

Well, we lost it.

What we didn't make clear in the last hour was how your mother and brother ended up in Paris.

Oh, yeah.

So if you can describe what you-- you don't know from the experience, but know from the story that your mother must have--

From bits and pieces, and some of them, that I even only heard about last year. Because it seems like things don't flow in the family. I get a bit, and then three years later, I get another little bit. So I don't know what it is.

And the shame is, as I said, I never had the chance to live with my father after the war. So I really only know what everyone has added a little bit over the years. I believe that they had taken what you call a man-- someone to pass them from Antwerp to France.

They were hoping to reach the free zone. There was a free zone in France. I don't know how safe it was. But, anyway you thought.

Right.

And I think you had to pay a certain sum per person, and also hand in whatever gold or values you still have left. Because the reason they gave was, if you are arrested, we can save it for you. But if you're arrested, they will take everything. You will end up with nothing, which at that time, did you care whether you had anything or not?

So they set out, I think, for the second attempt. And they were supposed to be passed over in Paris somewhere from one station to another. But the lady who passed them was arrested on the train before they reached Paris. And as I said, I still remember the name, Haberkorn. She used to do it on a frequent basis.

From what I guess from Henry, my youngest brother, she had the certain status, which allowed her to do these trips in and out. And so she was covered, but she wasn't that well covered, because they took her off the train right there. So from what I have heard, when they reached Paris, there was total chaos. And they lost each other.

My father lost trace of my mother and Henry. And I don't know where he went or how he ended up on his own, carrying on to the South of France. And she was stranded with other couples.

And someone told them your only chance now is go to this hotel, wherever the street of that hotel was. And I presume, not speaking the language, lost without her husband, she just followed whichever group of people went and ended up there, and never found a trace of her husband. Well, she died before the end of the war.

And your father ended up in Lyon.

He ended up-- first, he went as far as trying to get into Switzerland. One of the last years I heard that he had gone in, but hadn't found a place to stay. And they were hiding in the synagogue right there close to the border, whichever city it was when the Gestapo came to round them all up. And they got the notice in time.

So he went on the roof. Spent the night there, hiding behind the chimney of the synagogue or whatever, until he was told by people who passed that it was safe to come down. And he did. But I don't think he was allowed to stay in Switzerland, or the reception wasn't good or whatever.

So he decided to walk back with the help of some farmers. And so he hid for the rest of the war near Lyon in the forest, where he worked as a wood-- what? Wood feller, or whatever we had work, which he had not never done in his life from polishing and cutting diamonds. So he had a hard time-- a very hard time to survive.

But they fed him, and I believe they gave him some lodging. So that's where he spent the war. And he must have waited for the day, because they came back as soon as the war was over, two days later, he was in Brussels. And so did David.

Interesting. All right, now we can go--

Back to my mother

Back to your mother.

OK.

Your mother is now with Clara and Jacques, with Henry. And as I understand it, Clara has no children.

No.

So it's just the five--

Thank God.

Four of them, rather. So you go back to this wonderful reception, with Elise and Marie so happy to have you back. And you find out that they have been looking to see whether there was a--

Yes, and then that was finalized pretty soon, like within a week or so. The parish priest from Grez-Doiceau, the one who knew all about my situation, had asked the parish priest of the next little village whether he would take in my mother, hide her, and that she would be like the housekeeper-- which they all have a housekeeper. So he agreed on that.

No, I don't think I went to get her. I have a feeling that Clara brought her over to Grez-Doiceau. I think that's the only visit I remember her visiting me where I was hiding.

And we talked quite a bit. And we said we would try to find a place for her, too. And she kind of agreed on that. And then she went back to Brussels.

And Marie and myself, we brought my mother over to the priest. But we left in the evening, as we've always done afterwards, just to be on the safe side. And we went through the fields. It was within two miles walking distance, so not that far-- no, four miles, but feasible. And of course, we [INAUDIBLE] Henry with us.

Right.

But then, the parish priest from Gottechain, the one who took my mother in, made us understand that it wasn't a dumb thing to have a housekeeper with a child. That we would have to find a place for Henry. Now, that was the worst trauma that she ever went to, because that was her last living support that was taken away from her.

And no matter what I said, that I wasn't too far, I'd come and visit you at least once a week, that was very, very hard-- on both sides. He had never been without her. That was his only link. And she, to separate from him, well, was just terrible-- real terrible.

About how old do you think your mother was at this time? In her 40s or 50s?

In her 40s.

In her 40s?

You know, she died, she was 48, so she was pretty young.

Right. So that separation, that moment must have been awful.

It was awful. Just awful. Now, don't forget, here she is, and she can't speak.

Right.

So they made-- she did the housekeeping. She did the cooking for the parish priest. Now, here we go with the kosher and the--

[LAUGHTER]

That was something else. Oh, that was so awful for her. See for her, I think-- I was told by the doctor that the stress of all that alone, plus all the other things that happened after, would have been enough to have cancer. She died of cancer of the liver.

But she just couldn't handle it. I can't imagine, if you can't communicate, you know? She had another lady who used to come in now and again, and give us some advice. And she was kind of well in the knowing of what was going on.

And they communicated quite a bit by hand and signs and things like that. He didn't speak anything but French. She couldn't speak French at all. So it wasn't an easy situation at all.

It was a big parish house, you know? They're usually pretty-- yeah. And she did the cooking for him.

So she's really completely isolated, except for those little visits that you might have.

Yeah.

And did you ever say to her, let me teach you a little bit of French? No.

I probably thought it's a hopeless situation.

[LAUGHTER]

Or maybe I wasn't a teacher in those days. No, I've never tried, or maybe didn't even come in question. I don't know. Maybe I did tell her a few words, and I'd write out a few words the way she could read it, you know, with how it sounds. Because I do remember the parish priest laughing about some spices and things, where I had labeled it my way for her.

And he said, I don't know where you get this language from. It looks like a Regine-ism. I'd say, whatever. As long as she knows what she's doing.

So you would put it in Yiddish for her.

Mm-hmm. Spelling Yiddish, that with our letters. Do you know what I'm saying?

So you transliterated it.

Yeah.

Yes, and she could that?

Yes, she could read that.

Uh-huh. That's interesting.

Yeah.

So how-- we're in 1942, '43, right?

Beginning '42 [INAUDIBLE], yeah. Because remember, she only died in '44.

Right.

[? Jules ?] almost made it. Yeah, '42 and '43, she's with the priest now.

Right.

And OK, so after a few days, he found a place for Henry, but that is not so far away. With no means of transport, that was heartbreaking to separate the two on both sides, as I say.

And where did he stay over these few days? Did he go back with you to the--

No. And you know, I have a total blank there. I don't know whether to the same parish priests of Grez-Doiceau. He must have had someone who worked in the resistance who came to get him, and drove him probably to Dinant And those people were in the resistance, too. And they were going to take him, but not keep him.

That's what Henry told me. When he arrived, he was only supposed to spend a few days there. And then they were going to bring him over to an orphanage, as they used to do where all the Jewish people are.

Kids were hidden, too. But there were six children in that farm. They lived on the top of the city in the citadel, like a fort. Very beautiful.

And one day, the kids came back from school. And here is this little boy. So you can imagine the questions are flying.

They were all kids-- grade school kids. And who is he, and he's cute. And so the mother explained that his parents were not around, and they were just keeping him a few days until their dad would have settled that he'd be accepted in the orphanage, whichever place it was going to be. So the kids went along with the story.

But then when they-- and they had to go back to school. So the next day, they started really begging not to send him away. They got really attached to him right away.

And they said, oh no, we want to keep him. Why should he have to go to an orphanage, and how would you like it if we lost our parents and you sent us? [INAUDIBLE] the girls themselves have told me the story, not that long ago, how they really made a scene of it, because they thought he was so cute. And probably, in every kid's mind, an orphanage is an orphanage. It sounded awful. So--

How interesting they would think if it would happen--

And compare, yeah. So they decided they'd keep him.

So this is the Alardo family.

The Alardo family, another very Catholic family-- very Catholic. And they lived up there in the citadel. And of course, they had trained Henry, and he had to make a lot of promises that he would never reveal his identity, he would never say who he is. He would never say from where he was coming. They had tested them in many, many ways to see whether it was safe for themselves to keep him, being that they were in the Resistance.

So the Alardo family was in the resistance? I see.

And they even sent, like, a distant uncle to come and visit, and really test Henry out with I don't know how many questions, just to see how safe it would be. Would eh reveal anything that would put everyone in danger? But he never let go. So they kept him.

And he--

He was a character, too, let me tell you.

He was a character, yes.

[LAUGHTER]

He must have been, and a real survivor, because what he went through much younger than I did, you know? Even this testing out, you know-- where are your parents and how come you don't know this? And haven't you got any brothers, and why don't you know that. And they really went all the way up. But they had to do that, I believe, just to make sure, because-- it was just terrible.

So does he now have false papers? Did a child that age-- he was, what, seven, eight years old.

No, I don't think he needed any papers. He was too young probably. I don't know. He might have had, but that detail I haven't found out.

I can find out next year. But I'm not sure whether he had. He actually went to school with the kids.

And do you know how they explained that, all of a sudden, this seventh kid?

Maybe he said it was a little cousin or a nephew, or anything. But he told me he went to school with them. He started going to school with them.

Did he have a false identity? If not papers, but did he have another name?

Oh, yeah, he must have had another name. Yeah. He was totally integrated in the family-- totally, yeah.

So did it take him a long time to adjust to all these strangers or with these kids?

No, he was very happy with the family. He still is-- very. He wouldn't have left.

He was forced to go. As you know, the story unfolds itself later. He was heartbroken. Henry would never have gone to Israel if it hadn't been for my father.

So tell me something. Do you feel then-- I don't mean what you feel now. But here, in fact, you save your brother and your mother. Do you have a sense of growing up that you're doing something important that you have [INAUDIBLE]?

I probably had a certain satisfaction to say, well, at least I saved my mother and I saved my little brother. And I'm amazed that I could do that, you know? But without finding anything glorifying in it. I mean, life was just too hard and too difficult in so many ways.

But it had to give you a certain kind of sense of accomplishment.

Yeah, maybe. But maybe more than after the war. You know what I'm saying?

Yes.

Because we were very crushed. It takes a long time to--

To get back.

To get back into a human shape, let me say, you know? We were good-for-nothing, I mean, from everywhere we moved. So you grow up with that, and it's difficult to shake it off.

At this time, is your knowledge of what the Germans are doing is murdering Jews in the East? You know this.

Yeah, we already know. That there are gas chambers without knowing what they are. [INAUDIBLE] we have already start hearing things like that.

You really believe it?

Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So now you're back, and you know there's a certain degree of safety for your brother and your mother.

Yeah.

And Clara, are they trying to find a place for her, and she doesn't--

Yeah, so Henry's settled. My mother is settled. We try to arrange visits. He didn't come too often to Gottechain, because you've seen on the map, Dinant was a real big distance.

I visited at least once a week. In the beginning, maybe I went once or twice. But then, I tried to distance once a week. And we did arrange between the two families that we would meet not in Dinant, but in a monastery, which is like a whole village, with grounds and a Benedictine monastery above Namur, where we could all three be together. We did that a few times.

So the Dinant family would bring Henry over. I would come with my mother and Marie. Thank God I always had someone with me. So that was great. And we would, like, spend the night, and go back the next day.

So we had some visits. It was good for her. It was good for him, in the beginning particularly.

And so how did your mother go, and how did you come? Did you bike?

My mother, we would go and get her. And then-- no, we would have to go by public transport. It wasn't easy. Part of it we could do by bus. Part of it we do by train.

But again, we take all these risks. See what I'm saying? You keep kind of relaxing a bit.

And does your mother have false papers?

Yeah.

Now she has?

Yeah, yeah.

What was her name?

I can't remember.

You can't remember?

[LAUGHTER]

But she has--

Yeah, a Belgian identity card.

But she needs to keep quiet because she has no language.

She can't talk.

Right.

But she has papers.

So does she act as if she's a mute person in public, or does she just sleep all the time?

She more or less sleeps all the time. And I do the talking. And--

Strange. Strange, strange. And she really never-- see, that was really hard, because the Hanquet family would have loved to have a relationship with her, a conversation.

She was a very gentle lady and very loving. But there was just never any possibility of any deeper contact with her, because it'd all have to go through a translation. So backward, forward, you know?

So how often? Would it be once every few weeks that you were going to this monastery, so she could spend a good deal of time with Henry, and know that he was OK?

Yeah.

So could she feel at least better--

Yeah, that made her feel better. And then we did go once or twice. Now, Henry tells me-- and I have no recollection of that, so maybe he's right, that once or twice, she went by herself. They put her on the train and she went by herself to visit him in Dinant. And there are some pictures taken in front of the house there.

So maybe-- I mean, I don't know how she did that. I have-- my feeling is I might have dropped her off. He took her at that station, and then it's only two stops further to the monastery. And I was interested to go there and drop my mother off to visit with Henry. That's how I think it was.

And he wouldn't necessarily know that, anyway.

No.

But it's interesting because he's in a family with six kids.

Yeah. He's happy.

So he's in a very social, open situation.

Yeah.

And your mother is almost completely isolated.

Alone, and that was the hardest thing.

Yeah.

That was very hard.

Did you try to think of whether there was a place closer to where you were. Was that just--

To me, that was the closest. And it was a very safe place. It's a tiny, tiny village. I mean, Grez-Doiceau, when I came, was only 2,000 inhabitants. Now it is, of course, maybe 20,000.

And where she was was, like, microscopic. So it was safe, you know? There were like 300, 400 parishioners. We knew she'd be safe. And with a parish priest, I mean, you know, he did what he could to make her feel at home.

Right. Now tell me a little bit about this kosher, non-kosher. She was cooking food that wasn't kosher.

No.

It must have driven her crazy.

Totally. And not only that. She had to go to mass on Sunday.

But [INAUDIBLE].

He couldn't have a housekeeper who wouldn't even--

[LAUGHS]

Now, to tell her that was no small thing either.

Did you ever go with her on Sunday?

I went to my place.

You went to your place. You never saw her.

No.

So did she talk with you initially about having to go to mass?

Yeah. But I did explain. I said, look, you do understand that the whole parish would be talking, and that alone would put you in danger. How can you have a housekeeper, a parish priest, and you're not going to mass? I mean, that's the first thing the parishioners would ask. Would you please change and get someone at least that believes in-- you know?

And then there was this one lady, as I told you. She was very, very kind to her. She knew the situation, I'm sure. And she used to come and get her. And they would walk together.

The church is, like, just behind the house. It's attached to the-- the presbytery is attached to the church. But at least she had someone who would guide her in.



Even if there was--

But was-- I could not even imagine she'd do it. As I told you, the taboo on priests and Catholic was so strong in our family, at least between her and me. I don't know what the others heard.

That I thought that must be one of the hardest things in her. Isn't easy, you know? Can you imagine a real Hasidic woman to go through that, with no support of her husband?

Or even her kids.

All her kids, yeah. Someone who just at least [? tamper it a bit ?].

Did she make the sign of the cross?

No.

She wouldn't do it?

No. In the beginning, she wouldn't do any of that. She would just go to church. That was enough.

And nobody asked questions?

No.

Did they think she was Protestant?

I don't know.

You don't know?

[LAUGHTER]

I really don't know.

But there are a number of times when you go with Marie to see your mother by bicycle, I gather.

Yeah, bicycle or foot. We did both.

You did both? And it's a trip of a few miles?

The four miles.

Four miles.

Four miles.

Each way?

And we would sit out when dark would be falling. Well, yeah, because we didn't want to be seen for my sake and for her sake. So we had to wait till evening comes.

We did it a few times on foot through the fields There's the sweet beets and the corn. And we would just walk through the fields.

And sometimes, there would be searchlights, because I told you, the airport base, the military airport, was just right there well, when we saw that, we would just lie in the field wait for the searchlight to pass, because you never know what they're looking for. And so we would be there most of the evening.

I would not stay the night because that was my visit. So let's be up, not sleeping. And then towards early morning, we'd walk back before daylight.

So the two of you would stay up all night essentially, talking and being with each other? In these, was Marie with you.

Always.

When you were talking with your mother?

Yeah. Sometimes, she would just sit and read a bit. And sometimes, I would just be talking. She knew she would leave me for a few hours, so she could tell me her pains and her sorrows and the difficulties.

Did you get to know your mother in a different way during these conversations?

Mm-hmm.

So you--

Very, very frightened. Very frail, shaken, but still very strong belief.

She was a strong believer?

Yeah, for a long time. Mm-hmm.

Did you begin to understand where this fear-- because she seems to have been a frightened woman-- All her life.

All her life. I believe it's-- I didn't even question that. I think that's the way we were living. I mean, you come over from a country in a foreign land. You're an immigrant, and you carry an identity card, foreigner.

I mean, that's all I know in my whole lifetime. So you feel never at home. You're not accepted because they didn't want you because you're Jewish.

And then I can see where that fear has overtaken for her more than maybe it should. Maybe she was already not a very strong personality. But that definitely added the way she was.

And she talked about her psychological pain and her physical pain when you were [INAUDIBLE].

Physical pain, she was OK then.

She was OK--

Yeah.

--in the beginning.

She was telling me the priest was very kind to her. And that neighbor was a very nice lady, and would come and help a little bit, because the house was big. I mean, my mother was in no shape and form meant to be a housekeeper and a cook.

Right.

[LAUGHTER]

It's amazing, isn't it? And when I went, I would help a little bit, you know. Even just tidy up or clean. Do A little bit for her.

Was it physically hard on her?

I think so because it was a big house.

And she was the only person.

And she was the only housekeeper he had. [INAUDIBLE] again, he had the sister who would come and visit. But then, she was the guest, so my mother would get the room ready, and she might do some cooking. But she still had to be the one who welcomed his own sister, too.

Right.

And then priests do have some meetings with the surrounding parish priests. So again, that would put a little bit more strain on her again. He would keep her, but she had to work for it, which wasn't my case.

Right, right. It was different.

Yeah.

OK, we're going to stop the tape now and change it. And then we'll go to the next tape.