contradicting somebody or somebody else who said something. And, alright, I should say also by the way, the date that we moved out there, I mentioned earlier was the 30th of January, 1943, 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 the day on which Field Marshall Paulus, commander of German Sixth 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 it 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't last longer than next summer, meaning the summer of '43. I think it was that optimism that made us keep going. We would have, if we would have known it would last another over two years, I don't know whether, what we would have, I guess we had no other choice anyway, but it kept our spirits up. Yeah, then the food situation. As I had mentioned earlier also, food was rationed, the ration coupons were given out to people who were registered with the police, see, the food rationing offices 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 been 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, they were all kinds of people. First of all, fellow underground Jews, you know 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 a sausage from somebody else who had that source. And so there was, we knew of 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 house maid 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 meats. 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, we had lived, 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 us whatever she felt like up and charged me just the regular amount of money for these items, which were all under price control. She could have, I should have said earlier, on the black market roughly the price of food was 10 times the regular price control price, it varied a little bit, it also depend 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 that was, in the long run, that was 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 condemns you to stay at home, so we solved that problem with him. And then we had various other, I mean 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 of my father that I talked about earlier.

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

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

Q: What about people you ran across, like old family friends?

A: Yeah, I mean, Berlin was a city at that time still close to five million people, in a sense even though New York is much bigger, it is also similar in the sense that you don't run into people. Yeah, 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'll discuss that a little bit later, where sort of Jews were sort of quote, known to be often and we tried to avoid these areas also. But there is a possibility, I mean there was a possibility and you didn't trust anyone at all.

Q: What about in this village where you were living?

A: Yeah, okay, in the village, okay, that was a, 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, you know, 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. He, I mean Margot's father, was a very good accordion player and he played often and I guess in those cottages the walls are thin anyway, somehow that became known that he plays the accordion and that Nazi, his name was Harry Gladenik, a very nice charming fellow, you know. In spite of the fact that he was a rabid Nazi. He came over and said he heard that here someone plays the 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 sort of 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 there, 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 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.

Q: And when you went to these parties you felt comfortable?

A: 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, you know, that I was able to put up such a front and, I mean this whole, in the beginning I changed, 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 something that wasn't the case and fooling all of the enemies.

Q: But there certainly is an element of risk there. Yes?

A: What element of risk was there anyway? I mean, 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 there.

Q: Did anybody there know of your situation other than the person whose house it was?

A: No. Yeah, and she wasn't really known too well. She had just bought it a year before and was a few times, so yeah, she obviously knew us, but no, nobody else knew us.

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

A: 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 and in the city it was even more complicated than in the country where we were because the janitors of buildings sort of had, they 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 had to fill out. And if somebody, you know, regularly comes by, the janitor is supposed to watch out so they were somewhat like spies also, they're supposed to notice that 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, and actually he was, 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 you know, that would have sort of destroyed the whole arrangement. And during wartime, incidentally, the fire department, and that was made known also, did never, never did anything to protect or put out fires in ordinary apartment houses because they were needed for more important objects, you know, 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 in I don't know, whatever he did, that anyway, the local party organization gave him

a special sort of order of merit that people got for going out of their way and beyond the call of duty in putting out the fire, which they did.

Q: 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.

A: 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, in other words, with any attempt even at sabotage. We were totally devoted to only surviving and not being caught. I mean sabotage would have endangered us even more.

Q: But what about access to information?

A: 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 sort of 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, one, 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.

End of side one of tape four.

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

A: 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 the Jewish house. It was still,

you know, we had running water, we had running toilet, water toilets, even running hot water, central heating and all these amenities. And suddenly from one day to the next, transformed, transferred into that primitive cottage, was a tremendous, I don't know if culture shock as far as the wrong word, sort of a 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 you had to do all kinds of shenanigans to unfreeze the pump, like pouring hot water through a priming hole. We had, of course 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 we had to buy petroleum on the black market to run the one petroleum lamp and also had candles for 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 sort of return to nature and so that we really appreciate what is heat. Heat is not just some pipes that radiate heat, but in our case, wood had to be cut with an ax and was 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 that time I was very romantic about all of this and thought that was a great thing that was happening to me that I was returning to nature in some form. Okay, 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, you know, a fixed sum of money sort of would shrink in purchasing power over the years

and I wanted to avoid that. So, the money which I had with that former client furrier, client of my father, I decided to invest in something that would keep its value at least for, or would increase with inflation, thereby keeping its purchasing power. And through a friend I had the opportunity to buy a women's sort of evening handbag made out of sort of high carat gold and platinum, little elements sort of like in a chain. And for that handbag I paid twelve thousand Reichsmark and then I gave it back to the furrier because I didn't want to have it for fear, you know, something happens 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 anyway some workers and if I came, he would feed me for that 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 that estate, he had actually three workers already. One was a Polish couple, they were real peasants and in fact he detailed me sort of to that Polish guy and he told me what to do. And his wife was I think sort of a cleaning woman in his 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. As I said earlier, he supplied Göring 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, you know, people for their own back yards 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 German, the system under the Nazis was shot through with

corruption and anyone could get anything he wanted. I mean, incidentally, the film Schindler's List is an excellent example how Schindler, even in Auschwitz with a number of diamonds, gets his workers out of the concentration camp again. So I went, as I said, I went there once a week and worked under the supervision of that 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 with 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 antisemitic 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 sort of 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 a 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 plan somewhere to illegally slaughter a pig and sell it off right away. And he asked me, he had to, 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 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 day, 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 under, other underground Jewish friend of mine whom I had mentioned earlier, Heinz Jacobius, who you know also did all kinds of things in the underground, he even, he had some sort of a line, I didn't know what it was, 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 here, 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 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 that, about two weeks later or so, that a torso with the head missing and the hands missing and these would be the identifiers, the hands, because of fingerprints and obviously the head because of the facial features, was found floating in the river. Oh yeah, and it was, 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 you know, 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 re-forged into a different name or a different picture, and maybe other things that were of value to those guys, so the opinion among people who knew him and the circumstances was that he 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.

Q: Let me ask you something. Since you have mentioned a few minutes ago that most people who were arrested went initially to the transit camp.

A: Yeah.

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

A: No, actually, no that's a good question. The Germans somehow abhor sort of random violence. In fact the Kristallnacht even, which was a case of random violence, was criticized within the Nazi circles very much and in fact actually, at a ministerial meeting, a cabinet meeting two days afterwards, Göring 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 was a glass that was not even made in Germany, they had to buy it in Belgium, that means they had to use foreign exchange and then Göring turned to Goebbels and said, you could have, 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, so they are, 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. . .

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

A: No. I mean, if you did something wrong, yeah, I mean, they had a bunker there which was a sort of a nickname for a 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 sort of randomly like you saw in the film 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 whom one hadn't seen for a long time, the initial reaction was always to be suspicious. I'm coming now probably to the saddest chapter of the underground, and these are the Jewish catchers or spies. The Gestapo kept a sort of 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. The transit camp was shifted to the Jewish hospital of Berlin, which was then the last place, I mean sort of Jewish owned building in the city. And a 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 Jews, 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 had then been caught and 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. She worked part of the time that I was at Siemens, she also worked for Siemens. At that time, she was married to a man whose last name was Kübler, so then her name was Stella Kübler. 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. She, at Siemens 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 '30's was a boy named Klaus Goldschlag, in fact I remembered him very well, he was the 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, 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 her, I don't think she had any, to my knowledge, any intellectual interests or music interests and the circles that I sort of 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 is a lot of pedestrian traffic, you know, 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 would, 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 wouldn't be recognizable that way. So one day I was walking down a 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 I, obviously I didn't want to take a chance, you know, to get closer to her. I immediately decided turning around and 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, I remember it was a green grocer, so he had potatoes, vegetables, things like that. And I turned my back to the window and pretending to look at various items in the store. For awhile 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 sort of 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 death of many people. Now, she was after the war then tried in a German court, well 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 that for her to be put away. And then the Germans meticulously said, well, a person cannot be tried for the same crime twice, but there were in the meantime, many other arrests that she made which had not been covered by the Soviet trial and so 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 something, that is some of the worst, 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.

Q: Let me ask you a few questions here. Were you, do you think that while you were working together at Siemens that she was involved in this kind of activity?

A: No, not at all.

Q: It was later?

A: It was later, yeah.

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

A: 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, they 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 arrested a whole family of, a sort of middle aged couple and a teenage

son or something. You know, 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 that grabbed that person.

Q: You knew her a little bit, what motivated her to do such evil things? What was it about her, what was she like?

A: What was about her was self preservation, I mean that's how she survived the war, I mean by having others killed. Now, 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 that 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 or 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, that was the only, instead of to Auschwitz, but they were then transferred later to Auschwitz. I mean, the parents are sort of a tragic thing, 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 he refused, 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 while the train rolled, they started to saw, you know, they, 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.

Q: Were there a great number of these catchers?

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

Q: But you knew of others?

A: 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 stay just at that one point all the time. So we decided we ought to look for a sort of substitute place in case we have 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 sort of half way Berlin, between Berlin and Potsdam, a suburb which used to be the summer residence of Prussian kings. And she was, 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 servants quarters somewhere and I discussed with her, you know, 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 a sort 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 decided, we knew when the bus was coming and that 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 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 know you go through the revolving door and then you walk in. She instead of walking in, right away revolved back out and, you know, that immediately rang a bell. So I didn't ask any questions and Margot not either. We immediately revolved out and then the mother said that there was a couple sitting that she knew, they are Jews, she don't know, she doesn't know, you 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 sort of 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, you know, that he was in hiding. He should have been mistrustful of me as I would have been of him. Anyway, he sort of implored us to come back and we just refused and as an excuse we gave that we 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. Yeah, 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 sort of speeded up but never made it. But as the bus passed us, in those days busses 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 in that bus. So then it was obvious that he was trying to follow us and was 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 the, this country road and 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 if we walked, that was walking east from there, just through forests, I mean it may have been several miles, we would come to a suburban sort of commuter line where we could catch a train because we were sure that if we would take the next bus, he would have alerted police at the next suburban station for that line which was actually Wannsee. And so that's what we did. We walked for hours through the forest roughly sort of 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 sort of dead wood branches from the forest around that village there. And for that, even for that one needed a official permission of the Forestry Department. I still have that, it's sort of almost like a joke, it permits the bearer, Günther Hesse, that 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 sort of 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 and 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 he, 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, you know, a kind of offense was 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. So, 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 him 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 will 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 sort of understanding for that. And if he can do something about it, you know, we will 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, you know, cited for that offense of taking live branches. 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 sort of 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 to be x-rayed in case the bone was damaged. So one of the neighbors who had a car drove me to the nearest hospital and then there was, of course, first we are 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.

End of tape four.

Tape 5

Q: This is tape number five, side A of an interview with Ernest Fontheim on March 13, 1997, the interviewer is Randy Goldman.

A: So all that needed to be done was to sew up the wound and send me home, I thought. But Margot'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, I mean Margot'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% give-away 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 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 demands 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 30's, I was just 20 or 21 then, and he lived with his girlfriend, Bella Ritter. His name was Albert Marck. And Bella Ritter'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. Of course 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 did 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 whether 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 a 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 in 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. It was a big tragedy actually because what happened she told, 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 that 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 will 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. 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 is a jeweler and I needed some money from that furrier where I had converted all of the money into that ladies 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 were 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 that was just incredible. And as I found out shortly thereafter, she didn't. The problem was Stella Goldschlag. It turned out 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.

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

A: 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, she was, everybody knew her by name at least, there is 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 outerwear, coats or whatever they had, they were just like that taken to various transit camps that had been readied for that because the regular transit camp, obviously, wouldn't have taken the thousands and thousands of people. And then they were shipped out in a series of transports in the first week of March, 1943. 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 sort 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 on that day. And then they went underground and then sometime later, she was caught, actually by another catcher for the Gestapo.

Q: 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?

A: That is all explained, 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, you know, many of the sort of restitution measures that were then taken or given to the Jews. And she, I mean that was an unbelievable act of naïveté, 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. It is true 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 crematoria 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 I want in the strongest terms, in moral terms, to make a strong difference between her actions and the actions of the orderlies who had that tragic task to pick up Jews for deportation.

Beginning Tape Six, Side A

Question: This is a continuation of an interview with Ernest Fontheim, on June fourth, 1997. This is tape one, side A. For the record, why don't we begin again with your stating your name, date of birth and city of birth, if you don't mind.

Answer: Well, my name is, my full name is Ernest Gundolf Fontheim. I was born on October 23, 1922, in Berlin, Germany. I might add that my father was a lawyer, he was born in 1881, so he was already over 40 years old when I was born and he was one of the best known lawyers in Berlin. And I grew up in a -- very comfortably and in a very assimilated home, assimilated to German culture and with very little awareness of my Judaism.

Q: Okay. Do you want to pick up where we left off before?

A: Yeah. I would -- I would like to say that the transition from -- to the life underground, underground meaning simply with forged papers and under a different identity, meant of course for me also, a radical transition in family. My parents had just been arrested and deported and now I am living -- I was living with a completely different family and the family atmosphere was totally different. While my parents were both actually highly educated and very intellectual, the family of Margaret and her parents, family Haas, were on the other hand -- I mean Mr. Haas was a -- a tailor and designer of women's clothes and -- and actually had owned a factory be -- until the Nazis took it away from him. He was a man who was much more folksy than my parents, had a tremendous sense of humor and was a very warm person. And of course there were frictions now and then. I guess that is always unavoidable, but in -- in general, I felt comfortable and of course also grateful that I was accepted, practically as a family member by this new family. Also, another big difference was the age difference. As I said, my father was actually quite old and for a boy of my age -- I mean, my mother was 10 years younger than he, but Margaret's parents were, they were both of the same age, 20 years younger than my father and 10 years younger than my mother and I think that also made a difference in -- in the relationship.

Q: What kind of difference are we talking about in terms of your rapport with them?

A: In -- in, to some extent, in terms of rapport and then also in -- in terms of how they took life. I mean also, I have to say that my fa -- my parents had gone through unbelievable agony, I mean starting in 1933. Probably to some extent, they took it much harder. They surely lost much more, because they had more to lose. They were, in those 10 years, starting in 1933, they were robbed of all of their possessions, everything that my father had worked for and also their social standing and everything had been taken away from them. And by the time that the deportation started, they were totally devastated and -- and the atmosphere therefore at home, also was

always -- ho-how can I describe it? I mean morbid, maybe and -- and -- and just extremely ne-negative. While, in -- in spite of all the hardships, Margaret's parents, first of all because they were younger and secondly because, I guess, they didn't go quite through the same amount of tremendous radical turmoil and change, had retained their sense of humor and also their, sort of some sense of ad-adventurism and -- and so on. And I-I-I think to that extent, I-I felt comfortable there, in spite of the fact that the lot of my parents and my sister continued to be a -- a tremendous weight, I mean I-I -- by that time of course, I always hoped that they'll be in some camp and -- which will be liberated at some point in the future.

Q: So you have -- it was -- it was a more fun atmosphere?

A: Well, funner -- well yeah, I mean to some extent that is also true, we -- for example, we -- we had brought along a -- a phonograph player, we played records, both classical as well as dance music. I didn't know how to dance and so Margaret, who was an excellent or is still -- is an excellent dancer, taught me how to dance and -- and -- and yeah, as I said, ther-there was a certain amount of -- of -- of -- of humor and -- and -- and also light-heartedness. And of course, that went together with the fact that I and none of us, in fact, was wearing the yellow star any more, which made us outcasts. We felt sort of, at least I felt liberated by that and I mean all of that contributed to a -- to a -- a more positive mental outlook. In addition, I want to say that we tried to keep as much as possible, the Jewish holidays. I don't remember any more, how we even knew the dates, we surely didn't have any Jewish calendars, there were none printed in Germany. But we did know, for example, when Yom Kippur was and we fasted on it. We did know when Pesach, the date was and we even kept the ornamental Seder. Margaret's father, who was in general an excellent cook and -- and baker, baked some approximation of a matzo, which we ate and of course we didn't even have a Haggadah, but we talked about the exodus from Egypt, just

from out of our memory. I did have a handwritten copy of the Kiddush and so every Friday evening, we lit candles and made Kiddush. If we didn't have wine, we used some other liquid, whatever came handy, even if it had to be water. And -- and if we didn't have two candles, we cu-cut one candle into two. And I derived a lot of strength, I think from the -- the fact, I mean, of the Jewish religion and that was actually one important pillar of -- of strength I had. Looking back, there were three pillars of strength. One was my Judaism, the second was my unshakable trust in the future. I had almost certainty that Germany would lose the war, even at a time when Germany was -- still seemed to be winning. And in fact I had taken along some books. I had already decided to study physics later. I took a book for self teaching of calculus along, which I worked through from cover to cover in those years. And I had a physics book, which I studied. Every week I located some time to do that. And -- and in addition to that, by the way, we -- there was in -- in a local, bigger town, there was a public library, which we joined, of course, under our assumed names and so we checked books out, novels and other things and -- and I already said that we played music, so we -- we tried to maintain as normal an atmosphere a-as possible. So -- and -- and incidentally, I -- and in fact, none of the four of us ever had the intention, after the end of the war, to stay one day longer in Germany than absolutely necessary and we had, at that time already, always dreamt about coming to America. That was sort of a dream, like -- almost like a castle in the sky. And so it -- it was the Judaism and my trust in the future are the two. The third pillar of strength was actually Margaret, as I had indicated earlier, I had at one time, in -- in the -- during -- while we -- while we were still working at the factory at Zeemens, started to fall in love with Margot, only to hear that she had a -- a -- a steady boyfriend, but by that time, I-I-I forgot what happened to the boyfriend, I think he also went underground, actually and anyway, he -- he was not available and there was no contact and so my interest in Margot

was of course rekindled and at that time, finally, it was reciprocated. And -- and actually she was the person really closest to me and -- who gave me much of the inner strength also. She was sort of the third leg in that -- what -- what kept me going, emotionally I mean, mentally going. I should also say that, one thing that I was not aware of at that time, but that -- was the arrest of my friend Huntz, which I had mentioned earlier. All people that I had known in my earlier life, were gone. Some of them of course had emigrated, the rest had been deported. There was nobody from my immediate family, my first girlfriend, school friends, factory friends, you name it. Relatives, there was nobody. I-I was totally alone in the world and the funny thing is, or the strange thing is that I was totally unaware of it at that time. It occurred only years after the end of the war, when I sort of went through my memory, it occurred to me that's what actually was the case. And -- and she was the only one who was close to me and who -- who, as I said, who sustained me. Then I-I had talked about the primitive nature of the house we lived in, that -- house is probably a -- a euphemism, maybe a cottage or a hut. I had mentioned the pump in the garden, what I didn't say is, people might assume it was an electric pump, it wasn't, it was a hand pump and you had to work very hard to get water up, pumping it and as I also mentioned, in -- in winter sometimes it froze. The hut itself was built of wooden boards with -- with fairly wide slits of what I would say an eighth of an inch or so and that made it, obviously, very uncomfortable in winter. Through our Nazi friend, whom I had also mentioned before, we had -- we made contact to people where one could get building material. Building material of course, were severely rationed and practically impossible to get and we got sort of insulation plates and eve-even nails were hard to get and so we co-completely insulated the house from the inside with sort of, some plastic type material. I don't know what it is any more. And -- and we got all that material really, through his connections. Then one day during our stay there, suddenly the local

village policeman came and fortunately while I was out of the house. I was probably in Berlin and he said he wanted to find out who was living there and asked Margaret's father all kinds of questions, where he worked and he wanted to see the ID, which he showed him and -- and where everybody else worked and whatever other questions. And then -- and he was fairly -- he wasn't outright unfriendly, but -- but very business-like, which is in -- in -- in a rural setting in that village is really unusual. People were sort of more like a family there. And at the end he said, “Well, I hear there's a young man living here also.” And then Mr. Haas said, “Yes, that's my nephew and his name so and so, Gunther Hessem,” that was my assumed false name. And the policeman then said, “Well, I want to ask him some questions. When --” Yeah, and he was also told that I'm working in a factory and then he asked when I am home and he was told I'll be back on -- on the weekend and he said then, “Well, tell him I'll be here next Saturday,” I forgot, probably 10 or whatever in the morning, “and I want to ask him some questions.” And -- and then he left and -- and we felt very threatened by that and -- and of course I was the most vulnerable because I was of military age and I did not have, as I explained earlier, the complete set of required papers, so Margaret's father went immediately to our Nazi district leader friend and complained bitterly about it, said that the village policeman, I remember his name, even. His name was Mueller, good German name, had come and -- and interrogated him, almost like a criminal and he felt very indignant. After all, he is an honest, honorable citizen and so on. And Harry, the -- the Nazi's name, said, “Oh, don't worry about it Herman, he is a good friend of mine, I'll take care of it.” And a few days later, Harry came, paid us a visit and said, “Mueller isn't going to come any more here. I had a beer with him yesterday at the village pub and I told him that you guys are good friends of mine and I've known you for years and you're honest, honorable people and there was no reason to.” And we never saw Mueller again. So, unwittingly,

the guy po-possibly might have saved our lives. I had once a close brush with arrest in Berlin. As I mentioned, also earlier, the trips to Berlin were necessary to keep up with our black market contacts and -- and to get food. And I should say also, by the way, that most of the food was obtained by Margaret's father and his wife, they had of course many more contacts. They had lived longer, they knew more people and -- but I had a number of people also, that I visited usually once a week, sometimes twice a week. So, and I was always extremely careful. I think I mentioned some of the strategies already that I used to avoid detection. And when I was riding in the subway, I always rode -- sat on -- on the bench, sort of midway between the doors, which are -- were on either end. So -- and -- and watching the people who would enter and if somebody would enter whom I suspected or even knew, on the door to the right, I would get up and leave to the left. Not that it ever came, but at least that was my strategy. Well, on -- on that particular day, it was rush hour and I entered the train at the Wittenburg Platz station, in Witten, in the part of -- the busiest part of the western Berlin business district and since it was rush hour, the train was packed with people, of course and I never got to the center, I just was sort of next to the entrance door where I entered, sort of squeezed in between people. And as I stood there, as the train rumbled and rumbled along -- and incidentally, after Wittenburg Platz, the train emerged from a tunnel and became then an elevator train. I saw a chubby, short man next to me, say thank you to a soldier who was also standing next to him, handing back his ID, and I immediately knew that was a -- some sort of a secret policeman. And by that time it was obviously first of all, I couldn't get out of the train and if I would have made one move, that would have even arranged -- aroused suspicion. So I just looked into the air, trying to look as harmless and innocent as I could, but the guy sort of swung around and fixated me with his eyes and said, “Your papers, please.” And he made me very ma -- nervous. I had been controlled, I must say, several times

before and usually it went very -- people looked at my ID and I greeted them with a snappy Heil Hitler and that -- that's the job. Well, he looked at my ID and I -- the more he looked, the more I noticed he must have been a real professional. He -- he looked back between me and the picture, and it was of course my picture. Then he tried to lift the picture up to see how it was fastened to the material of the ID and asked me one or two questions and I got so unbelievably nervous that I noticed that my artery in my neck started really to pump very hard and that was something that I couldn't control, but he must have noticed that. And -- and because he -- he constantly gave me sharp looks and then I was already expected to be arrested or at least taken along for further interrogation. Instead he handed me the paper back and said, “Thank you.” And I had the distinct feeling that guy wasn't satisfied and the reason why he didn't arrest me is he had decided it might be smarter to follow me, because I might lead him somewhere, where he could get maybe a bigger catch, or something. So -- a-and at the next stop, which then, as I said was an elevated stop, Nolendorf Platz, he left the tra -- he left the car. And I decided immediately, that guy didn't leave. There are two possibilities. Either he had another man with him, whom I didn't know who it was, whom he might give him -- have given some wink to follow me, or he would just have gone to the next car and wait where I would leave. So I quickly, in my mind, made a plan of how to shake off either him, or somebody whom I may not even know. And the next stop was Buellerstrasser, was one of the busiest intersections in -- in Berlin. Buellerstrasser, corner Putstamastrasser. And I-I left the car then and walked down and the stairs from the elevated ended in a median strip between the two lanes of traffic, you know, going one way and one side and the opposite way in the other side. And at the bottom of the stairs, I-I knew the area like my own pockets. At the bottom of the stairs was a newspaper kiosk. So my plan was, and that's what I did, I stopped at the newspaper kiosk and pretended t-to read newspapers and headlines and so

on, while out of my -- the corner of my right eye, I peered up, who was coming down the stairs and I figured that if so -- if somebody whom I didn't know was going to follow me, that person would sort of linger around and I could sort of make out who it was. Was the guy himself, of course I would know and lo and behold, I had hardly stopped and started looking at the newspaper, when I saw that guy come down. So he obviously did what I had suspected. He was in another car and waited for me to leave. So I ignored him and just kept reading the newspapers and that was probably not part of his plan. Because he had to follow me surreptitiously and if he had lingered around there, I would have been aware of it. So he didn't He stayed, I don't know, maybe 10, 20 seconds or so and then he crossed over to one side and that was exactly what I had anticipated. I should say also, there was a traffic light at that corner of Buellerstrasser and Putstamastrasser. So, once he crossed over to one side, I waited for the light to be such that traffic was going and then I made my way, sprinted between cars, to the opposite side, so that there were now two lanes of moving traffic between him and me. And then I walked along, not to -- to the busy street, which was Putstamastrasser, but to the next block, which was a -- sort of a residential street, with very few people only walking there. And -- but I-I -- in order not to arouse suspicion, I didn't run, I just walked briskly, the way one walks purposefully in a city, if one goes after some appointment or so. And as soon as I had turned the corner, I raced as fast as I could and it was about 100 meter dash to the next corner and there I looked around and I saw that guy come around also, following me. Then I-I walked, I-I turned again the corner and came back at a different block of Putstamastrasser, see that busy street, jumped on a moving trolley car. In those days, trolley cars had rear platforms, without a door, so you could, just by grabbing the handlebars and jumping on, you could even jump o-on a -- a car, while it was -- they -- they -- they didn't go very fast. While it was in the middle of -- of riding, driving. And -- in this way I

shook that guy off. I am still convinced that -- that he had some suspicion, that he was not -- my paper was not that perfect. I should also say that, over the -- by that time, though, we are into 1944 and many of my friends and acquaintances, who had gone underground, or had -- one after another had been caught by the Gestapo. I mentioned that cousin of mine, who had gone to Bavaria and -- and his girlfriend. There were various schoolmates from my high school class who got caught. Then that other friend, Galcoun, who wasn't caught, but who was murdered. And -- and of course that -- that had an effect on -- on our, you know, mental outlook obviously and -- but I guess there's a -- there's a German saying which sounds very cruel, but it was really the case in our case, it's veba graba forwards, it means, "You walk forward over graves." And that's -- that was all the time what happened to us. We -- we lost a tremendous number of friends. Some of them came back, but most did not. During that period of time, of course, also the military situation changed more and more against Germany and that gave us a tremendous morale boost. I mean, by that time, in the 1943, Italy had already capitulated and -- and then in early '44, there were continuous rumors of a landing of the Allied Forces, somewhere in France. And that happened finally, on June 6, 1944. I still remember the -- the day distinctly. Of course we didn't have any radio in our hut, so we didn't know anything, but Margaret's parents were in the city, in Berlin on that day, on -- on their various errands to contact black market sources. And they had bought extra editions of newspapers, so when they arrived out, in -- in -- in -- in our house, in our cottage in -- in the evening, they came with the news that the Allied had landed in the Normandy and for Margaret, that was such a shock of joy that she broke out into tears. I-I-I never forget that. And -- and we were just unbelievably happy. Of course, a-as the Allies then continued to make progress, and yeah, I should say also, incidentally, on the eastern front, the successes were tremendous. Even before that, in -- in 1943, I think the biggest attack battle of all

time took place in the area of Koosk and Orwell, in the western Soviet Union and where Germany suffered a decisive defeat. And by that time, by 1944, when the allies landed in the -- the western allies landed in the Normandy, the Russians had already taken Warsaw and from both sides, the allies were approaching finally, German territory. And, so one response of the Nazi's was to create a new unit called folkshdum, best translated as “militia.” And all Germans who were not -- all German males, I should say, between 16 and 60, who were not in the armed forces, were immediately conscripted into that folkshdum. And the conscription, since they didn't want to create a new bureaucracy, was -- the task of conscription was given to the Nazi party organization, which was already an existing organization with offices and so on. And -- but now it became necessary to have ideas, because if you're not in the Vairmarkt, in the armed forces or any of its branches, you had to be in the folkshdum. It's was either one or the other. So fortunately, Margaret's father had a -- a colleague from earlier days, also a Jewish colleague, I mean, from the garment line, who was underground and he had access to blank ID's f-for the folkshdum. And -- but what he couldn't supply was the -- the -- the rubber stamp, it -- it was stamped by the Nazi party district, in which one was mustered in-into the folkshdum. And then I remembered that I knew a stamp maker. So I went to -- and -- and he knew me only, also under my forged, I mean assumed name, not who I really was. And of course for stamp makers it was strictly forbidden to make official stamps because they can be used then for all kinds of purposes -- illegal purposes. So I went to him and told him a long story, the story basically was that my uncle was working in a local party district, registering folkshdum members and that in the -- in the crush and the busy work there, somehow the stamp got lost. He thinks it may have fallen off the table into a wastebasket and then empty out, but -- but he simply didn't know what happened to it and he reported it immediately to the local -- to his boss, the district leader and the district

leader was very unhappy about that and said if that got into the wrong hands, you know, anything can be done with forgeries and he holds him personally responsible, he better look within two days, if he doesn't -- if he has not found the stamp, then he has to face consequences. So -- a-and of course the consequences in those days usually were that the party would fire him and then he would be immediately subject to military induction and be shipped to the eastern front. And so I told that stamp maker, then finally said I would like to have that stamp within a day. I -- I can give him, first of all, the actual cost, whatever it is. In addition to that, 300 cigarettes, 100 immediately and 200 when I get the stamp. And in those days, cigarettes were -- were almost worth their weight in gold. And so the guy agreed. I had the stamp within -- less than two -- two days. And then Margaret's father went back to his friend and they made a deal that he would give us, free of charge, two of folkshdum membership blanks and we in turn would stamp his own with the party stamp that we had, also free of charge for itwasa. And so -- so that's what happened and of course, women didn't need a -- an ID as I said, because only males were inducted into the folkshdum militia. So -- so we had, in fact I still have my folkshdum ID. And -- and to have that ID was actually terrific because that obviated the need for any military papers, because only people who were not in the armed forces were inducted into the folkshdum. And since -- and the party, of course, had all of that background material. So, by being in the folkshdum, that automatically implied that the military status of that person was okay, whatever it was. And -- and also, of course, as the situation became more desperate for the Nazis, there were more and more ID checks on the streets, I mean they were looking first of all for German deserters. They were looking for allied spies, they were looking for -- you know they had millions of foreign workers in Germany also, they had been forcibly deported to work in the armaments industry. And many of those were on the loose, they just ran away. So, anyway, the

thing was that having that paper, I'm sure saved my life, because I was then frequently controlled, particularly by military police. Now, on the other hand, as the situation worsened, it also became more and more difficult to get food. I-I-I should say where -- what with black market food prices, I believe I mistakenly said in an earlier interview here, that the black market prices were 10 times regular prices. That -- I have to take that back, it-it's closer to 100 times. In other words, any, say pound of meat or whatever, was -- which whose price may have been one mark regularly bought in a store with food ration stamps, would be 100 mark on the black market. But, because of increasing shortages, because Germany of course, used to get a lot of its food from the occupied areas and they were no longer occupying them, obviously the scarcity grew higher and as the supply dwindled and the demand either stayed the same or increased, obviously the price increased. So, just at that point, that problem was solved for us. What happened was -- was that on a d -- on one day, I was also in Berlin, using the -- the subway and as I sat there, a girl -- I mean young woman actually, a year or two older than I, whom I had known from before, in fact she was a counselor in a vacation camp that I went to in the 1930's, in the mid '30's and then later I met her again at Zeemans, where she was also a forced laborer. And she approached me and said, "Oh hi, how are you," and that, "I'm so happy to see you." But since one didn't trust anyone whom one hadn't seen continuously, I said, "Well, my name isn't Fontheim." And -- and then she said, "Well, don't you have a smaller sister?" I said, "No," and I gave her some fictitious name, say like my name is Irige Billow and I only have an older brother. And she sort of left the train puzzled. And -- and at that point I decided she is obviously not working for the Gestapo because she wouldn't be put off by such a rude, crude lie. Okay, but anyway, about a week or two later, I ran into her again on the same sort of line of the subway where I met her the first time and then I admitted that -- that her memory was really correct and

then she said, “Oh, that's marvelous,” and “let's sit down at a cafe and -- and then have a little talk.” And I said, “That's a great idea, but I don't have any food ration coupons” And in restaurants and cafes, you also had to pay, obviously, the price in mark, but in addition, which was much more important, give the food coupons, equivalent for whatever you were ordering, what -- even if it was just a piece of cake. And she said, “Och, d-d-don't bother, I invite you.” So okay, so since I was always hungry, I fo -- I accepted the invitation, so we sat down in a cafe and talked. Of course I have to say that I didn't tell her a thing, where I was actually living, we were just talking sort of in general terms and -- and then she said -- yeah, I mean I-I asked her whether I couldn't pay for the stamps, coupons that she used on me, she said no, she didn't pay for hers either and in fact she'll show me how to get them free of charge and all one had to do is find out where the last air raid -- there were daily air raids now. Where the last air raid was centered at. And that was easy, that spread through Berlin like fire, the news, you know, last night this district was hit or that district. So we went to where last night --

Q: Finish your sentence.

A: Oh, where last night the -- the allies had bombed, and looked up a house that was destroyed.

End of Tape Six, Side A

Beginning Tape Six, Side B

Q: This is tape one, side B of a continued interview with Ernest Fontheim, on June fourth, 1997.

A: So we arrived at the part of town where last night's air raid had done the most of the damage and then my friend -- her name by the way is Ursula, she said, “What we need to do is first of all, write down the address of a house that's completely destroyed, or at least remember and note it down.” So, that's what we did. And then the German, sort of air raid support system was, by years of experience, of course very well organized. Each house had -- I mean the -- the -- the

people who lived in -- in each house knew exactly where to go if that house became destroyed. It was usually a public -- usually a school nearby, sometimes a church or some such public building. So -- and that was posted also in the -- near the building. So we -- after noting the address of the place, of the house that was destroyed -- of course that was just one of many houses, and also discovering where to go for further support, we went there and of course that was a school, I remember and it was in the main auditorium and the place was mobbed with people who had been bombed out the previous night. Some with some of their belongings still saved and others with nothing. And there were -- and the place was run again by a subsidiary of the Nazi party organization. And -- and then I-I stuck with her and we -- first of all registered at a desk where a man in full Nazi party regalia was sitting. And she would give some fictitious name and that address and saying that she lost all of her belongings, including even her papers. And so they immediately did two things. They gave a person a temporary ID, identifying that person as a bombed out person and also asking then all agencies of the government to sort of give any support possible. And for people who had lost their food ration cards, they -- oh no, wait a minute. I-I'm sorry, I take that back. They did not hand out any food ration. They simply noted down the -- listed the person as totally bombed out and then they supplied people with sandwiches and cigarettes and if they needed, also an overnight, a simple cot, although people were urged, if possible, to move in with friends or relatives, but those who didn't have either, could also stay overnight there. So, of course I followed her example, gave a differ -- I did not give my name that I had adopted on my papers, I didn't want that to appear there. So I chose just some arbitrary name that came to my mind, but the same address and I also got an ID, identifying me as bombed out. Now the point was, with that ID, one could go then to any food rationing office and get a set of food ration cards. And the idea of course was, you couldn't do it

in the same district where the building was located because they had, of course, a complete card catalog of people who were living in that district and -- and of course neither one of these people even existed. But with the bombed out ID, one -- any other food ration office -- suppose one moved to a different part of Berlin than was required to hand out a -- a set of food ration cards. And of course, in another district, they wouldn't have the set of -- of you know, registered people living in that district. Comes to my mind, I'm glad that the tech -- to -- that today's technology didn't exist in those days, because today all they would have to do is, on a computer, access a database and look up anyone from any other di-district. But fortunately the Nazis didn't have that capability yet, otherwise they would have used it. So what we did is we took them -- the subway to a different part of Berlin. Went there, got our set of food ration cards and then took off. And that was now the first set and I enjoyed that game so much, I-I should add also, by the way, that the sandwiches they handed out were terrific. I had not had such good sa-salami sandwiches in -- in years, in fact. And that alone was even worth it. So I start practically every time when I was in Berlin, since there were daily air raids, there was -- there were every -- every day there were houses destroyed the preceding night, so all one had to do was sort of ask and find out in what part of the city, to go there, look up an address of a destroyed, I mean house from the -- from last night and then go to the local sort of air raid support facility, where people were helped with their fi-first needs and so on, get another ID. And -- and so I kept doing that and finally at the height of the thing, I got -- I-- I got food ration stamps for 16 people, without paying a penny for it. So we could just go into stores and -- and buy food at the regular price-controlled prices, which was peanuts. And -- and that obviously was a tremendous help also in our -- our, you know, for our budget.

Q: Wasn't there any chance that there was going to be duplication?

A: Yeah, I mean -- I-I am sure that these card officers, foo-food coupon officers where I went under an assumed name then would forward my name and -- and this address that I gave to the food office in that district and then within days they would find out that person never existed there, and -- but by that time I was gone and when you -- the food ration coupons themselves didn't have a name of a person on it. So you could -- you didn't have to be afraid that they knew already that this was, the whole thing was a fake. I mean, I-I could use the stamps without being afraid to be identified. It was a marvelous thing. And yeah, also of course, the continuous air raids -- by the way, the air raids started I should say, really to become severe and shortly after we moved there, I think I discussed that even, that helped us in -- in -- in our fictitious story that we told people. And of course it got worse as the war went on and usually it was the British bomber fleet coming at night and the Americans during daytime. And it was sometimes an awful -- awesome, not awful -- an awesome sight during daytime. The Americans were flying in like on a sort of military exercise, in -- in close formation. And the roar of the bombers -- there were hundreds usually, filled the heavens. It was for us almost a shout of liberation. And -- and they were just coming an-and you -- we could see the anti-aircraft guns, the German flock firing at them without much effect. And -- and then when they start dropping their bombs, the bombs sort of had made a whistle sound as they fell down on the -- with tremendous speed. And -- and the whistle sound then was followed by seconds of silence and then a tremendous explosion. And of -- of course there were hundreds of them. It -- it -- it was a -- an unbelievable experience and -- and at night of course one couldn't see the bombers any more, but the noise was the same and -- and then of course the flames that engulfed large parts of the city would almost be a -- a -- present a ghostly scene of -- of fire and destruction. And obviously that had also a tremendous effect on the population and people reacted differently, but by that time, it was obvious I think to

most sane people at least, that the war was lost. And if the war was lost, then all that destruction and all of the German soldiers who were still falling on all fronts, were just a total waste or a wasted loss, which wouldn't really do anything for Germany. And so many -- there was a lot of dissatisfaction ex-expressed with the government. But it was all sort of below the surface and the reason was, there was a tremendous government terror that increased. There wasn't just the Gestapo, but I mean, the employed agents of the Gestapo, but there was a much larger army of either paid or unpaid informers, or people who are sometimes just out of spite, were informing on others. And obviously that kept people in line and they would often grumble only between their four walls or to -- only to people whom they definitely knew to be okay and safe. But there was increasing dissatisfaction as the war came closer to the German borders and the -- the German government -- and particularly the propaganda machine of Goebbels, had another weapon given to them and -- and that was actually by the Russians. The -- while it is understandable that the Russians, who had suffered unbelievably under German occupation were not very kindly disposed towards the Germans, but the -- the atrocities committed by the Russians and the -- the totally wanton destruction in the wake of the Soviet army, was such that Goebbels was able to whip up enthusiasm for continuing the fight by basically threatening the Germans with the Russians. And of course the worst part of the terror probably were the unbelievable rapes. I-I must admit that I did not believe the stories at first and thought they were just an outgrowth of Goebbels propaganda, I mean in the same way how the antisemitic press, for years had smeared the Jews with all kinds of sexual innuendoes and so on, which were just inventions. But it turns out, I mean the Russians -- incidentally, the Russians did not only do that in Germany, I mean, even in areas that they liberated, countries that were supposed to be allies, like Czechoslovakia, Poland, there were unbelievable rapes in those countries. And so it can't be

just explained by the fact that there was an accumulated hatred against the Germans. But of course that contributed to it. But, be that as it may, they handed the Germans a tremendous propaganda weapon and -- and occasionally it would happen that the -- the German army would make a counter-offensive and sort of re-occupy some locality which the Russians had already taken before. And then they would immediately send in the entire press corps and -- and interview people and they would get some sort of first hand horror stories of how the Russians behaved. And I'm sure that was part of why th-the Germans put up resistance t-to the very end But the -- the -- the fact is that resistance didn't give them any better results anyway and I would say that any building that was destroyed and any German that was killed fighting in the latter part of '44 and '45 was just a waste. Of course not to forget that during that time also, hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Russians, still were killed and -- and also Jews were killed in the Holocaust, which continued unabated. I should say on that subject, incidentally, the fact that a holocaust was going on was totally unknown to us. We did occasionally -- we had opportunity to listen to foreign broadcasts and incidentally, that was strictly forbidden and it was under death penalty that if anyone listened to a foreign radio broadcast. But sometimes we had the chance to and -- and -- and there were reports finally, mainly from BBC, the British radio, that the Nazis were killing, at that time it was said, hundreds of thousands of Jews, and that -- while it filled us with fear, it -- the number, hundreds of thousands, was so huge that it staggered our imagination. And that was not even 10 percent of the truth, but we didn't know it in -- at that time.

Q: Had you heard of some of these notorious extermination centers?

A: Well, we definitely had heard of Auschwitz and -- because that was the -- that was the camp that most Jews from Berlin were deported to. And -- at least in the later stages. In the beginning there were also deportations to Riga and then other ghettos. But starting, I think about in the

middle of 1942, maybe early fall of 1942, all deportations went to Auschwitz. Even that was not really officially announced, but it somehow became known. So Auschwitz became known as a destination for the deportations, but the term extermination camp was not known. I mean, what was believed in general, that Jews were worked extremely hard under inhuman conditions and of course people die under such conditions also. But that they were sort of murdered in a mass production style, the way it was actually done, was not known to us. It may have now -- that -- I have to add that German soldiers, hundreds of sol -- if not millions of them were in one way or another witnesses of all of these exterminations. And -- and of course they, in -- in most cases were too fearful to even report or -- or tell the -- or even told to keep that silent. But we were, I mean in -- in a certain amount of isolation there and -- and to some extent I have to say that it may also have been simply that we, or at least I myself, I can really only talk of mys -- about myself, simply refused to believe that, that it was so horrible and -- and all the people who were close to me were involved in -- in these deportations. And -- and maybe to some extent I -- it was wishful thinking, that I did not believe in what really happened in those camps. But all I can say is that I hoped, til the victory and even after that, to see my family again.

Q: Was there -- was there -- I mean you said people were fearful to even talk about them, so was there much conversation at all about these places?

A: No, I mean, even in earlier times, it was -- somewhere I-I mentioned for example that after the costan of Jewish males were arrested. They were all told that unless they wanted to come back there, to keep their mouth shut. And so people only whispered about it. Some didn't talk at all about it and some only to the closest friends or family members, what -- what really happened and these were not extermination camps, they were just sort of quote everyday brutalities committed by the SS.

Q: What I'm try -- what I'm trying to get a sense of is -- since you were amongst German people, not Jews at this point --

A: Right.

Q: And for quite a long time, did there seem to be any horror expressed or any remorse of what was going on, other than the fact that the war had inconvenienced them terribly?

A: No, it was terrib -- the -- the horror was only at the impending loss of the war and what might become of Germany and of them personally. I-I didn't -- of course, as I said, people had to be careful, but -- but the people that we associated with, and we had a certain social life there and -- and as I had or said earlier, they -- the -- the cruelties against the Jews never even came up. Now that's -- actually there's one exception. There was one family, an -- an elderly couple with a son who is -- was about six, seven years older than I and was an officer in the Vairmarkt. They were politically 100 percent -- they often even talked to us and that surprised us because you know, they -- they should have been somewhat mistrustful, but they ex -- op-openly expressed their opposition and their hatred of the Nazis and Hitler. They were -- one thing they were a very devout Catholic family. And in northern Germany, where Berlin is located, the vast majority of people of course, are Protestant. But I don't know whether that was the -- bu-but they were -- these people actually then, played a role in -- in our final survival. And that's a story I'm coming to now. In -- in March -- in March 1945, about six weeks before the end of the war, we heard through one of our friends that we sort of were socializing with, a very strange story. He -- he met Mr. Haas, Margaret's father, and said he has to tell him something very funny. A -- a pensioner, who lived in our area, and who earned himself some additional money by working on people's property and he worked also often on a property of our neighbor and he was known as a fanatical Nazi. And that pensioner had told him to be careful with us and stay away from us

because there's something not okay. We -- he is convinced that we are either foreign spies or Jews. And -- and then when that man said, you know, “W-W-What makes you think so?” The man said, “Well, they have -- they have a -- a Berlin address, where Herman Hesser lives.” And there is actually a Herman Hesser living, he checked the phone book. But he decided to really look into it himself. And so, he -- and being a pensioner, you know he had nothing better to do, he took the subway and went to that address and actually rang the bell and there's indeed a Herman Hesser living at that place, but it's a completely different person. And we simply used that person's name to legitimize ourselves. And he told that fellow to -- to be careful and not to say anything to us of stay -- and that guy again -- he was also, by the way, secretly very much against the Nazis and made commensur. And he interpreted it as saying that now that the war is obviously lost, that fanatical Nazi is sort of becoming -- going out of his mind, losing his mind. And didn't take it seriously, in fact found it really funny. And well, Margaret's father came back to us, he didn't find it funny at all, nor did we. And we were thinking about what to do now. Now we knew that that guy probably would, within a day or two, notify the police, if he hadn't already done so. And that we had to get out of there. And in fact we -- we had to get out sort of seemingly just as if we go into the city. In other words, without luggage, in order not to arouse suspicion. But we had all of our per-personal belongings there and many of them were also necessary for survival. I mean we, in those days it was practically impossible to buy anything, cloth -- gloves, clothing, anything you need. Shoes and so on. So we -- and of course also we didn't really know where to go. So our first reaction was to talk to that elderly couple that I just mentioned, and their son -- he was a first lieutenant in the German army, was actually home during that week, on furlough. I think he -- he had some sort of a sick leave, he had a slight injury. And -- and we knew that all of them are totally okay, so the plan was that I -- but we

wanted to talk to the son alone first. So I went over and asked the son, we would like to have a card game with him, he sometimes played cards. And -- and he said, "Yeah, gladly," he'll be over in a few minutes. So in a few minutes he came and we both decided, among the four of us, that the two women would stay in -- in the back room and Margaret's father and I and he would sort of play the game. So Margaret's father started out, I still feared -- to mix the -- the cards, to distribute then -- the cards, to -- to play the game, when he suddenly put down the cards on the table and said -- actually, we -- we invited him not to play cards but to discuss some serious business with him. And then he told him right of the events -- that our name isn't actually Hessem. We are Jews who live here in hiding and our name is so and so and we -- and then he told him what happened with that pensioner and that we have to get out immediately or within a day at least. And also possibly save some of our belongings. And the -- the officer was in full uniform. His name, incidentally, his first name is Heinz. He listened in stony silence, then he got up and said he'll discuss everything with his parents and will be back as soon as possible. After some time that to us seemed like an eternity, it was probably not more than 15, 20 minutes, I don't know -- they lived just one block over from us, he came back not alone, but with his mother. His mother was a gray haired -- sort of gray haired, dignified lady, came with a huge basket of food, which she plunked on the table with a thump and an angry face and said, "Listen, you have known our politics for -- for years now. We have known each other closely enough, we could have helped you all that time. How come you didn't have confidence in us to tell us that before?" And the food basket contained things which were worth a fortune on the black market. Sausage, eggs and all kinds of things. And their -- their behavior was just incredible. So -- so then they, right th-they said okay, what -- what they would -- they would like to, first of all, support us in -- in hiding some of our belongings. And after some discussion, we made the

following decision. As I had mentioned earlier, every night the British Air Force, the Royal Air Force bombarded Berlin, and of course all surrounding areas and had airplane alert, and so people would be up and then after the all clear siren, people obviously would go immediately to sleep, because they had to get up early in the morning to go to work. So the decision was to wait about half an hour after the all clear, hoping by that time everybody will be sound asleep and in the meantime have suitcases with certain necessities packed and Heinz said he would help us carry them over to their place and they have a shed behind their house where they could lock them up and they would be safe there. And -- and then Heinz said he had a room in -- in the southern borough of Berlin, Templehoff. It became known later under -- during the air lift of '48, '50, because there was also an airport that played an important role in the air lift. But anyway, in Templehoff he had a room where he could, we c -- all four of us could at least temporarily stay, but or -- some of us. And Margaret's mother knew -- had a -- a girlfriend, I mean a woman friend who was also underground. Now she had succeeded in totally legalizing herself with police registration and so on. And she said that the next day, she and Margaret would try to go there and -- and -- and Ma-Margaret's father and I would go to the room that Heinz had. And then, before leaving, Heinz turned around, pulled out his revol -- service revolver, gave it to Margaret's father and said, “Here is my service revolver. If they should come tonight, just finish them off in self defense. The war is over soon, anyway.” And -- and then they left. That was an incredible thing that he did. And -- and then the next day -- I mean then, at night, right, everything worked out the way it was planned. We carried the luggage over and I don't know whether we got any sleep done or not, we probably didn't feel like it. The next morning we left, you know, as if going to work, with no particular luggage on us. And -- and never came back and I just want to say that after -- the few weeks after the Battle of Berlin, I came back to visit the place and neighbors told

us that the following day, the Gestapo came looking for us. So that -- that really saved our lives. So I-I, yeah -- then in that room where we stayed, incidentally, Heinz knew that the superintendent of the house, a janitor, was a secret Communist. I don -- I never knew how -- how he actually knew that because that was itself subject to execution, but anyway he knew and -- and he said he will talk to him about us, because he would -- he -- in -- in -- in the city, apartment house janitors were responsible to have every new person who appears, registered with the police, I discussed that earlier. So -- but he said, if -- he -- he would not tell him that we are Jews, that doesn't fly well with Communists, we -- he'll just tell him -- tell him that we are some Socialist activists and have to hide out. And so that's what he did and we were intoruss -- in fact I remember the janitor's name, Kuchinski, sort of a Polish name, huh? And -- but I mean, he was a German. And -- but Kuchinski himself had access to black market pistols. And so I bought a pistol from him and -- for my own self protection and I had never had a gun in my hand in my life and I decided if I, you know, ever have to use it in an emergency, I don't even -- I-I barely knew where to pull the trigger, but not how to aim and so on. So I bought additional ammunition, and that was also expensive. Each bullet costs -- I forgot, substantial amount of money. And from a piece of paper, I made myself a -- sort of a goal to aim at, with concentric circles and then I-I traveled out into a forest near Berlin and nailed it to a tree, of course in a solitary place where no people were around and then I sort of practiced shot. And I -- and you know, in those days these more old fashioned guns, I think today -- they had a tremendous sort of a backlash. And all I remember is I never even hit the outer circle, not to speak of the inner circle. But at least I knew a little bit of how to handle the thing. And actually I never had to use it, but at least it gave me also some self confidence just to carry it with me. In the meantime, as I said, Margaret's mother and she herself were with that woman friend of Mrs. Haas. And -- and in the meantime they --

they knew some other people, through whom they finally found a place in Pottsdam. Now Pottsdam is a suburb. It used to be the summer residence of Prussian kings. And there's particularly one famous castle, the one of Frederick the Great, called Soswasee, which is French of course, means without worries or no worries. And that summer -- he was actually a great Francophile and basically even talked mainly French and had his castle and also his garden surrounding the castle designed in imitation of Versailles, on a much smaller scale, of course. And it also contained an orangery, just like the park in Versailles does. The orangery basically served to keep plants in winter, which were -- which were not durable during winter. And also a servant's quarters for the gardeners. And that orangery had been turned into a huge sort of camp for people who were out, bom-bombed out and also for refugees. I-I forgot to say that, actually. As the Soviet army moved westward and came into areas which were inhabited by Germans, the Germans were systematically evicted from everywhere. And even that was, it started already before, I am now talking about March and early April, '45. Even in -- in midwinter, the -- the Germans were evicted and day and night you could hear, on the country road that passed by near that cottage where we lived, horse drawn carriages with ref -- German refugees, hundred them. And, although that obviously was tremendous personal misery for these people, it filled me with a tremendous joy to see, finally, the hardships of the war hitting back at those who had caused all the misery to us, but also to other peoples. And -- and so there were millions and millions of German refugees, who were streaming westward, into the still unoccupied areas of Germany, including Berlin. And so, that orangery, as I said, was a huge camp for such people and so people whom the Haas's knew, who -- who were themselves out bombed and lived there, they were introduced simply as a family that was bombed out, but they said also they knew of my existence, that it is too unsafe to have me there, because why would a youn-young 20, 22 year

old or so man be living there? I mean he would be normally in the Vairmarkt, fighting. So I stayed then, alone in that room of Heinz in -- in the city, in the district of Templehoff and they were out there. Of course I had a bicycle and I commuted -- I forgot what, once or twice a week out there. One reason also is I had all these food coupons that I collected and kept collecting and so I also brought food out there. And -- and -- and as -- as the war slowly sort of wound down to an end. Now, the Battle of Berlin, i-it -- yeah ona, I-I-I-I should say one other thing before the battle. Th-th-the Germans made --

Q: Why don't you finish that thought and then --

A: No, but th-that's a totally new subject.

Q: Okay, then why don't we stop here?

End of Tape Six, Side B

Beginning of Tape Seven, Side A

Q: This is tape two, side A of an interview with Ernest Fontheim, on June fourth, 1997. The interviewer is Randy Goldman.

A: Yeah, as the war finally came home to Germany, we were delighted to see in the official vairmarkten, armed forces report, that was issued at the end of each day, finally German place names. Names like Argen, Kern and so on, instead of names like Zabororja, Minsk, Halokoff, Kiev and so on. That al-already felt like a liberation and there were more and more German place names now in the official army reports. And all -- while all that happened, the government maintained the official line that the war will be won, that there will be a final victory. As the fronts on all sides collapsed, of course preparations were made for the defense of Berlin. I have to say, that of all the insanities, that may have been probably the biggest one. There was n-no reason really, to defend Berlin and the Germans should have done what the French did in 1940,

declared an open city and surrendered. But of course that was not to be. Instead, throughout Berlin, tank traps were built, ditches were dug. And the folkshdum was called up, finally, for participating in the defense of the city. And often they would even grab civilians from the street and just incorporate them in some unit. The battle itself began in earnest on April the 16th, 1945. I never forget that day, because even though the -- the Russian front was on the east side of the Oda river, which runs north-south and about 50 to 60 miles east of Berlin, so it was pretty far away, but the artillery barrage was such that the ground under Berlin, under the city, was rumbling and slightly shaking. And of course, in battle reports, which I read long after the end of the war, I can see the reason why. That was the biggest concentration of artillery ever. The Russians spent about two months getting ready for that assault on the city and they had assembled a density of artillery which was unheard of. And they raked the entire German front for hours and hours. As I said, that -- at that time I was living in the Berlin borough of Templehoff and through the Communist, I mean secretly Communist janitor of the house that I lived in, I also got some information of how the folkshdum members were called up and in fact he showed me such a call up order that a friend of his got. So I-I kept a copy of that and then typed on a typewriter that I had available, my own call up order, every day. So that if I had to -- I had an errand to a certain part of the city, I would write myself a call up order that I had to report there for duty. The reason was that there were -- I mean groups of folkshdum people either grabbing civilians from the street, or also sometimes they are confiscating their bicycle, yeah. I-I did all of my -- or almost all of my commuting by bicycle. Public transport had all but ceased to exist. There were still a few subway lines that were -- would run intermittently between a few stops until they came to a place where there was an artillery or a bomb crater, shutting down the -- the rest of the line. So that was surely not reliable transport. But the folkshdum did have the

power to confiscate bicycle for service, so I always -- I wrote my marching order always in such a way that it -- it would say I have to appear with my b-bicycle, which for purposes of my service, is confi-confiscated by the folkshdum, the -- the militia. I kept visiting a number of friends and there was a peculiar atmosphere then. By -- by that time the Russians were still far away from Berlin, but nobody knew how the Russians would take the city, what would happen afterwards. After all, the city was still totally dominated by the Nazis, not just the military, also propaganda-wise. Goebbels's voice was everywhere, in -- in newspapers, on the radio. And it -- it seemed as if a deep chasm sort of separated us -- our today, from what would happen tomorrow after the Nazis are gone and nobody could really imagine how it would be like. From day to day of course, the Russians worked their way closer to the city and in fact, the way they planned their attack, instead of entering the city from the east, they passed -- their units passed by Berlin to the north and south, and then closed the pincer west of Berlin and -- and then entered the city from the west. After -- and then the joy of hearing German city names in the official army report was placed by the -- replaced by the even greater joy of hearing su-subdivisions and districts of Berlin mentioned in the -- in the army report. Like parts of Shallotenburg, which is a well known borough of the city, had fallen into Russian hands. Or the suburban railroad station of Eichner has been taken by the Russians. It simply seemed unbelievable that these names, these place names, where I had been sometimes only days before, were already in Russian hands. In fact, there was a curious situation developing. People could make telephone calls into parts of the city which were already occupied by the Russians, which were behind the Russian lines. That was the weirdest thing, really. And visiting people, one usually parted never knowing whether one would see each other again and instead of the German Auf Weidersain, which means really, “See you again.” One would greet each other, I mean say good-bye with a formaller Ubalips -- that means,

“Survive it.” And as I said, nobody could even imagine how life would be once the Nazis were gone. Berlin was, of course under constant bombardment and in the beginning, when the first artillery shells fell on the city in the -- in -- in the inner parts of the city, Goebbels distributed a news release saying that these are not enemy artillery bombardment, but trial runs of a new German sort of miracle weapon, which is going to be used any day now, to throw the Russians back again. And there were people who believed this nonsense. Yeah, let me -- so the -- the -- the city and of course also electricity slowly stopped being supplied and water stopped being supplied in Berlin, even it -- it had already been drained by evacuation of ma -- children and infirm people. There were still, I think, between three and four million people in the city and to imagine, that city was sort of headed into chaos, without -- without running water, without at least reliable electricity and the gas lines on many places were -- had been, of course, hit. And so there was no gas supply any more for cooking. The -- for me the crucial day was Sunday and I remember distinctly, Sunday, April 22nd, 1945. On -- by orders of Goebbels, who, besides all his other offices, was also in charge of the defense of Berlin, on his orders, all food st-stores were ordered to be open. Now anyone who knows Germany and German mentality, must be aware that the closing of stores on Sunday, of all stores, was something absolutely holy. There was nothing -- there was always one day, one Sunday -- that was the Sunday before Christmas, where stores were open, that was a tradition, but on all other Sundays, nothing -- the world had to go under for -- for an order to be issued for stores to be open. And that of course, exactly was what was happening. I mean their world was going under. And it was obvious then, that what Goebbels wanted to avoid is that the food stores and the shops might be maybe taken by Russian troops. And rather than have that happen, had to distribute it to the population. And in fact, there was enough food there that he also announced the distribution of all kinds of special rations. See

how the -- the ration coupons had -- of course most coupons were dedicated, like it would say for 100 gram of butter or 100 gram of meat or whatever, this and that. But there were certain coupons always which were unassigned. They were just labeled with a letter, like A, B, C or something, for special occasions. And so, he -- he announced that on coupon A, everybody would get so much of this food and on coupon B, so much of that food. There was a -- a -- a tremendous amount of these special rations amounts. Now here I was with my 16 food ration cards for 16 people. So I basically went wild. I went -- found -- of course that was in the days before the supermarket, so in other words, you had to go to the butcher separately and to the baker and to the dairy, for each particular type of food. And so I was busy for a long time, you know, buying all that and coll -- and bringing it into the room which I occupied in -- in Templehoff and thinking how I can get most of it out to Pottsdam, to my friends. And -- and then -- but even more overpowering was, that on that day, finally, beaten German army units started to stream into Berlin. And that is a sight which I will never forget, I think that made -- that day I can say without equivo-vocation may be the happiest day in my life. Anyone who has seen German soldiers in -- in an ordinary life or in -- du-during the war or on -- on parades, they always looked spic and span, there was not a button missing, there was not a spot. An-and -- and they all -- an-and they looked well-shaved, clean and -- and with a certain aggressive stride and demeanor. These guys who came back, they were dirty, unshaved. Their uniforms had buttons missing. Many had bloody bandages around their head or their arms in a sling. None of them bore any weapons and -- and they had that dull look of defeat in their eyes. Wh-wh-when I saw those guys, I finally -- even though I knew the war was lost for Germany of course, somehow intellectually and mentally, but now I saw it with my own eyes and I almost lost my mind. I-I got on my bike, I remember and bicycled along and felt almost like thanking each of these soldiers

for the way they looked. I-I'm somewhat of a history buff and I had read reports of Napoleon's army streaming back from Russia after their defeat in 1812 and -- and these guys looked exactly like those descriptions of Napoleon's defeated army. And -- and then the -- the eerie thing was that now and then truckloads of newly outfitted soldiers, who looked clean and fresh and with weapons, drove into the opposite direction, towards the -- towards the front, which was probably just, I don't know, 10 or 20 miles or so away, if that much. So -- but then I -- I finally sort of grabbed a hold of myself and -- and went back to the house and this German apartment houses are always sort of built with a courtyard in the back and the rumor spread that -- there was one person apparently, who for some reason owned a horse and he couldn't feed that horse anymore and so he decided to have it slaughtered by a professional butcher. But of course there was no refrigeration either, so he couldn't say, keep the -- the meat for-forever. So he invited just anyone from the house to serve himself. So it was incredible, I-I got myself a long, sharp knife and went downstairs and cut a sort of a big chunk out of the upper thigh, or the rear end of -- of the horse, of the dead horse that was lying there. And a-as -- as -- as another sort of trophy. And -- and then another rumor spread that was -- th- there -- there was a huge freight yards of the German railroads, about -- less than a mile away from that apartment building and the rumor spread that the Vairmarkt, the German army had just abandoned and withdrawn from the freight yards and that there were many freight cars loaded with food. And then I got on my bike with a knapsack and -- and bicycled to the -- to the freight yard and I saw already people streaming there from all over and -- and then the -- the freight yard was periodically raked with machine gun fire from deep diving Russian fighter planes. And you know, to avoid being shot, I-I sort of threw the bicycle away and -- and I had to -- anyway I wasn't on my bike, it was across tracks, so I-I-I walked, pushed it. And then I-I threw myself down, pressed myself against the -- sort of the --

wh-what are these, these wooden ties, I guess, the railroad ties and -- until the planes had gone and then I would get up. So then I-I came to a -- to a railroad car, which had, was loaded with big vats full of butter, so ea-each one, maybe 50 pounds or so. And -- so how do you -- an-and that was sort of solid butter, so how do you grab solid butter? Well, I had a -- I had a huge screwdriver in a tool kit on my bike, so I got that screwdriver out and sort of staked out a huge sort of a cube of butter and took it with my hands and threw it in my, into my knapsack, which at other times, I had taken potatoes in, with dirty peels and -- and -- and coal and so on. So what I decided, if the outer layer of the butter is covered with dirt, I'll just cut off a layer and then inside it should be clean. So, anyway -- so then I-I-I took that back and -- and my room that I had in that house was like a veritable sort of food storage place. Incidentally, as a side light, when I came back after the war, I-I was told that maybe half an hour or so after I left that place, the folkshdum turned up there, collected all males, put them on trucks and drove them out to the front. So I was spared having to fight the Russians. And -- and then I decided I-I better get al -- o-o-on the one hand I didn't want to get out of Berlin, because I felt a tremendous inner excitement, to see the fall of a major capital, which had a sort of world dominating role played, was to me like -- see, witnessing the fall of Rome to the Germanic tribes, whatever, 2000 years or so earlier and that filled me with excitement. But on the other hand, I -- I really felt that I wanted to spend these hours with Margaret and so I-I finally -- what I did is I wrote myself a marching order for the folkshdum, which said that my battalion that I belonged to, had to report for duty in Pottsdam, which I h-had earlier mentioned, the suburb where Margaret and her parents had found a place. And I put as much into the knapsack as I could, I mean the more s -- vulnerable things of course, were the butter and also the -- the chunk of horsemeat. And -- and then a few other things, I don -- I-I forgot what it was, anyway, was a knapsack just full with

food and -- and by that time also, the army had taken over traffic control and at each major intersection, there were transportation officers directing traffic of course, what there was was the traffic was all military by that time. Military trucks and -- and jeeps and this sort of thing. And there was a major intersection near the house where I lived and I-I went up to the officer in charge and told him that I had been ordered to report into Pottsdam and whether he knew whether the highway to Pottsdam was still open or whether the Russians had cut it. By the way, the Russians then were always referred to by their nickname, Ivan. So -- Ivan in English. So -- I -- that's how you talked about them, with a Ivan, because no -- nobody really knew it and -- and the officers answer was that he knows only what goes on within a radius as far as he can see in each direction. And he -- he didn't under -- it was just total chaos. And -- and -- and those idiots were still fighting and -- and defending the city. And by the way, at each of these intersections, like that also, there were heavy guns and -- put into place, that -- so that in case Russian tanks would appear, they would immediately be subject to heavy artillery fire. So anyway, I decided, I mean to see whether I can get through to Pottsdam, there were rumors that the Russians had already cut that highway. And I got on my bike and with my marching orders and everything and -- and set out. And that trip to Pottsdam was a -- a -- a major experience. Th-the -- the -- the highway was mobbed, Pottsdam was in the direction sort of southwest of Berlin. In other words, sort of away from the eastern front and it was full with people. And -- and all kinds. There were groups of allied soldiers, I mean British and French, who were obviously prisoners of war and which you had seen throughout the war, always in groups, but under heavy German military guard. These guys, they were simply walking down there, no-nobody even, they were part of the population, nobody even gave a damn that they were supposed to be under German military guard. I suppose they were trying to get home or something. There were foreign laborers. There

were people who pushed, sort of some belongings they wanted to save, in -- in baby carriages or in little wagons that they pulled. And then -- now and then a -- a fancy, big Mercedes, with the driver leaning on the horn to make way, was slowly making its way, getting some big shot out of the city before the Russians would take it. And then, in the midst of all of that, periodically, Russian fighter planes would st-swoop down and rake the street with machine gun fire and then everybody, like on a -- a -- as even blown away by the wind, would vanish to the sides of the road. And there are sort of rainwater ditches on each side, and lie down there until that danger was over, then get back up and walk. It was the most incredible, it was a -- a -- the -- part of it I bicycled, part I pushed. Yeah, there were some areas where there was a b -- one area, I think, where a water main was broken and the -- the water was almost knee high. So you had to wade through that and -- anyway -- and -- and then finally I arrived at the bridge which connected Berlin to Pottsdam, the -- there was actually, at the western outskirts of Berlin is a -- there was a havel, spelled exactly by the way, the same way as the name of the president of the Czech Republic, H-a-v-e-l. That river also separates Berlin and Pottsdam, there's a bridge leading over it and that's how you get then, from Berlin into Pottsdam. The name of the bridge is Gleenic arburger and -- which became famous several decades later, which I couldn't have known at that time, of course. It's famous because that's where, often, spies were exchanged. Yeah, that was, of course, West Berlin, then. What -- what became later West Berlin and among others for example, the Jewish refusnik Anatoly Sharunski, now an Israeli minister, Nathan Sharunski was exchanged there and given freedom on that bridge. Well, anyway, at that bridge, I saw already, at the distance, was completely, there was a -- like a chain across the bridge, of SS, checking carefully everybody's papers. So -- but I had my folkshdum ID and my marching orders to report to Pottsdam, so I figured nothing can happen. I-I had in my breast pocket also, the gun which I

had bought on the black market, through that janitor, but I was hoping not to have to use it. And of course there was such a sea of humanity, they obviously didn't really have the time anyway to do very thorough checks, but they found my papers to be in order and -- and then I-I passed through and I had to still bicycle through a major part of Pottsdam, because the park of Soswasee, where that orangery building was located, was on the other side of Pottsdam and -- and then I appeared there and they had already almost given up hope that I would be able to get out of Berlin. So that was the 22nd. But I had still a lot of food left in the -- in the apartment, so I decided the next day, I ought to go back and -- and pick up some more food. And when I arrived at the Gleenic Arburger to bicycle across, the commanding officer told not just me, but everybody else, that Russians were reported nearby -- oh yeah, and -- and of course all bridges had been -- had been supplied with explosive charges, so that at the approach of Russian troops, they would be blown up so that they couldn't use the bridges. That was another part of the insanity, because while the Russians could have used the bridge, these bridges also were part of the German infrastructure, which at that time was already almost totally destroyed and -- and under those conditions, with a -- a lack of raw materials and so on, wasn't easily re-buildable in -- in those days. But -- but the Germans and -- and particular the Nazi party fa -- we-were so fanatic, that they completely disregarded the needs of their own population, even. But I mean, they had it coming. The -- with all of that, I -- my thoughts always go back again to the period of the deportations. And how brutally the Jews were treated and nobody gave a damn about them either at that time. And -- and furthermore, I didn't even know yet, what had become of my parents and everybody else who had been close to me or whom I had known and I was still hoping to see them back once that whole thing was over. And I decided t-to go across the bridge anyway, hoping that they wouldn't dynamite it soon.

Q: It's okay, it's okay.

A: Oh. And -- but then I was finally stopped, as I said, when I came to Pottsdam the day before, there was a place where a water main had broken and the water was almost knee high. Where by th-the next day I came back, it was even higher and it was under a bridge. And I mean that, it was practically impossible to -- you'd have to swim across and of course I would have been completely wet then and -- anyway, I didn't have the stomach to do it, so -- and how would I have taken the bike through it? So I just returned without having been able to get into the city again. Th-There was constant artillery bombardment of course. The 22nd, by that time, was over. That was the day when I went out. Now the day where I made the unsuccessful attempt to return, was the 23rd. So that is over now, then there were several days -- there were several days of -- of fighting and -- and finally on the twent -- yeah -- and final -- yeah -- wh-what we had to do also is, we finally decided -- we meaning all of the people who lived there as refugees, to transfer to the basement. There was a huge basement with s-sort of simple benches and actually no electricity, only some candles we had occasionally. And we just sort of hoped to wait out the worst danger. On the 27th of April, there was still no change, there was still artillery rumble and -- but we didn't know what was going on. So I decided I ought to go out and look and see what the situation is. I went out and didn't see a soul until I finally saw a man in what looked to me like the uniform of the -- an engineering battal -- the German army had engineering battalions which had sort of brownish type uniforms, which were used in support of the troops. I mean, to - - to build more quickly, bridges over rivers and things like that. And so I-I shouted at the guy and wanted to -- to know where -- wh-whether he knew where Ivan is. His response was to point his gun at me and shout back at me in a language that I had never heard before. And run toward me as I stood there with my raised arms and then he grabbed my left arm, saw the watch, gave it a

strong jerk, pulled the watch off and vanished again. So from that I knew that the Russians had arrived, which I related downstairs. And from then on we frequently were visited by Russians who came down there. They were interested only in two things. One was the women and the other one was possessions of any value. They took everybody's watches of course and other valuables and -- and many women were taken, not just once, but innumerable times. And -- and so that went on for a day or two and -- and of course caused everyone to be totally demoralized and -- and then I think on -- on the second day or so, I -- there -- there was an artillery unit actually stationed in front of the orangery building, fighting was still going on in the neighborhood. And that artillery unit was under the command of a colonel who made a more educated impression than the run of the mill Russian soldiers. And in particular, he spoke fairly fluent German. And -- so Margaret's father went up to him and introduced himself and told him that -- that we are Jews, whether -- that's the first Russian word that I learned, Jew means Yvrai in -- in Russian. And -- and we were treated just like the Germans, even though we had suffered under them, just the same way the Russians. So the colonel pulled out a piece of paper and wrote something down in Russian and said whenever in the future, Russians sort of try to attack us or molest us, to show that paper. And okay -- and then he -- he got orders to move on, which he did. And then -- now unbeknownst to me also, by the way, the -- the Russian commander in the area, had ca-called on all German forces to surrender and furthermore had, i-in that order also, had declared that any German who tries to eva -- any German soldier who tries to evade captivity by putting on civilian clothes, will be treated by the Soviet armed forces exactly the same way as he would have been treated by the German forces. And the German forc -- the German forces, I mean that was already going on for months. Any deserter was, after a brief re -- cursory so called military tribunal, was immediately hung from a tree and with a sign around his neck, I am too

much of a coward to fight for my country and -- and for our women and children. And -- or something of that nature. In other words, what it meant is that if a German civilian was found, he could be immediately executed by the Russians, because they would interpreted that as the guy being a deserter, trying to evade captivity. So I was out, on -- on that day and that was about, I think a day after that colonel came, either the same day, later or the next day. And a-again, a Russian soldier was in the neighborhood, whereas -- as soon as he saw me, he pointed his gun at me and -- and pointed me toward a tree. As I said, it was in a park there. And I saw immediately that he was going to execute me. So I shouted down into the basement for Margaret's father to come up, because he had that paper that that Russian colonel had -- had given him, in Russian. And he came running up and handed the paper to that Russian soldier. He looked at it and made a motion with it, as if he was wiping his rear end with it, sort of put it in his fist and crumpled it up and threw it away and told him to wait there too. Then I stood at the tree while he aimed at me. And at that moment, the only thing I could think of is, I survived the Nazis and now I end up like this. And I could hear the click of the trigger, but nothing came out and he did that two or three times and then he got mad and sort of threw his gun on the floor and shouted to me at Russian -- in -- in Russian, which I didn't understand and pointing at the tree, what it obviously meant, that I should wait for him there at the tree, to be shot when he comes back with a different gun. And of course then Margaret's father and I, we immediately ran -- there was some bushes not too far away and hid sort of right at the bottom there. And it wasn't long, I don't know, maybe five minutes, maybe less, I don't -- when he came back and -- and we heard him shout and I was just sweating with fear. And we know that wouldn't be long until he found us and all we heard is he kept shouting and then new voices appeared, more voices and -- which -- wa -- since we didn't know Russian, I don't know what all these voices were saying, but apparently they had to move

on because the voices became more and more distant and -- and then finally ceased. And -- but we decided that maybe the guy is just lying in wait for us, so we -- we waited there for at least an hour, if not more. And -- co -- wa-was completely silent, until we were sure that he really had left the area.

End of Tape Seven, Side A

Beginning of Tape Seven, Side B

Q: This is tape two, side B, of an interview with Ernest Fontheim, on June fourth, 1997.

A: So we finally emerged from there and there was not a soul around. Then we went back into the basement and there was a tremendous shout of relief. Apparently, downstairs, somebody must have seen the Russian soldier pointing his gun at me, so the rumor had spread that both of us had been shot. And -- so when we appeared alive, obviously the joy was great. So then, finally came the first of May, 1945. And the first of May, of course, is a big Russian holiday, a Soviet holiday and -- and it was for the soldiers. By that time, things had sort of quieted down a little bit, although not too much and a large group of soldiers visited us. It somehow spread around that Margaret's father, who was in general very handy, was also very good in some simple sort of dressing up wounds and things like that. And we had, of course for our own purposes, all kinds of medical supplies. And there were some soldiers who had, I don't know what it was any more, some open flesh wounds flumow and anyway, he treated them. And then there was also a piano around for some reason and he played the piano and to celebrate them, he played the s-song, "The Internationale," which is the sort of international Communist party song. And that made them all very happy and -- and they became sort of somewhat friendly and then one -- I remember one soldier, he was a -- a giant of a guy, pulling out of a -- a dirty pocket, some equally dirty photographs of -- were obviously family pictures. Wife, children or something. And

with -- with tears streaming down his face, he said they were all killed by the Germans. And -- and then after awhile, they said they needed all of the women to co-come along. And then so obviously we were very uneasy about that and then we said, you know, what they wanted -- I mean there was very difficult communication, obviously. None of us spoke Russian and they only knew sort of a s-smattering of some German words. Anyway, it turned out they had nearby, sort of a -- some battalion or regiment camped and to prepare for their meal, they needed people to peel potatoes. And so we immediately, all of u -- males, volunteered to go and so they took the women and the men along to about, I don't know, it wasn't far away, a quarter of a mile or so, where they were camped and put us down and they had piles and piles of potatoes. And so we -- we peeled potatoes for them. And in fact they had discovered apparently somewhere, a storage shed that was full with potatoes. And one d -- and they needed more from there. One of the Russian soldiers took Margaret's father along to help him carry them in a-- in a sack or something. And when they opened the door of the shed, the first thing, before they even saw the potatoes, there was a dead German woman lying. So the soldiers just -- soldier kicked her away with his foot and said something like "Kaput," which is a German word for broken. And then they gathered the potatoes and -- and -- and brought them back. And -- and then we peeled potatoes and then we were actually taken back by them. Oh, while we -- while we -- while we peeled the potatoes, they had accordion players there, they -- they played the accordion and sang songs, so for awhile it became even somewhat romantic and they also gave us some meat dishes to eat, which was hearty and -- even if not exactly gourmet style, but we were always hungry in those days and would have eaten anything. And -- and then we were taken back by them again, to the -- to the orangery where we all stayed. But I mean, there were also, still, less pleasant incidents and robberies and so on. So a day or two later, I decided that we need really, some

more firm protection, that by now, since the city, there was no more fighting, even nearby, there must be a city commander. And so I-I-I got up -- out, and said that I will try to find where the commander is and see whether we can get some protection. And of course I had no idea wh -- th- the city picture was totally changed. You know, a few days before, the last time I walked in the city, it was full with Nazi party uniforms, SS, Vairmarkt uniforms. All of that has vanished as if swallowed up by the earth and all one saw was Russian uniforms. And the traffic was -- the traffic police, they were all women, usually very hefty looking women. Their most prominent feature, they were all unbelievably heavily bosomed and they carried two sort of colored sticks, I remember. I think one red, one yellow, which they waved in some prescribed form, with the left hand and with the right hand, indicating which direction could move and which had to halt. And actually they did it in a very snappy, military fashion. I enjoyed actually looking on, just seeing them perform these duties. Now, in the meantime, in order to f-find the -- where the commandant -- the commandature was. Commandature is a Russian word actually, meaning the command office for the -- for the city commander. And I was always pointed in some direction, so I just kept going in the direction that I was pointed at, until I arrived in front of a huge villa and that villa was beleaguered by a huge -- by, actually by two huge throngs. As I found out in a minute, one were Germans and the other one were foreigners. Practically all of them false laborers who had been deported to Germany and who obviously went there for help in trying to get back to their home countries. There were Frenchmen, Belgians, Poles, e-e-everyone. And -- and the other throng were Germans. The one person I remember was a German medical officer, who was in charge of the local military hospital where -- I mean the Russians left him in charge -- these were all soldiers with fairly heavy wounds. He came to complain that his nurses were being constantly raped and therefore could not fulfill their duties to the patients. And I decided immediately not to

identify myself with the Germans, so I stood with the foreign laborers. Oh yeah, and I forgot to mention also, we had -- when we left that village overnight, we had taken along also, all our real identifications, so that -- because obviously we knew the war would end within days or weeks, that we could then establish our true identities. And, among other things I also had saved my Jewish star, which I then put on. And as I said -- and I -- I waited there together with all the foreigners. And so it was of course a slow process. So finally it was my turn, I was ushered in and was in some sort of a front room, entry room or waiting room, whatever and was told to wait and then one, from -- behind it, apparently, was a real office and then one officer came and took a look at me with that star and sort of shouted something in Russian to the back and then an officer with sort of more stars and so on, who seemed to be the commander, came out. He was sort of a short, stocky, heavy-set guy. Took one look at me and -- and then asked me in fairly good German, “You are a Jew?” And I said, “Yes.” And then he -- he ran toward me, embraced me and -- and told, sorry -- told me that I was the first Jew whom he -- whom he saw in -- in weeks or months. There was n-no Jew left anywhere… Okay, then he -- he asked me in his office and sit down and told me that, to tell him how come that I wasn't killed. So I briefly told him what had happened to me and -- and also that I was actually together with a family of friends and that we needed some personal protection and then he -- he told me I should, as soon as possible, bring the whole family, he wants to meet them. Oh, and -- and of course, I forgot, his name was Major Shike and of course, he was a Jew himself… So yeah, the only thing then at there, before I left, he asked me, he said he -- he wants to keep my yellow star as a souvenir. So I gladly gave that to him. And then I went back and I forgot, either the same day or the next day, all four of us went there and met Major Shike again and he award us a piece of paper in Russian. That one was not thrown away by anyone, in fact I still have it among my souvenirs and in fact I never knew

what it really said and of course, with the Russian immigration to this country here during the last decade or so, we also -- we made some Russian friends in Ann Arbor and I had that guy translate it to me, for the first time -- what, 40 years after Major Shike gave it to me. And it -- it simply said that every possible protection is give -- to be given to the Jackass -- fact he ordered in one word, I guess he didn't realize that it was a first and a last name, family and -- and also that we are supposed to be supplied generously with food. Oh, yeah, he told us also that the Soviet army was soon going to start handing out food to the population and they will be very small, restricted rations, you know, like so many crumbs of bread and this and that. And so there will also be long lines. But with that piece of paper, first of all, we did not have to stand in line, but we could right away go to the counter and also, we -- we should buy whatever we thought or needed to buy. And regardless of what the official rations are. And you can imagine the pride we -- after years of being always kicked to the back, now we could go to the front and the Germans had to stay behind and wait. And so that went on for -- I mean then our -- our life go-got much better and we were not molested any more. But the next thing was of course, we wanted to get back to Berlin. And so I guess we had to find out whether there is a suburban railroad line going from Pottsdam to Berlin. And so I suggested, I-I wrote to the railroad station, which was also several miles -- that castle was somewhat out of town, of Pottsdam. And to check the railroad station and where the trains are going. And when I got to the railroad station, it was an incredible picture of destruction. Somebody should have painted or at least photographed it, but of course in those days we didn't have a camera and I don't have a talent for a painter. But the -- the -- the railroad, there was hardly any railroad car that was standing on its wheels, they were lying on their sides, there were bomb craters all over and one locomotive apparently, must have been -- due to some force of some explosion, was standing on its heads wi -- on -- on the front end, with

the wheels o-on the side, a totally grotesque picture. And -- and wires were hanging and signal l-lights were dangling down or overturned. I mean you had to take one look and know not only that nothing is running now, but that nothing would be running for weeks probably or months or longer. So I walked back to give that report and on the way back, along one of the streets, I saw a sizable group of Germans, coming under guard by -- by two Russians, one Russian in front with a gun over the shoulder and one Russian behind. And they were wearing not the usual army uniform. I mean it looked similar to the army uniform, except that their military hats were green. And these were actually the NKVD troops, which -- they were the forerunner of what later became KGB. And so I walked -- I mean I walked along and they came toward me and as they were -- as they were passed me, the soldier in front asked me for my papers. And I-I had my Jewish ID and naively I thought, you know, the guy knows immediately that -- you know, it didn't say Jew, it just has a J printed on top of it. And furthermore, of course it was in the Roman letters, which are used i-in German and not in Cyrillic, which the Russians use. Anyway, he didn't even look at the -- at the ID, he took the ID, put it in his uniform pocket and -- and told me -- I guess there were only a few words he knew in German, one of them was com. That means come. And then I tried to tell him that Y-Yvrai and he just waved me off. So -- so then I suddenly found myself a prisoner of the NKVD. And we walked for several blocks and I noticed, it seemed totally random. There were some Germans whom we let pass by and then again one he would take along. I-I couldn't figure out what, if any -- principle governed his a -- and by now, having seen the Russians operate, I'm sure it was random, that there was no principle involved. So anyway, we finally stopped at a large villa, which was -- had been confiscated by the Russians. And on the side of the -- w-we walked over to the side. On the side of the villa, a table was set -- oh I'm sorry -- a table was set up and behind that table, there was a -- an officer, also

with a green hat, n-next to a civilian. And -- and we were sort of lined up in -- in -- in front, on the other side of the table at a certain distance. And then we were called up, one by one, to sit down -- there was one chair across from them, to sit down and being asked questions. When it came to my turn -- and by the way, the officer, the interrogating officer looked exactly like a brutal SS man, except the uniform was different. When it came to my turn, he asked -- the questions were asked by him in Russian, by the way and the civilian next to him was an interpreter, then he gave it to me in German. And they were all very standard, harmless question. My name, my address, my father's name, that sort of thing, date of birth. And after the last question, then he turned that thing that he had filled out, that sheet of paper, over to me and -- and asked me to sign at the bottom. Now, not only was everything that he filled out and so on, in Cyrillic, but then there was a long paragraph below the filled out part, of text. So I pushed that thing over to the interpreter and asked him politely to inter -- I wanted to know what I'm signing, you know. Interpret it to me. But instead of translating it in -- into German, he told the officer that I wanted it translated. And then the officer barked something that didn't sound very appealing to me and then the interpreter said, “He says,” you know, “my boss says, if you don't sign it right away, he beat you to death right here on the spot.” So I signed it and was convinced at that time and somewhat even today still, that I probably signed that I volunteer to go to Siberia. And so then, an-and actually, a few of the people after that interrogation ended were sent home. Others were not and of course I was in the latter group. Then we were, after we were through with all of them, we were led around to the back and in the back yard there was an air raid shelter ditch, which the Germans had dug during the war, to protect, I mean, against air raids. And what it was is, it's a ditch, you know, about I would say, about three yards wide and about five feet -- five feet deep at most, maybe a little bit less. And then over it was a sort of pre-

cast concrete sort of arch that extended the length of the ditch. So an-and that pre-cast concrete arch then, would be covered, or was covered with earth and something planted on it, so that it was camouflaged, but you could go in for protection of that against bombs or artillery and so on. And they used it now as a prison. Of course it was totally damp -- yeah and the-there were benches in there, but it was very damp and unpleasant. And -- and then there was a guard with a gun at the exit. And the only reason to -- for anyone to go out is, if somebody had to do some business and the guard who stood there knew only one German word, we were told and -- and that is shisin, which is the German slang word, actually the total equivalent of, in English, means shitting. So -- what did -- if -- if somebody had to go, then they was taken out and what they had rigged up there is, between two trees, they had fastened a horizontal broom, at about sitting height or chair height. And you just had to sort of sit over that broom, holding on with your hands and do whatever you had to do and then go back again in-into that ditch. And after a few hours, we were even brought some food. It was in -- in a bucket, which is used in Germany, or I guess here too, for say, washing floors and th-they had in there some nondescript soup, with a few pieces of meat sort of floating around in it… Yeah, then later that day, I mean that was all still in the morning and then we get something at noon, that -- that food and then the afternoon, somebody shouted down, "All Germans out." Again, there were Germans and non-Germans that they had collected them and the non-Germans were al-always the forced laborers that the Germans had deported into Germany. But anyway, all Germans were called out and I immediately decided, you know, I'm not a German and so I stayed in there. And they were actually taken out to peel potatoes for the Russians, you know it was a fairly large group of policemen and investigators and so on. And after they were finished, they were told, okay now they can go home. Then I thought I could hit myself over the head. If I would have gone out with

the Germans, I would be out and free now. Well, it was a wrong guess. And then, the night came and we had to sort of seat -- sleep sitting up on that -- that bench, in -- in that damp atmosphere there, as well as one could and the next day, the next day the various people were called up for more interrogation. Yeah and then I had sort of started up some sort of a talking acquaintanceship with a Czech engineer, who had been taken by the Germans to work on some war plant. And so he was called up and he -- he was brought down by the guard after whatever, maybe a half an hour and he was hardly down and had sat down and he looked already very disturbed, when another officer, who looked also extremely brutal, appeared with a -- he had sort of a baton and -- and a sort of wooden stick in front, i-in his hand, waved it in front of that Czech guy and shouted at him in Russian, something that didn't sound very pleasant. And when he was gone, the Czech guy told me that the Russians, during the interrogation, told him that they have evidence that he was not forcibly deported, but that he volunteered to work for the Germans. And of course he denied that and it wasn't true, he said. And that guy who came down, shouted at him, “If you don't admit the truth, that you volunteer t-to work for the Germans, you'll stay down here until you starve of -- of -- of hunger.” And -- and th-then he told me yeah, I mean he -- he -- by the way, he knew Russian also, that Czech guy. He told me -- you know I had told him a little bit about my story, that, “they probably won't believe that you are a Jew, either.” Anyway, later that day, be -- before I was even interrogated, we were all called out and marched off. And I thought now actually, that we are headed toward someplace where we were being shipped off into the Soviet Union. And I was sort of looking around, whether there would be a way, quick -- make a quick escape. There was just -- there were two soldiers, one in front and one bringing up the rear, each one with a gun who -- and it would have had to be somewhere where, you know, they couldn't immedia -- anyway, it never came to that, we only walked about two or three

blocks and then we were asked to sit down on the street in front of an even bigger villa, which was also occupied by these same green-hated soldiers. And then we were called up one by one into the building for interrogation and some people actually, after they came out, left. Apparently they were told to be free and others came back and joined us. And when -- when I was called in, there were two interrogators and they struck me immediately, sort of totally different. But see the Russians which I had come across so far, all were s-sort of looked pretty uncivilized and -- and -- and brutal in a sort of a raw way. These two guys, they also looked brutal, but they were well shaved. They looked brutal, maybe sounds funny to say, in the SS way. They had elegant uniforms, they talked fluent German, they seemed to be very educated, but -- made a ruthless impression that way. But -- anyway they --they wanted to know, you know, who I am, which I told them and then exactly as that Czech had predicted, they told me that they won't believe that I am Jewish and in fact that they have some evidence that I had -- was working under orders to blow up bridges to delay the Russian advance and how I could prove that I'm Jewish. And then I s -- I told them, well you have my papers, you know th-they confiscated. Then they both laughed, indicating, you know, these days, anyone has forged papers, so. And then I was sent down into the basement of that villa. The basement was of course, concrete floor, covered with a thin layer of straw and I was greeted there by a chorus of other Germans, “Ah, a-a new one coming in.” And of course, in lying there with those guys I found out one of them was th-the local Nazi party district leader, had sort of the same position as that guy that we had then. And I-I said, sort of to myself, you know, what an irony, you know. Here I am in prison now, with guys like those, like that. And -- and then we were also again fed some nondescript food and people were constantly being called up for interrogation upstairs. And then night fell and then the guard would periodically come into the cellar and shine a flashlight into people's faces, looking for a

particular individual and then gave in up and the next morning I was called up again and -- and the same two guys were there and they immediately took me und-under sharp questioning and said whether I had changed my mind and I'm willing to tell the truth now. And I told them that I -- that I -- that is the truth and then one guy sort of walked up to me and said, “You know, I tell you one thing, we have more -- too many of your types of Jews in the Soviet Union, and they're -- you are all the same. You don't want to work, but you want others to work. You want other people to work for you. If one thing, we'll teach you guys to -- how to work.” And then, with that he lifted his jack-booted foot and gave me a -- a powerful kick into my rear end, “Now get down.” And the guard took me down again. And then other people were called up and I forgot whether there was a third night or not, but anyway, the next time I was called up, the guard who did the bringing up, came into the basement, pulled his pistol a-and shouted into the room. Usually he called by name, now he shouted, “Where is the Jew?” So I got up and he pulled his pistol and said, “You are going to be shot now.” An-And that d-didn't sound real to me, because they weren't shooting people there, you know? And anyway, as I-I walked ahead of him, he sort of pressed the muzzle of his gun into my back, but somehow at that point I wasn't afraid, I-I-I-I sort of felt that was just a ruse. And when I came up, there were these same two guys and they again asked me whether I had a change in mind and whether I'm ready to tell them the truth. And I -- I said, “That is the truth.” And then -- then they asked, “Well, how could you prove that you are a Jew?” So I-I said, “Well, I know some Hebrew.” So upon which one of them rattled something in -- in Yiddish. Then -- then I said, “But that wasn't Hebrew, that was Yiddish.” Then he said, “Oh? What's the difference?” So I explained the difference to him and then he smiled and then he said, “Well what -- what -- what do you -- what Hebrew do you know?” You know, in -- in -- in that moment, the only thing I could think of was a Shema, which I recited. And then

they both laughed and then it suddenly struck me, these guys are Jews. And -- and then they were just instantaneously switched, they were extremely polite, told me to sit down and I must be hungry after that ordeal and they -- they barked some orders at some guy outside. And it was in five minutes he came with delicious rolls with s -- sausage and salami and -- and then we had a conversation, then he asked me what I want to do and I told him werwidden. And then he said well okay, I-I should get out of there an-and -- and go home. Now the thing is this, on the day -- that all started when I was looking for the -- when I was looking for the railroad station and I had a light coat on and that coat, of course I had left downstairs in the -- in the cellar, in the basement. But during the days that I was down there, you know, you hear all kinds of stories, they were telling of -- of somebody who was released by the guys upstairs, who also had forgotten some personal belongings in -- in the basement and said he wants to retrieve it, but the guard had a change in mind, you know and -- and just told the guy he's not letting him out again, even though the officer upstairs there. So I figured, to hell with my coat, I am free and that's more important. But of course, in those days, even a coat, a simple coat was a -- somewhat of a fortune, but my freedom was even more valuable. I-I forgot to mention, by the way, that when, on the first day, when those Germans were asked to peel potatoes and then released, I managed to tell one of them the address where the Haas family were living there in the orangery and to notify them where I am, because you know, they had no idea. So when I came back, you know, they knew over there, that guy had actually notified them and they had gone to Major Shike, you know, hoping that all that needs to be done, that he has to pull some strings to get me out. And when they told him where I was, he immediately backed off and said, “Well, there's nothing that -- these guys knows wh -- know what they are doing,” and he cannot interfere. So, that's an interesting sidelight on the system, was exactly the way with the Gestapo in -- in -- in -- in -- in

Nazi Germany of course. Okay, so anyway, after all of that, we knew that no trains were running to Berlin, but that's where we wanted to get to. And then -- in the meantime, our bicycle of course, had been stolen by the Russians. It was th -- after the watch, was the next thing. So I couldn't even bicycle to Berlin, but I suggested that I walk to Berlin, was about, I forgot, must be 25 miles or so. And -- and go to the Templehoff district, where I had that room and sort of see what's going on. So I walked there and right when I got there, I-I found out first of all, that the Russians had already instituted a German civilian administration and in the borough, sort of city or each -- yeah, Berlin has 20 boroughs, you know, th-that borough of Templehoff where that apartment was in, then had its own city hall and so I went up there and I found out that they have lists o-o-of -- of Nazis, particularly Nazis who had more prominent positions. And their apartments are available for people who are returning from concentration camps, that were persecuted. So the guy told me that all I have to do is ask for a list and I can pick the apartment I want to have. And of course I didn't want to make a decision so I just stayed one night and then walked back again and then there's another one or two days and then I -- I walked with Margaret's father, Mr. Haas, to Berlin. There we had a -- another incident, while we were walking on the -- this major highway, I mean that also goes through suburban city streets toward Berlin. We saw already at a distance -- there was a big hospital there and -- and the Russians, you could see were busy there, carrying equipment out. And -- but as we come closer, we could see that they were basically Russian guards and German civilians carrying equipment. And so, as -- as we got there, the Russian guard immediately enlisted us to also help carry out equipment from the -- they were dismantling the entire hospital and we had to go in and carry out whatever medical supplies and -- and so on.

End of Tape Seven, Side B

Beginning of Tape Eight, Side A

Q: This is tape three, side A, of an interview with Ernest Fontheim, on June fourth, 1997. The interviewer is Randy Goldman.

A: Yeah, so -- I mean, we were not exactly excited by this prospect, particularly since we figured if they need us here to load that truck, somewhere they must have a railroad sighting, where the truck then has to be unloaded into railroad cars and we didn't want to be taken there. Now again I had really a unbelievable stroke of luck. It turns out that one of the nurses in that hospital, was a nurse who at one time, my grandmother had -- I forgot for what reason my grandmother was paralyzed toward the last years of her life. Anyway, she knew me and she knew our family. And so I-I told -- we had a chance to chat and then she told us to -- when we ca -- to bring down now whatever we were taking dow -- told to take down and when we come up, to see her in a certain room number. So that's where we went and then she conducted us to some rear staircase, in the rear of the building, that the Russians apparently hadn't been aware of, and which let out some rear door to a side street, away from that main highway. And then she told us to walk down that street, several blocks and then turn right and to come back again to the main highway, but sort of out of sight of those g-guards there. So that's what we did, so. And -- okay, then we continued and then when we came to Berlin, I went with my -- with Margaret's father to the -- to the city office, where I had been a few days before and we were give -- given the list and then we started to look at one or two apartments and actually liked one. There -- there was a mother, who was, I guess she must have been probably around late 30's, maybe around 40, with two relatively small children, maybe sort of around, maybe, a young teenager, I think a boy around 13 and a girl a few years younger. And, you know, we identified ourselves as -- that we are Jews and that the

Nazis had taken everything we -- away. Oh yeah, by the way, I'm sorry, I have to back up. The official in the city hall also told us that the people, I mean, who -- apartments are vacated, are not permitted to take anything with them, unless we give special permission. And t -- Margaret's father sort of conducted the conversation and he told her that we are, of course, not like the Nazis and any personal, I mean we don't want her clothing or -- or that of other family members and -- or personal items, but all furnishings, all kitchen utensils and those things, have to stay in the apartment. And -- and to do it sort of on an honor code and we'll be back the next morning to claim the apartment. So that's what we did, we came back the next morning, got a set of keys and -- and then took possession of the apartment. And then I-I think through Major Shike or somehow, we got a Russian military truck to take us along, who was going to Berlin anyway, also with all our luggage. I mean you couldn't have -- yeah, I-I mean I-I-I skipped several things, you know, when -- when I say I discussed, when we suddenly had to leave that village there overnight and we hid all our suitcases in the shed of this elderly couple, Dwuzul. I don't -- I don't know whether I mentioned their name, but their name is Dwuzul anyway. And I picked those up by meeting them at a certain railroad station. So we had all our things with us by that time. And of course there was no way how we could have gotten to Berlin, you know, with all that stuff if we -- so anyway, that's how we got to Berlin. And then one sort of interesting after development, I-I had discussed, quite a bit earlier, the former client of my father, who was also a furrier and where I went to work once a week on his estate, so long, as a gardener in the fields. And I mentioned that he had three Polish forced laborers there. A Polish couple and then a single woman, Maria, who always, every time I came, invited me to her room and fed me and gave me food along. And -- and who I sort of suspected that she might have a crush on me. Well, when I visited the furrier [indecipherable] after the war, he told me an amazing story, he said when the

Russians came, you know and he lived, of course in an area of big mansions and they were going everywhere just emptying places out -- Maria went and sort of got a hold of the first Russian officer and had a long conversation in Russian with him. As a result of which, the officer ordered all his -- his troops away from this house and -- and on and he was, nothing happened to his place. And then he -- he asked Maria, “What -- what did you tell him?” And, “I-I told him that you are one of the few decent Germans, that you helped enemies of the regime and Jews.” And then he said, “What -- what Jews did I help?” Well, you know, I went -- I think I mentioned I went there also under an assumed name. And the name I used there, by the way, was Tsarini. There was some reason for that, but doesn't make a difference here. And -- and she said, “Wasn -- Wasn't Tsarini Jewish?” And he laughed and said, “Of course he was, but how did you know?” Then she said, “I know because I am Jewish. My name is not Maria at all. I -- I got Polish papers. It was better to be deported to Germany for forced labor than to some concentration camp and I-I immediately recognize a Jew.” And -- and when he told me the story, I felt really dumb. That is -- that never occurred to me. And I often wondered what became of Maria, or whatever her real name is. Well, it's an interesting sidelight.

Q: Let me ask you a question. At what point did you start hearing about all of the atrocities?

A: Oh yeah, okay. In a -- we heard from British broadcasting, BBC, that we occasionally -- yeah, the -- the -- we -- we had a chance to listen to BBC at the house of this elderly couple, the Dwuzuls, you know, who -- later were insulted that we hadn't informed them earlier who we were, because they -- we had even before that, when we still pretended to be good German Aryans, we had often been at their house listening to foreign broadcasts, mainly BBC, actually, with them. And in fact I have to say that -- that was a big morale booster, just to listen to the BBC. They did a lot for us just by having these broadcasts and -- and they -- their signal was

always -- it started out with the Morse Code signal for the letter V, for victory and -- and by coincidence, these are also the first tacts of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. And -- and just listening to -- to this signal was already a big morale booster. And of course we heard all kinds of stories, that the Nazis kept from the population. And of course, as I had also said before, that was punishable by execution if they found out someone was listening to foreign radio broadcasts. So in a way, the Dwuzuls had a point, you know, they were totally in our hand, you know, we -- we listened to these broadcasts there with them at their radio and --

Q: No, my question was --

A: Yeah?

Q: After you -- you were with the Russians, did people start streaming back?

A: Oh, no.

Q: Did you start hearing stories?

A: No, not -- I mean, all I was going to say -- that come from -- from Brit -- from BBC we heard for the first time, I think maybe I said that before already, that hundreds of thousands of Jews are being killed. Then -- no, i-it -- it took quite awhile. Actually, people slowly dribbled in. There was a central registration place for Jews right after the war. In fact, that was at the Jewish hospital, which was the last, sort of collection center for Jews for deportation. Then it was turned over and -- and then was the first place where Jews could -- free Jews could collect again. And -- but since there was no public transport, that was at the opposite end of Berlin. Templehoff was in the southern part of Berlin and that hospital in the northern part. It was a long walk of many miles. I went there once a week, hoping to see a -- a well known name, but -- but didn't discover anyone. The -- the first person who returned, whom I knew, from Auschwitz, was a high school friend of mine, who in fact later also came to this country and was then, before his retirement, a

professor of mathematics at Ohio State University in Columbus, and -- where he is living now. But he -- he was in Auschwitz and he came back and he told me basically, a lot of the things also, a lot of the things that Elie Wiesel discussed in his book, "Night." An-and -- I mean sort of, I mean the -- the fact that millions of Jews had been systematically killed, I mean it -- because then also other Jews came back, not just German Jews, also east European Jews who were chased out then, from their own countries, mainly from Poland. As you may know, there were pogroms in Poland against the returning Jews. And so, I don't know how soon we found out, but within maybe weeks or months, we found out, although I mean, the total extent of it probably might have taken longer, I-I don't know.

Q: But the stories --

A: Yeah, right.

Q: How bad it was?

A: Yeah, right -- that -- that came out. I-I-I would like to make a few sort of post-script comments concerning the period of time before the start of World War Two. Because I-I remember you had also asked me a question, you know, how that time affected me, at that time I was just a teenager and of course the Nazis were then in power, since 1933. And what I would like to say is, that there was an increasing atmosphere, sort of -- of -- of hostility against the Jews in -- in all -- in the media, in p -- in -- in newspapers, in -- in the radio and so on. And -- and we were, I mean, th-that I know I discussed also -- pictured as the worst criminals and as a --a sort of tr-trying to undermine the German nation. Yeah. For example, one incident in -- in the apartment building where we lived, the -- the beautiful one where we had that large apartment, there were only two parties on each floor. And on the same floor there was another couple, the husband was also a lawyer, but they were Aryans, I mean Germans and they had a daughter, just one, single

child, a daughter my sister's age. And the grandmother, one of the grandmother also lived with them. And my sister and that girl were very close friends, they played together, and of course they went to school together then, when they came to school and so on. And one day the girl told my sister that her grandmother had forbade her from now on, to have a Jewish friend. So she is sorry, but she can't come over any more and can't have her over. You know, things like that. Then, each apartment building was assigned a Nazi party, sort of representative for that building and the man who was the representative in our building, for example, made it a point, whenever we crossed paths, see, in the house entrance, in the elevator or wherever, to ostensibly sort of look in a very hostile way and ignoring us, not greeting us. And a few other tenant, not all of them, but a few other tenants followed suit. Then, as the 30's wore on and the Nazis really started openly to prepare for war, they also started an extensive air raid protection system, with building air raid shelters in basements and so on. And one of the early orders was that Jews are not permitted to join the other tenants in an air raid shelter. So we had to go -- ea-each tenant also had a little lockable area, sort of separated by -- by wooden planks, to store things, for storage. And we had to sit in there like pariahs, while the rest of the tenants walked by there into their air raid shelter, which was, you know with benches and so on. And there was -- I mean there were constant speeches, of course, which were insulting and hostile to us and -- and people, even people who were not ill-meaning, felt that it was dangerous even, to be seen -- to associate with Jews. And then there were, they had frequent Nazi holidays or other holidays. They u -- every opportunity they -- then there were the Olympic games and so on. And o-of each time they made a big fuss about marches. That -- that was sort of one of their favorite activities. SS units, SA units, Hitler youth units, would march, you know, looking really snappy and snifty, with flags flying and with bands playing and singing their songs. And it was sort of, in retrospect, almost

like a -- almost continuous holiday atmosphere and by that time of course, as the 30's went on, everybody was employed. You know, Germany had a tremendous unemployment rate before, as part of the world wide great depres-depression. And of course they were all employed, basically re-arming Germany, but we didn't know it at that time. But, I mean, that was the thi -- that's -- that's how they solved the unemployment problem and also their own military, what they conceived as inferiorit-inferiority, and --

Q: You mentioned the Olympics.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you go to any of that?

A: Yeah, well actually, I went to two events. I went -- one was the final for the gold medal of soccer. I went with my mother, she -- my mother was very interested in sports, my father couldn't have cared less. So she went with me and the final game was between Italy and Austria and it was a very exciting game, they were, at that time, the power houses in -- in -- in soccer. And actually Germany also had a pretty good team, but was already out of the running by that time. And what happened is the -- at that time of course, Austria was still an independent country, otherwise they wouldn't have had a team. And -- but the Germans of course, felt kinship with the Austrians, so the -- the stadium sort of rooted for the -- for the Austrians. The Italians had bought, sort of blocks, large blocks of seats, where they were sitting in their black Fascist uniforms and were waving Italian flags and they must have had some sort of a cheerleader. They would -- at -- at some particular moment, maybe when Italy was on a drive, they would jump up, like on a command and shout, I mean in Italian, “Italia, Italia, Italia,” and waving their flags. And then the rest of the stadium would thunder back, “Ustarashe, Ustarashe,” is the German word for Austria. “Ustarashe, Ustarashe.” So it was that constant back and forth between these

blocks of Italians who shouted Italia and most of the rest of the stadium shouting Ustarashe. And --

Q: Was that alarming at all or was it exciting?

A: No, th-that was an excite -- that was an excite -- excite, I mean of course there were political undertones, but I mean, Italy was, by that time already, an ally of Germany, so there was no, it wasn't as if say Britain had been, you know then the --

Q: There was a certain energy --

A: Yeah.

Q: At the '36 Olympics --

A: Oh, yeah, I mean --

Q: Maybe you can talk about --

A: Yeah I-I mean that was, I mean, incredible. First of all, they -- they toned down somewhat, their antisemitism. That was probably on pressure from the west, although there wasn't much of that pressure as far as I can see. But the whole city was sort of -- was first of all renovated. The -- the -- the elevated lines got totally new trains. You know, it's that line that ran by that synagogue also, that was burned down a few years later. And -- and in fact those -- those cars are still in use now, that is now 60 years later. Unbelievable. I mean now they -- they look worn and so on. And -- and several stations, like the -- in -- in central Berlin and -- and -- and western Berlin, the central station is -- is a zoo station, because it's near the zoo. And that was totally rebuilt and -- and lots of other things, I mean were done to the city. I mean -- I mean the Nazis used that -- went all out of their way and -- and the interesting -- when I came to this country, and went to college here, in the year 1949, so that was only 13 years after the Olympics. I was at a small college in Missouri, where I had a scholarship. Southwest Missouri State College, in Springfield,

Missouri. And my German t -- not my German, she was a German professor there, a woman and I-I was actual -- at her request, I was active in the German club. Ther-There was a club for students who wanted to major in German and practice German and -- and she had asked me to go there too, so they can sort of converse with me in German. And then I often talked with her also, and she said she was in Germany in '36 to the Olympics. At that time she was a young, I don't know, whatever, assistant professor or something and -- and she said she was impressed -- the -- the courtesy, the -- the -- we -- how well everything was planned, the efficiency and also the party, the party hogans were also enlisted. They were all very nice, you know, the-they -- it -- it's fairly hard for people to understand. I mean y -- you can -- you could, even SS officers and sometimes the most brutal types, could be very charming and courteous and polite and they were all double faced and -- so the Olympic games, from that point of view, were a huge success, I mean. And of course, also, Germany did very well, I mean the Nazis had a tremendous system of physical training and -- and sports facilities and so on and I think in medals they won that game, far -- at least they claimed to, I forgot the details. But anyway, coming back to that soccer game, they -- the way soccer was played at that time at least, it was a draw at the official end of the game and I think it was one to one. And then the rule was that the game is extended until sudden death. In other words, one party shoots a goal and that ends the game and that party of course then wins. And -- And it was Italy that shot that additional goal, so it was two to one for Italy, and they got the gold medal and the Austrians got the silver then. But my father was -- my -- my mother was very interested in -- in sports, though not just spectator sports, but she did a lot also to entice me to -- I was originally totally averse to any sports, I didn't like it and often was afraid of things and she had a tremendous energy and -- and sort of practically forced me how -- to learn how to swim, to ski and to skate, I mean ice skate and bicycle. And I do most of these

things -- for swimming I don't care too much anymore. I find it too boring just to swim bac-back and forth in a lap, but -- but I mean, I-I'm able to swim and -- but I-I still love skiing and --

Q: [indecipherable]. Why don't you continue?

A: Yeah. Incidentally, the Olympics was the first occasion when I saw Hitler in person. We -- we lived -- the street we lived on in that ap-apartment was the major east - west sort of boulevard, that cut through, it started at the center of Berlin, actually near the Rice chancellery and then went for several miles, to the western outskirts where we lived. And the Olympic stadium was also near where we lived, so Hitler passed by there on -- on opening day to open the games. And of course, his trip out to the Olympic stadium itself, was planned as a big theater. They had the streets lined with enthusiastic crowds and SS, sort of in -- information, holding them back. And then Hitler would ride in an open Mercedes-Benz, in uniform, standing stiffly upright and periodically raising his right arm to the Hitler salute, greeting the masses. And as I stood on the balcony, just looking straight down at Hitler, the thought occurred to me how easy it would be just to assassinate him from here. The next time I saw him, was exact -- about a year later, when Mussolini played his state visit to Berlin in 1937. And in fact, during that state visit, the Berlin-Rome axis was sort of cemented. And Mussolini, the arrangement was also for them to ride into town, so in the opposite direction now, from the -- from a suburban railroad station, which was in fact just half a mile away from where our house was. And then they rode into town, again greeting the masses that were lined up behind rows of SS. And there was an interesting contrast. Hitler, the unsmiling, stiff despot and Mussolini, the typical, jovial Italian. He also raised his hand, but he raised it in a much more informal way. He -- his mouth was widely open and -- and laughing and smiling and his body would sort of -- in body language, wave back and forth from one side to the other, acknowledging crowds on both sides. Was a tremendous difference in the

appearance of these two dictators. I'm not trying to make Mussolini appear any -- like a nice uncle, but there was a tremendous difference between these two men, both were equally brutal. In -- in summary, I mean, I-I must say that I -- th-the years in the 30's, leading up to World War Two and the Holocaust, I felt, I mean basically like an outsider, like b-being, I mean pushed away from the main body and from all the festivities that the Germans enjoyed, from which I was excluded. But on the other hand, I had found my inner Jewish belonging, mainly as a result of the school that I went to and which gave me inner strength and to some extent compensated for that. One final remark I would like to make concerning the question of the deportations. The deportations of course, were ordered by the Gestapo and go back directly to an order by Heidrish, who was ordered by Hitler, was given by Hitler the -- the order to carry this out. But the -- at the local level, the deportations were organized by the Jewish community organizations. And of course that has been a big problem ever since it happened. For -- for me personally, I felt -- first of all, totally abandoned, I must say, by the -- knowing that the Jewish organizations were organizing the transports. Infer it got to the point where I actually considered the leadership of the Ricefinegunk -- that was the sort of umbrella organization of Jews in Germany -- I considered them as part of the enemy and they had to be considered that way. On the other hand, of course, we know now much more, there were very difficult moral decisions and there were very difficult also, options available. I certainly would never want to be in a position to make those choices. But it -- but th-th-th-the fact remains that for me at the time, I -- I felt really as being abandoned by my own leadership and -- and -- and it -- it probably needs to be considered more deeply now, where we have some distance, what the options were that these people had and what they could have done, other than what they actually did.

Q: I'm wondering how long you remained in Berlin, what your plans were and how easy or difficult it was to realize those plans.

A: Yeah, briefly, my first priority was to get on with my education and I immediately enrolled in the technical university in Berlin and then later took courses also in the main university, or Humboldt University, as that was then renamed, li -- taking lectures in mathematics, physics and so on. There were many famous professors who had still survived the war. And of course there -- there were then also a number of Jews who had returned, or some of them actually had survived in Berlin as -- as mixed -- children of mixed marriages. You know, where one parent was Gentile and the other one was Jewish. And of course there was a large number of German army veterans. And that in fact, was a very sore point. Many of them were still very nationalistic, in spite of that hu-huge defeat. So I-I-I enrolled in those courses and actually Margaret's mother immediately opened a sort of office, on her own, for social help for Jews returning from concentration camps. And she worked closely together with the American official who was in charge of that borough, Templehoff. A -- I think a captain or major Davidhoff, or Davidhoff. It turns out supposedly, that that man was a Communist and was then later rotated out and sent home. And when -- when the first possibility arose for emigrating to the United States, that was in '46 and we registered, it turned out that Margaret's mother somehow was on the black list, because she had closely collaborated, and that Major Davidho-Davidhoff also for example, was helpful in providing apartments for returning Jews and etcetera, etcetera. And so we were, for about a year, subjected to a lot of chicanery by the American consulate. I remember th-the consul himself was a Mr. Haney and -- who was a very unpleasant character and I was once, I'm sure on -- on his orders, although I can't prove it, interrogated by an officer of the CIC. The CIC is the army's criminal investigation commission or some -- and -- and that interrogation took place in the following

way, that the interrogating officer sat behind a desk and next to him was a growling German Shepherd, who was there just to intimidate me and they wanted to know, you know, about I -- wanted me to incriminate Margaret's parents, basically, as -- as Communists. And -- you know and when I -- when I couldn't say anything incriminating, you know he -- he let me go, finally. But he -- it was a very unpleasant interview, or interrogation is the better word. I did receive, finally, my visa, but the Haas family did not and at that point, since we had lived through thick and thin through the war, I decided to let my visa lapse, even though I was told by the -- and I told the consul I will go when the others will go. The consul said that there's no guarantee that I will ever get my visa renewed if I let it lapse once. And -- and I had an uncle here in the United States who also implored me to -- to come -- to come and let -- wait here for them. Anyway -- by the way, that's a interesting thing, my -- my first connection to -- to friends, you know there was no postal connection, of course, between Germany and any country outside. So we went to -- there was a huge barracks of American soldiers near where we lived and I remember I went to the guard soldier outside and asked whether he could tell me whether there was a Jewish soldier somewhere. It's such an outlandish idea. So -- so he directed me, pointed to some particular room and there was a Sergeant Roth, R-o-t-h. So I went to that Roth and told him who I was and that I survived and -- and I had a-an address of a school friend in Connecticut and my uncle. And -- and -- and actually I didn't -- he was in New York, but I didn't have his exact address, but I had some connecting address in London, who could then forward it. And -- and so he also conversed with me, that Roth and he -- he asked me where -- he -- no, he didn't ask me, he warned me not to try to emigrate to the United States because there are -- were already too many Jews there and -- and was rising antisemitism and now that the Nazis were gone and the war was over, it would be much better for me also if I stayed in Germany. And I found that so unbelievably

preposterous, he was an American Jew, telling me not to come here. But anyway, I didn't follow his advice, but what he did do, is he di -- he did forward my mail and the letter that I read to my school friend, wound up as an article, he submitted it -- there's a German-Jewish weekly called “Oufbow.” By now it's a biweekly. And it was published in there and -- and my -- my uncle then also f -- supported me. Finally we did get visas. Th-The joint was extremely helpful there, they -- the joint opened offices in Berlin and with their help, the three of us finally got visas and we arrived here on the 22nd of June, 1947. And -- and then my -- my first priority again here, was to study.

End of Tape Eight, Side A

Beginning of Tape Eight, Side B

Q: This is tape three, side B, of an interview with Ernest Fontheim, on June fourth, 1997.

A: Yeah. After my arrival, my first priority, as I said, was to continue my studies. My uncle provided the financial support in the beginning, for a-a few months. And then -- I lived in New York then. He had rented for me a furnished room in the upper West Side. And then I took a job as a messenger boy on 48th -- West 48th Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, for an outfit called Action Messenger Service. We were a whole bunch of young guys who were lined up and the boss would always call one after the other to run certain errands. For me that was great, that's how I got to know New York. I -- he sent me to one address to pick up a package to be delivered to a second address and I got to know New York from downtown Wall Street to midtown and even further uptown and I really fell in love with the city at that time. In the evening -- and by -- incidentally, I earned 50 cents an hour. And in the evening, I took two or three courses, I forgot, in City College. And -- and I took some elementary physics, which I already had in Germany, just in order to get up to speed also with the English language and with the technical expressions.

And I also had a course in calculus, which I -- also mostly was just review of what I had already learned in Germany. And I -- my goal, of course, was to become a full-time student and financially that wouldn't have been possible for me. So through a friend of mine, I was referred to a committee with the interesting name, American Committee for Émigré Writers, Scholars and Artists. And was sort of an interesting outfit. Basically what they did is this, they did not have any money themselves, they served as a clearing house for available grants, fellowships and so on. So I registered with them and after, I forgot what it was, a few months -- I should say also, I had only A's from my first two semesters in City College, so that obviously helped along. And they told me that they had a Rotary international scholarship for Southwest Missouri State College, in Springfield, Missouri. I never heard of the place before and of course I didn't know at that time that there were such huge disparities between different academic institutions. But anyway, I went there and I credit my two years in Springfield, Missouri and at that college, mainly with my Americanization. And one thing that bothered me in New York is that the only social contact I had was not just with other German Jews, but mainly only with Berlin Jews. Former Berlin Jews I should say, I should say. But -- and I realized that if I want to become acculturated in my new country, I can't just have a s -- a social life only with people from the old country. And -- but it was very difficult in City College, leadto -- I tried several times unsuccessfully. It's a commuter college, people come, take classes and rush away. Go back into the subway and go to Brooklyn or God knows where. And so it's not really a campus atmosphere. So when I got that scholarship, I took a train off to Springfield, Missouri and yeah -- and I should say that my friends, the Haas family, they --after some initial difficulty, settled in -- in New York and Margaret's father got several jobs, improving as time went on, in the garment industry as designer, pattern maker and so on, in ladies garments. Of course we stayed in contact

as I went to Springfield. And there I was received by the dean, who felt that it would be a good idea if I would be put -- housed in the barracks, which had been built on campus for GI's. That was the time of the GI Bill of Rights, after World War Two and there was such an influx of students that they needed to do something to -- to house them. And so th-these barracks were built. They were relatively primitive, but as far as I was concerned, totally sufficient. And of course, there I learned all the slang that I hadn't learned in all my years of English in the German high school, including all the four letter words, which I hadn't known before. And -- and in general got sort of acculturated to life in a small, Midwestern town. As the -- coincidence would have it, also the -- the dean, right away set me in touch with the local rabbi. And it turned out that rabbi also was a form-former German Jew. He was -- he wa -- had been rabbi in the Bavarian city of Oxbourg before the war and now he was rabbi in Springfield, Missouri and he and his family took me somewhat under their wings. I -- I was often invited to Shabbat evening dinners at their house and obviously each time for the Seder. And so I lived with them -- but -- not lived with, I mean I socialized with them and on the other hand, I also had American contacts and I even made dates with American girls. And so -- and -- and my school performance turned out to be very well. I did very well in all classes, so when I graduated then in -- in 1950, with a Bachelor's Degree, I got an offer, actually several offers, but the one that I accepted for graduate school was from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Admission to graduate school, plus a guaranteed sort of teaching assistantship in the physics department. And so, in the summer of 1950 isa, I got my Bachelor's Degree. That was in July, but I remained a bachelor then for less than a month. But o-on the sixth of August, Margaret and I finally got married. And that was in New York and -- and then we moved together to -- to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where I started my graduate studies. That graduate studies turned out, unfortunately extended for more years

than I had originally anticipated, and is customary, for a number of reasons. I had some bad luck with my first thesis subject and so on, but I don't want to go into that here now, but I -- o-of general interest is maybe that in the s -- in the -- in my first summer there, it was the summer of '51, I had a summer job at Bethlehem Steel Company, which is in the same city as Lehigh University. And the company -- in fact the steel plant, I think the company still exists, but the steel plant doesn't exist anymore. But I saw a steel plant from the inside and I found all of that very interesting. How steel is being made and so on. And then two years later, in '53, I had a summer job at White Sands proving ground. That was a rocket proving ground before anyone even knew that the United States was deeply involved in rocketry. At that time, they just shot -- shot captured German V2 rockets. And some clever physicist had gotten the idea to -- while these rockets are being shot with harmless warheads, just to test their flight characteristics, why not put some instruments on the -- in -- in the warhead, to measure properties in the upper atmosphere, ionosphere. And actually I was hired partly to write a sort of research paper on certain aspects on how to detect cosmic rays. And so that filled my summer and I didn't realize at that time, that in fact space physics would at one time become my life's profession. In 1954, the following summer, I spent -- I had a special fellowship for -- to Brookhaven, the national laboratory, which at that time was the foremost laboratory for -- in the world, not only this country, for high energy physics. And th-there was a machine that could accelerate particles to unheard of -- at that time -- energies, and cause all kinds of interesting effects and collisions. And I worked with some famous physicists there, I -- I met, among others there, Enrico Fermi, who -- the famous Italian physicist and Nobel prize winner and several others. And -- and then I-I wrote a f -- a thesis, back at Lehigh University in a fairly esoteric, purely mathematical subject in theoretical physics, involving fundamental particles and -- and field theory. I graduated in

1960 and by that time already, we had two children. I-I-I should have mentioned that after we married, in August 1950 and moved to Bethlehem, Margot worked for a number of years in an office and in 1955, she was pregnant with our son, Claude, who was born in August, '55 and -- and then in -- in O-October '59, our daughter Eva was born. And in '60, she was less than a year old, we moved from Bethlehem to Ann Arbor, Michigan. And in Ann Arbor, I have worked -- actually I was for two years in the radiation laboratory and the radiation laboratory sort of started to fold and go downhill. And then I obtained an offer from the space physics research laboratory in 1962, where I -- I stayed until my retirement in 1992. I -- during that time I had a also varied, interesting career. I attended many international meetings, including one in 1971, in Moscow, which interested me very much. I-I should add, incidentally, that I taught myself the Cyrillic alphabet during my two years -- postwar years in Berlin, from '45 to '47. Because the Russians immediately after their arrival, one of the first things -- they put under the German street names, the -- the name in R-Russian -- in Cyrillic letters, so that their soldiers could orient themselves in the city. And simply by comparison and also by -- by knowing the Greek alphabet, which I knew from the gymnasium, I -- I could figure out the entire alphabet, so going to Moscow in -- in '71, at least I wasn't lost. I could read street names and so on. In '72 I attended an international conference in Warsaw, which -- an-and just shortly before that time, I had read several diaries and reports about Warsaw ghetto, including the uprising. And the visit to Warsaw was a emotionally very shattering experience for me. I -- I spent every free minute that I was not at the meeting, walking around the streets of the ghetto and -- which I all knew, from the books and -- that I'd read. And -- and observed and of course -- this is well known, the ghetto was totally destroyed by the Germans after they captured it and -- and then the Poles completely leveled everything that was left and then built sort of a worker's apartment in a style which I call

Socialist Modern. Which means modern lines, but shoddy construction. And -- and I-I just walked through the streets and in my mental eye, saw in front of me, the Jews who lived there, only a few years before. It was there 30 years later that I was there, which is nothing, in history. In -- in '70, let me see, in '78 I spent a year, I'm sorry, I spent a summer in Paris. I -- a --a former student of mine actually, w-who got his PhD u-under my supervision in the late '60's. Was a French fellow, with whom I had an also personal friendship and we stayed in touch and he was probably one of my most successful students. He -- by now he is director of a big laboratory in Toulouse, but at that time he was already head of a group and he invited me to spend the summer of '78 there and I went there with Margot and our daughter Eva, who at that time -- '78, what was she doing then? She must have been a college freshman. And -- and that was marv -- we lived really like -- like French people. We rented a furnished apartment and Margaret and Eva, during the day, went of course to visit museums and sights around the streets and -- and on weekends we did things together. It was a -- one of m -- the best summers we had. And in '76, by the way, I had a summer position at the space physics laboratory of the University of California and Berkeley. That was where we -- we made a cross country trip by car, which is the only way to see this country, is really by driving through it. It's fascinating how the landscape changes, the architecture changes and so on. And on the fourth of July, actually -- we -- we first visited friends in San Diego and Los Angeles and on the fourth of July we drove up from L.A. to -- to San Francisco. And of course the fourth of July is Independence Day, obviously and in '76 it was the 200th anniversary of the United States. But in addition to that, it was also the day where Israeli commandos liberated the prisoners in Entebbe. And we were driving along and listening to the radio, you know, just for diversion, when suddenly a newsflash came on that Israeli commandos had liberated the passengers of a -- I think it was an Air France plane with Israeli

and also other citizens on it. And so that was a perfect way for us to celebrate Independence Day. And -- and then in the evening, after we arrived in Berkeley, we were told that already ahead of time, that there's always a big firework over San Francisco Bay and the best way to view it is from the -- from the eastern side of the bay, from Berkeley, in other words, th-the space physics lab is on -- on -- on a -- on a mountain where also the radiation lab is located. And it was a tremendous experience to see the fireworks over San Francisco Bay on the fourth of July, 1976. Well --

Q: Let me ask you a few questions.

A: All right.

Q: Okay? What -- what -- when you look back, I mean you've now had a lot of time and you -- you're rela -- you're fairly reflective. What sort of long term impact did these early experiences have on you, on the -- on the way you've lived your life, on your general outlook or the way you've raised your kids? Could you talk about that?

A: Yes. I mean, it had a tremendous impact and in fact the impact increased as the years went by. I -- I mean the fact that my parents, my sister and my first girlfriend, plus innumerable other people I knew or I didn't know, just vanished and were brutally murdered because of some unbelievable ideology which somebody cooked up, is so unna -- it -- it -- it's even for me today not understandable, how that could have happened. And I have been sort of totally more and more absorbed by it as the year went by. I -- I read -- I have, I mean innumerable books, some of them I haven't even read yet, on the Holocaust. I mean starting with the standard works by -- by Hillburg and what's her name? Yahyah Hill, the Israeli Estroyen and also Lucy Davidovitch and so on. But in addition to that, all kinds of -- of special works by authors on special subjects like the Warsaw ghetto. I own a number of diaries, including Rhea Blumes, notes and -- and on -- on

-- also on -- on -- on German Jews and I -- of course fascinated particularly by the fate of -- of German Jews, because that's what I am and I was totally raised in Germany and -- and how that could have happened, of all countries, in that country, is something that I -- I have wrestled with all the -- for years and years and have not really come to a conclusion. What it really was that gave rise to this unbelievable crime and you know that was com -- also it was committed by people who were mostly highly educated and although there were some uneducated at the lower levels, but at the higher levels they were of -- Goebbels was a PhD and -- and -- and many other people and -- who -- who are not that well known, but were in high positions, were highly educated. And to plan a mass murder on that scale and carry it out is -- is totally mind boggling and so -- and -- and then another thing is that the fate of my immediate family is -- I'm -- I'm trying to picture my father, even on the -- on the de -- on the deportation train. I mean how -- I-I-I mean going into such de-detail as y-you know that each -- each railroad car where people were transported and they were basically freight or cattle cars, had just -- somewhere -- big bucket where people could relieve themselves. I couldn't -- I can't even believe how -- how anyone would even be able to relieve themself in public, with everybody standing around, in a bucket in the middle. The -- the idea, to humiliate Jews to such an unbelievable extent and how my father even -- an-and then, on the day that they left, the temperatures were -- I mean Berlin in winter was anyway cold, I think now it's not as cold any more, but at that time it was much colder, but that was an unusually cold day, even for that time. I-I checked the meteorological records again, to -- and have that at home, actually. And to -- to -- to reconfirm, that was just my memory, but it -- were extremely cold days j -- and of course the cars were unheated and -- and how my family was treated after they arrived in Auschwitz, or that they went to Auschwitz, that is a matter of record. And my friend Ruth, I think, was deported to Riga and from -- but I -- from what little I

know, it may have happened that they were immediately transported by truck into some forest and shot. And s-so I-I have been -- as the years went by I have more and more occupied myself with that. For example, I was instrumental in Ann Arbor, to start a annual sort of observance of Yom HaShoah, which has been now going on for over 10 years. And I was also involved -- Ann Arbor has a statue now, commemorating the Holocaust, where I was involved in -- both in raising the money and in getting the idea through, it's a -- the -- the artist who made the statue is Leonard Baskin, who, by the way, also made one of the statues of the new FDR memorial here. And so I'm -- I-I must say that I am -- m-my -- yeah then -- did you ask me how I raised m -- what affect of raising my children and -- and in two ways. First of all, I have always talked to them about that period and -- and in -- in 1981 in fact, that was when our son graduated from -- from law school in Michigan and our daughter was actually still a year away from -- from graduation, but we proposed sort of for them, a joint graduation gift, that's a trip to Europe, sort of as students like to do it, sort of to bum around. They could select where they wanted to go, sort of and you know, hos -- youth hostels and so on, with one proviso. In '81, I was at an international meeting, I think in June or so, in Edinburgh, Scotland. And I-I suggested that we meet in Berlin on -- on a certain week, so that Margot and I could show them where we grew up, respectively and also where we went to school and other places of relevance to -- in our lives. And so that's what we did, we actually -- after -- from Edinburgh, you know, we flew to Berlin. The kids had already left earlier. They had decided first to make a brief swing through parts of Scandinavia, they were in Copenhagen, then southern Sweden, okay and then they went into Berlin. We met there and spent a week there and we -- we sh -- went also to the cemetery where some of our forebears, gros grandparents and so on, are buried. And some famous German Jews. In Germany the gravestones are also more, sort of descriptive, I mean you can really see who

somebody was. I mean it explains -- somebody may have been professor of this or that at this university or -- or may have been an architect or whatever. Anyway -- and -- and then -- the rest of the time they continued then, on their own. So, coming back to your question, I mean I -- I saw to it, but I also w-we wanted to make them also very conscious of their Jewish heritage and Margot and I often feel, that in that respect maybe we didn't do too great a job. We had -- we sort of totally relied -- we are members of a conservative synagogue and of course, you know, money constraints being what they are, they can't really hire first rate teachers, so they usually use college students who come from more or less religious homes, to teach sort of the standard things in elementary Hebrew and Biblical history and so on. But they still, they are -- our daughter now even, is taking now here a course in basics of Judaism, I think, at the DCJCC.

Q: Wh-what what I'm asking is maybe a little bit more subtle. It's, do you think that you acted differently than you might have? Do you think that you have certain values or you instilled certain values --

A: Oh, okay.

Q: As a result of your experiences?

A: Yes. Okay, that -- thank you for raising that question. I was -- I-I was never only concerned exclusively with the Jewish faith, although this is obviously the one that's closest to me, but I was always appalled, I mean for example, also, with the treatment of blacks here in this country, or Afro-Americans. And I-I have been always quite active in -- in -- in Ann Arbor there. I mean today's -- seems long ago, but there was at one time strict housing segregation and there was a large group in which I was involved, for passage of city ordinances, to make such segregation illegal, particularly by real estate agents, loan practices by banks and so on. And I took the children sometimes along to demonstrations, I mean just to -- and they are both -- both of our

children -- E-Eva, our daughter, is involved now in the Hunger Coalition here, which incidentally my wife is also very much involved, in Ann Arbor. And our son is involved with the Anti-defamation League and such organizations. So we always instilled in them that it is important for everybody to work for equality, not just for yourself or your own group, but for all groups.

Q: Were there certain, or are there certain fears that have stuck with you as a result of your experiences?

A: Very, very seldom, I have some dreams or some thoughts. I mean I -- I just recently, when I woke up earlier in the morning than I-I should have probably, I thought of that incident with that civilian police guy who stopped me on the subway and where I ask myself the question, what if my assessment was wrong and my lingering around there would have caused him -- he could have, any time while I was at that newspaper kiosk, pretending to look at newspapers, he could have tapped on my shoulder and said, “Why don't you come along, I want to ask you some more questions.” And then, that would have been the end of me. And -- and sort of I elaborated on that in my fantasies. I w --

Q: I mean there are people who probably wouldn't have gotten -- wouldn't ride a subway today, do you know what I mean?

A: Yeah.

Q: I'm trying to --

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, no.

Q: If there are certain -- certain images, certain sounds that really trigger memories for you?

A: Yeah.

Q: In a very powerful way?

A: Well actually, it's not a memory, it's sirens -- for two reasons. First of all, they signaled air raids, but they also, you know my father was basically abducted, that's what the correct word for that would have been. And normally, you would call the police and -- and they would come with their sirens blaring and whenever I hear sirens, particularly in a police car, sometimes I've actually -- tears are welling, thinking of it. They should have come and rescued my parents, they were being abducted in broad daylight. And -- and I visited -- I visited by now, Auschwitz four times and that is also a -- something I still have not come to -- to grips with. But in general, I -- in my day to day life, fortunately, I have not had any, I mean to my knowledge at least, any sort of real strong emotional effects of, I mean like you say, not wanting to ride subways or things.

Q: Is there anything else you want to add, because I think we've covered a lot and --

A: Yeah. I mean actually, o-one thing that I wanted to say and forgot, that in one of the earlier tapes, I think I made some mistakes in two dates. One is that highacoo -- high school friend of mine, at one point I said -- left Berlin to emigrate to England on January 18, 1938. Now, in context that of course could not have been in -- in -- as I explained at the time. His parents were Austrians and in January '38, Austria still was an independent country. Ex-Excuse me. Austria was occupied in March '38 and so then they lost their protection. And he left Ger -- actually Berlin on January 18, '39. In other words, about three quarters of a year after Austria lost its independent. The second date correction, the arrest of my girlfriend Ruth. I said at one time, it's November 9, '41. That -- also th -- in November -- I-I'm sorry, September 9, '41, I said. The first deportation left Berlin only at the end of September '41 and she was deported on September 9, '42, not '41. I mean that's just -- it doesn't change anything, but to correct the misstatement.

Q: Any overall thought or statement you'd like to make?

A: Well --

Q: Doesn't have to be specific, but just any --

A: Yeah. I would think really two or three things. One of them is that there is a lot of basic value in Judaism and that it's sort of incumbent on us to really familiarize ourselves with it. I mean there -- for many Jews in this country, there has been sort of -- the Holocaust has been treated almost like a substitute religion, particularly in recent years and I think that is almost sick. I think the Holocaust must be remembered, of course, but not as a -- in the sense of a religion, but in the sense that we, first of all should remember always, just like we remember other events in our history, going back to Masada, to the destruction of the two temples and so on and also to learn from it. Learn what to do and also what not to do. The other thing is, that aside from Judaism, I -- I also don't believe that one should be focused 100 percent on one's Judaism. Like I know there are such Jews, but that since we are living in a -- in a broader world, that it is also the duty of everyone to involve him or herself in the daily politics. To fight for what is right and to fight for -- ag-against injustice, also against other groups. I think that is -- that is one thing th-th-that is important, I mean the -- there is a famous, by now it's a cliché, quote -- I think it is from the German, "Pustor Nimala." At -- at first they came after the Communists -- I mean the Nazis, I didn't particularly care because I wasn't a Communist. Then they went after the Jews and didn't b-bother me either, I'm not a Jew. Then they went after homosexuals and didn't bother me, I'm not a homosexual. Then they went after Catholics, that didn't bother me and when they came after me, there was nobody left.

Q: Thank you.

A: You're welcome

End of Tape Eight, Side B

Conclusion of Interview