United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Tracy Strong
June 11, 2009
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PREFACE

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TRACY STRONG
June 11, 2009

Question: – and interview with Mr. **Tracy Strong, Jr**., conducted by **Peggy Frankston** of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**, for the **Rivesaltes** Internment Camp Memorial Museum on July – on June 11th, 2009, in **Washington**, **D.C.** Thank you for coming today Mr. **Strong**.

Answer: You're welcome.

Q: Could you introduce yourself and tell us a little about yourself please?

A: Okay. I'm tra – **Tracy Strong**, born in **Seattle**, **Washington**, September 4th, 1915, and grew up there. My father had moved to **Seattle** in 1910 to join the **Seattle YMCA** as a Boys' Worker. So we spent the first 12 years at – in **Seattle** on **Queen Anne Hill**. Eventually moved up on the boulevard in **Queen Anne Hill** and built a house looking out over Lake **Union**. My bra – I have a older brother **Robbins**, and a younger sister **Ruth**, and we enjoyed a very pleasant gro – time at growing up in **Seattle**; it wasn't quite as crowded as it is now. The house we built is – in fact, I just heard from the lady who lives there, she bought it from my father in 1923, and has lived in it ever since. So the house remained the same. We had a normal childhood, my father was always off to a **YMCA** camp. And summers we'd join him in the camp, so we spent a very pleasant time in **Seattle**. Then in 1923 my

father was appointed to the Boys' Work secretary for the world's **YMCA** in **Geneva**, **Switzerland**, so the family all packed up. I was five, my sister was seven or eight, and my brother was 10 or 11. And my father indicated that if we're going to work in a world's organization, he should see something of the **Orient**. So we sailed out of **Seattle** in November 1923 on the – one of the princess ships, and went, actually, practically all the way around the world in six months. As I think back on that, must – and have traveled with my own children, here were three young children and my mother taking care of us all the way around the world. We went first to **Japan**, and got there just after the big earthquake in **Japan** in 1923. Then **M-Moncton**(ph), **Manchuria**, **China**, **Hong Kong**. Then around through **India**, up through the **Suez Canal**, went over to **Palestine**, and eventually to **Venice**, an-and arrived in **Geneva** in April 1924. Which was quite a trip. So we settled into **Geneva**, which was then a much smaller town that it is now, but also a very international town, because a lot of international organizations were there, including the international Red Cross, and then many of the other youth-serving or people-serving organizations.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: Oh, we started out in the public school, across the street **[indecipherable]** where we had to learn French in a hurry if we wanted to play. We children picked up

French very quickly, my folks never did, so we asked them not to speak French when we were, cause their accent was so poor. Anyway, they went there, went to international school for a year or so, and eventually came back to this country for two ye – my father thought I should learn English, so I came back for two years to a high school in **Bainbridge Islands**, **Washington**, and finished high school there. Then I was 16, at which time I felt I was a little too young for college, and as he and my mother were traveling a great deal for the y – world's **YMCA**, I went to school in **Germany**, **Deutsche Jugend – Jugendhof**, which was 1932. And if you remember your history well, that was the time that **Hitler** came to power, in 1933. So I went through that whole time of the change in regime and cha – and heard **Hitler** speak twice, big rallies. And then at the end of the year, went back to **Ohio** – **Oberlin** College, **Ohio**, where I spent four years and got my bachelor's degree, 1937. At that time I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do, a chance of working in the **YMCA**, or in the church. So I went to **Yale Divinity School** for three years in **New Haven**, **Connecticut**. In 19 grad – got my da – my master's degree in divinity and it was in 1940, first war had already started in **Europe**, and my father had headed up the war – war prisoner's aid of the **YMCA**, which was approved in the **Geneva** Convention, that international Red Cross took care of the physical problems of the prisoners on ev-every country, and the **YMCA** took care of their

spiritual and intellectual problems, physical problems. So, my father was the head of this organization, but he – with headquarters in **Geneva**, although – and **Geneva** was still open then. 1940, of course, the – **France** fell. In just a few weeks, blitzkrieg **[indecipherable]** Germans. I did –

Q: When did – did you go back to **Germany**?

A: I went back to – actually to ge – headed for **Geneva**. Had to take a boat from **New York** to **Lisbon**, then across **Spain** where we got – just at the time **France** had fallen, so everything was closed down, so we were stuck in **Barcelona** for several weeks. And then eventually the group went across southern **France** and up the **Rhone Valley** to **Geneva**. And went originally to work with the European Student Relief fund, which was an organization made up of the three student serving organizations. The World Student Christian Federation, the Protestants. The **Pax Romana**, the Catholics, **NISS**, a neutral organization. And our job was to do for stu – university students what the **YMCA** was doing for the general population. So we singled out students in camps in every country. I did go to **Germany** for about six months, to work in the prisoner of war camp, and visited Stalag 16, I think it was, and 17, one section of **Germany**. The ma – most of the prisoners were either French or British, Polish. A few ru – quite a few Russians eventually, which now

because **Russia** did not sign the **Geneva** Convention, we could not get into the camps to visit them.

Q: What were some of your activities in the camps with the prisoners of war?

A: Mainly with the **YMCA** and the – and the European Student Relief Fund, the **ESRF**, it's called, for them I was ju – identify students, and try and get books, material to them, so they continue their studies. See, in the camps, particularly the officers' camps, the officers were not allowed to work. They had nothing to do except organize activities. So the **YMCA** brought in books, sporting material, violins, anything to keep them occupied during their imprisonment. So I'd go the – there were about, I suppose, 15 camps that I visited off and on in the fall of 1941. Eventually – course, **America** wasn't in the war yet, but in 1941 I went back to **Geneva**. The Germans would not let me go in the camps any more, they thought I had helped a prisoner escape, which was the last thing in the world I would have done. So the Germans went and closed the camps to me. So –

Q: So you went back to **Geneva**.

A: So I went back to **Geneva**. **[interruption]** So I went in the – must have been about March I left **Germany**, went to **Geneva**, where headquarters were for the **ASRF**, and – and by this time there were camps set up in southern **France**. See, when the Germans took **France**, everybody in northern **France** went to the south,

to get away the rapid advance. The Germans kind of overran everybody, but then, as you recall, it divided **France** into occupied and unoccupied **France**, with the occupied being headquarters in **Marseilles** and **Vichy**. The **Vichy** government was set up in – in **Vichy** under General **Pétain**, **Laval,** which put the Germans very much in control. But at least they didn't – were not interfering in southern – in oro – unoccupied **France**.

Q: Tell me, who sent you to **France**? Did **Donald Lowrie**?

A: No, **Donald Lowrie** was the head of the **YMCA** organization in southern **France**.

Q: He was based where?

A: He was based in **Marseilles [indecipherable]** and – and the – our – our student organization worked with the **YMCA**, or under the **YMCA** because they had access to the camps.

Q: So did he ask you do come from **Geneva** to –

A: Well, it wasn't so much his asking, he – he was in **France**, and we were – and the – my or – organization, the European Student Relief Fund wanted somebody to coordinate things for students only, in southern **France**, so I – and the entry was through the **YMCA**. So I went, being sent by the European Student Relief Fund, be working with the **YMCA**.

Q: You s – mentioned traveling with **Everett Melby**, was he part of the European Student Relief Fund too?

A: Yes, he was one of the secretaries.

Q: Who was person who decided what your mission was? Was there someone above you?

A: Yes, there is. **A-André de Bionay** was the head of the organization, was hired by the three religious groups, or student groups that had formed the organization. So I was responsible to him, but my activities were pretty much up to me, what I could do with – to help students in southern **France**.

Q: Who funded you?

A: The European Student Relief Fund.

Q: Because you seem to have a lot of tra – you seemed to travel a lot.

A: I did. That was part of my job, to travel from camp to camp and help set up the **[indecipherable]** or the **bibliothèques**, in the various camps.

Q: And your specific mission was intellectual support, and something else too?

A: Spiritual, phy – whatever physical support we could give. You know, I'm sure mainly, my main job was to identify students and see what we could do to either get them out of the camps, or to get them material to study with. Wasn't too happy with students staying in the camps, cause conditions were hardly conducive towards

intellectual study. And there were all students that either started on a career in their home country, whether it was **Poland** or **Germany**, **Romania**, **Lithuania**.

Q: Did you become friendly with some of them?

A: Oh, very much so, and –

Q: Can you remember some of their names?

A: Well, the one I remember the best wa-was **Hans Solomon**, who – we stayed friends, so I still correspond with him. **Edgar Druenhoot**(ph), **Hans Mayer**(ph).

Q: **Palos**(ph)?

A: **Palos**(ph), and –

Q: And what about some of the artists? You mentioned providing equipment for the artists.

A: Right.

Q: Do you remember some of their names?

A: I don't remember any of their names, but I still have one or two paintings that they did.

Q: Did you purchase them?

A: We purchased them in a way that – or they were donated. So – and we set up exhibitions for them so they could be sold.

Q: And what about some of the other artistic activities, they play – did they play musical instruments?

A: Yes, well, we were able to provide violins, cellos, guitars. Usually had a piano in the camp. So they would set up small musical groups, depending on the activities, and depending on the interest, depending on the health, because the condition in the camps weren't really conducive to any intellectual work.

Q: You mentioned the Russian choir in your diary? Do you remember meeting a group of Russians?

A: I remember very vaguely that a group of Russians – they were mainly though Russians who'd left **Russia** during the revolution. So they were what you call the white Russians, who had settled in **Paris**, with a large colony of them in **Paris**, and with the rest of the French they left the north and came south. So my work was primarily centered in **Marseilles**, I lived at the Hotel **Terminus**, and then we'd travel regularly to different camps.

Q: You mentioned traveling with **Donald Lowrie**, can you talk a little about **Lowrie**? He sounded as if he were an interesting person.

A: Very interesting, very active, one of these what do you call it? **A**-type persons. Very outgoing, charming wife, who did all the driving for **Donald**. And **Donald** had worked in **Czechoslovakia** with the Czechs, the Czech **YMCA**, and

[indecipherable] Czech, and so had a very special place in his heart for the Czechs. Any Czech student came by, always got some help. But **Don** was also the head of what they called the **Nîmes** committee, which was a committee of all the various private organizations: the Red Cross; Unitarian; Quakers; **OSE**, Jewish organization. And they met once a month in **Nîmes**, so it became known as the **Nîmes** committee, to coordinate their efforts, and then to intervene. And **Don** would go to **Vichy** to talk to the representatives of the government in **Vichy** about permission to do certain things.

Q: For example?

A: Well, one thing that happened was be able to get the refugees out of the camps, if they could support themselves, so that **Vichy** government did finally approve that. Whereas if an organization would provide for them so the state didn't pay anything, they could get them out of the camps, or a prisoner of private means could get out of the camps.

Q: Do you remember going to **Vichy** with him?

A: I didn't go to **Vichy**, I went to **Nîmes** regularly, to the **Nîmes** committee.

Q: Did you actively participate in the **Nîmes** committee?

A: Yes, I was representing the student relief fund and – but the c-committee wa – it was a very **[indecipherable]** very worthwhile, very interesting committee, because

people of various interests – the Red Cross, of course, was mainly interested in providing food, and the Swiss Red Cross particularly, took care of a lot of children, whereas some of the other organizations were providing just intellectual or spiritual help.

Q: Do you remember some of the people from the Jewish organizations? Did you remember **Raoul – Raymond-Raoul Lambert**?

A: No, I can't say that I do remember them. I met them all, of course, and knew them, but that's a long time ago.

Q: At one point you mention that the **Vichy** government creates a – an official state organization for all Jewish organizations, **Ugeef**(ph), **u-g-i-f**. And – and you mention in your diary that **Raymond-Raoul Lambert** was supposed to be the general secretary and he refused. Do you have any recollection of that?

A: Not really in any detail.

Q: And you also speak about meeting Dr. **Markeen**(ph) on a – on a train. He was a doctor who with **OSE**. Do you remember him?

A: A Swiss doctor, I think. I just by chance met him because I travel a good deal, and meet a lot of people.

Q: And do you remember some of the memorable sessions of the **Nîmes** committee? Were there certain times when it became animated?

A: Oh, it always was animated, because everybody there was an intellectual when – very di-different interests, but they all **[indecipherable]** in their own interests, and – but willing to cooperate. I remember especially one session where **Lowrie** asked for a criticism of the committee, or recommendation, what we could do to improve, and it was very open, everybody put in their two cents worth, but very – very open discussion. Praise for **Lowrie** as president, because his was a difficult job to bring them together, and get them to work together and go in one voice to **Vichy**. **Vichy** was not too cooperative. I think **Vichy** was not thought of very much by the French themselves. They knew it was under the control of the Germans, that **Pétain**, **Laval** had very little of independence.

Q: You worked with other organizations like the **Cimade**, and –

A: Met **[indecipherable] Cimade**.

Q: Right. Can you tell me a little bit about the **Cimade**?

A: Well, the **Cimade** was set up by the French, what they call a fede – **Fédération des étudiants**, a Protestant organization under **Marc Boegner**, who was head of the Protestant church in **France**, which is, of course, very much a minority in f – in **France**. And **Cimade [speaks French]**.

Q: And who was –

A: And Mada – Madame **Baro**(ph), a very active lady who – she was probably in her 30s and was the head of it **[indecipherable] Vesfal**(ph), **Dumas**, some of the names of people. And they would put students into the camps to set up a **foyer** with the **YMCA** and with the European Student Relief Fund. So they had it in most of the camps, not all of them, but **Gurs** and **Rivesaltes**, **Les Milles**,

they had students living in the camps, running the **foyer** and organizing various activities for the internees.

Q: Who is the person who was living in **Rivesaltes**?

A: **Andre Dumas** was one, Madame **[indecipherable]** was another. And they changed from time to time.

Q: What about – who was Mademoiselle **Ugand**(ph), and Mademoiselle **Sen**(ph)? Were they in with the **Cimade**, or were they with another organization?

A: I think they were with Swiss Red Cross, which was a big or-organization.

Q: At one point you talk about traveling with **Lowrie** and getting a l – a lot done, and you reflect on the fact that you seem to get more done in a week with Mr. **Lowrie** than the five months that preceded. And why was that?

A: Well, he – well, he was a very active person, and had connections all over southern **France**, and had lived in **France**, of course, before, so he knew the French. He was able to get the **functionaires**(ph) to listen to him and do what he

wanted. But he had that knack of approaching them and not – not challenging them really, but getting them to listen to him, and then he never asked for more than he thought he could get, in getting permissions from the camps. And he couldn't do anything really to change the camps, but he could call to attention any discrepancies or any errors, or anything that were happening in the camps. And he had a very persuasive approach to the people, and very friendly always.

Q: I noticed that you had all sorts of authorization forms, travel, **laisser-passer**, you had – had driver's license, you had all sorts of identity cards, and –

A: Also had all kind of food cards. See, ev-everything was rationed.

Q: Who ga – who issued your food cards?

A: Who would what?

Q: Who gave them to you, was it –

A: The government. Everybody in **France** had to have coupons for bread, or for meat. For instance, we got, I think enough meat for a month to make one good hamburger. So, was very little meat. There's a big difference between **Germany** and **France**, and of course **Germany** was taking all the food, except the fruits. **France** was a very rich agricultural country, of course, especially in the south, a lot of fruits and vegetables, so we survived pretty much on **[indecipherable]** and – **[indecipherable]** and asparagus. But you had to have coupons for those. As I recall

one – one of the wives who **[indecipherable]** committee, Madame **Lagalle**(ph) went to spend four hours at the market, and just got one **[indecipherable]** which was not a great deal, but it was better than nothing. So the – it seemed that food was very much the central part of our lives. And we were much better off, of course, than those in the camps who were getting very little food. But you could always eat well and – depending what part of **France** you were in. When I went to **[indecipherable]** which is another story, and there there was plenty of food.

Q: Or when you went back to **Switzerland**.

A: And I – and I went back to **Switzerland** regularly. I would gain – go back to **Switzerland**, gain five pounds and lose it the next time I went to **France**.

Q: You also worked with the Quakers.

A: Yes, **Ross McClellan**.

Q: Tell me about **Ross McClellan**, a little.

A: Very pleasant person, very outgoing. Both he and his wife were very dedicated people, good Quakers. A big – big fella, he was very imposing, which helped him a great deal.

Q: You speak in the beginning of your diary in the year 1941 about your arrival, and a couple days after your arrival in **Marseilles**, you witnessed something that the Quakers were doing, and it was food distribution.

A: Oh, I think there was food that was being brought in by a ship, and the Quakers were distributing it. Mainly milk and flour.

Q: How – how did that work?

A: As long as food – the ships came in, it worked very well, but then the Germans stopped it. There weren't any more food being sent in from abroad, so –

Q: Who was entitled to the – the food they brought?

A: Any children. It was mainly a-an attempt to improve the diet of the children in **France**, not just refugees, but all – all childrens. So distribution was throughout all of southern **France**.

Q: I remember you talking about setting up the **[indecipherable]** in **Rivesaltes**, and apparently there was a theater there, and you mentioned about –

A: Well – well, we had built a – in the **foyer**, one end of the **foyer**, a stage, which became the theater, and –

Q: And did you put on shows there?

A: Put on shows, plays, or musical events. Held church there.

Q: Did you go for services regularly, at –

A: On Sundays, yes. Were very interesting groups, cause there'd be maybe six or seven Germans, I mean, five or six Spanish, a couple of Poles. Three or four French people. So it's conducted either in German or – or French.

Q: Did you preach?

A: Once in awhile.

Q: In what language?

A: In French.

Q: How did that go?

A: Oh, it depends on the Sunday. Went off pretty well, because half the people could understand French, most of them could understand a little French, but the audience was very mixed. So preaching or talking to them is – any distraction wa – and anything di-different that was going on was – I mean, in a – not only interrupted the service, but I remember one time when I was preaching, I don't have no idea what it was on, and this Spanish lady down in the front had her baby with her. About halfway through she began to nurse him, which for a young, 25 year old was – it was surprise.

Q: It distracted you.

A: Some distraction, yeah.

Q: You also mentioned Bible study groups.

A: Right. The **Cimade** was very big on Bible studies. It was very much a intellectual approach to the Bible. And of course, everybody was invited to come, not – not just the refugees, but any other French people who were there. That was

one way of keeping the organization central in their beliefs and in their ideas, and a ch-chance for exchange it as personal ideas, too.

Q: You mentioned the fact that the French seemed very – their priorities seemed to be evangelization and theoretical Protestantism and ideas, whereas you wanted to do social work. Could you elaborate on that a little, please?

A: Oh, I think the difference between our two cultures, I mean the – the church in the **United States** is a – at least the mainline churches have always had a very social gospel impact, where they felt that more than just religious ideas, but they should also do something for people. Whether it was healthcare, or whether improve foods, or take care of people in prisons, whereas the French were much more intellectual in their approach, and – and the French loved to discuss, and to talk, a-argue – very pleasantly, but also very intellectually, and I find – I found that they were way ahead of us as far – intellectually as different ideas, which, even though I'd had theological training, I was not ready to discuss in such detail as the French were.

Q: Was it stimulating for you?

A: Very stimulating. And after awhile it got little – not boring, but it got – because they never seemed to finish their discussion. They'd go on and stop in the middle of a sentence, and everybody knew what they were thinking, so you didn't have to say anything, which was a very typical French approach to it. I enjoy – had very good

relations with all the memb – we have, every six months maybe, a big retreat of all the workers, in – in the **Cimade**, that is. **[indecipherable]** in the **[indecipherable]**. Go up for just three or four days of just relaxation and discussions.

Q: Skiing too?

A: And skiing.

Q: Did you try skiing there?

A: Oh, I started skiing as a boy in **Switzerland** when I was 10 years old, so I loved to ski. Given it up now though, I haven't skied for 30 years.

Q: There was a man you mentioned who was in **Rivesaltes**, and then he was transferred to **[indecipherable]**. His name was Mr. **Kaufman**. Do you remember? He was about 63, and –

A: I remember he was trying to get out, like most refugees to – to the west, either to **America** or **South America** or anyplace out of **France**.

Q: Do you –

A: And I don't remember whether – I think he probably eventually made it, although our – our job – there was certain organizations that were specializing, like the Unitarians, and the Jewish organization specialized in immigration, both – I wi – I can say it now, both legal and illegal. If they could get the permits to leave **France**, they had to have permits to get into **Spain**. And if they couldn't get them,

they would have students who'd take them over the border, over the **Pyrenees**, or into **Switzerland**. We had a number of students who were able to get into **Switzerland**, like **Hans Solomon** and his five friends made it once into **Switzerland**, got into the **Valais**, which is southern part of **Switzerland**, and were stopped at the Swiss border by the Swiss guards who were from that area, given a nice, big bowl of soup, and then sent back into **France**, cause **Switzerland** said they just can't take everybody who wants to come to **Switzerland**.

Q: So what happened?

A: Eventually – eventually they got back into **Rivesaltes**, and then we arranged for them to ge – try again, and not to go into the **Valais**, which was much stricter than – than say **Geneva** or **Vaud**. And eventually made it across, and we had visas – visas for them, so that this time there's no problem.

Q: To go from **France** into **Switzerland**?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you arranged for that?

A: We did, through the organization, yes.

Q: The European –

A: Eur-European student, or through the **Cimade**. **Cimade** was very good at that, it was one of their jobs, and they had young students who were acting as guides across the mountains, so –

Q: Was – were you in contact with **Garel**, the **Garel** rescue network? They were working with the Jewish organization **OSE**. They also brought children into **Switzerland**. Were you in contact with them?

A: Very vaguely. Not – I'd say we were not specializing in immigration – or emigration, but you couldn't help get involved in it.

Q: You mentioned that many of the students come to see you, and some of them are violinists, or they want to study medicine. And in your diary you seem to advise them to learn a trade, a handicraft, so they can make a living, and they seem reluctant to do so. Do you remember anything – what you were thinking at that point about –

A: I think it was more of a practical approach to know that they – you wanted them to continue their studies, but that took a **[indecipherable]**, a place to live and steady income, which we co – we could not provide, I mean, we couldn't provide. We gave out very little money, as far as help, just in emergencies. And that was true of most of the organizations, they tried not to just hand out money. But I thought, so if

I recommend that they learn a trade, at least they can earn a living. What we did – the story of the **Chambon** is another, different story.

Q: Could you tell us about that?

A: Yeah, in ni – at the end of ’41, we fi – figure that the students – we wanted to do something for the students, and there was a committee of the **ESRF** in **France** with Professor **Lagalle**(ph) from – from **Montpellier**, who was the head of the committee – French committee. And we figured we had to get the students into an atmosphere where they could really continue their studies. We looked over southern **France**, and a Mr. **Guillome**(ph) who was a – worked for the – a Frenchman who worked for the **YMCA**, been mayor of a little town **Chambon-sur-Lignon [indecipherable]** and so we went up to see **Chambon**, which is very up in the mountains, and a very rural area, and found out that they had a treme – there are two pastors there, Pastor **Truckmay**(ph) and Pastor try – **Tise**(ph), who are very much the leaders of the community, and they had already had a number of **maison d’enfants** open at the Swiss Red Cross, that a couple may – where they could bring children and take care of them during that – in that manner. And the main difference between **Chambon et –** the whole area, the plateau and gau – and southern **France** on the coast, was there was plenty of food there. For the first time in I don’t know how many months, I found butter. That sh – one ra – thing that struck me, I would

say made the decision that we should try and settle a – a home there was, **Melby** and I were looking for a hotel, or for a place where we could – for a place we could rent to put students into. We – and we **[indecipherable]** the hotel overnight, went out in the morning. And the people next to us had had **[indecipherable]** breakfast sent up, and they put it out in the hall, and there were two pound – two patés of butter left on the plate, so **Melby** and I immediately scooped it up and decided this is where we wanted to be. So we did find a **Maison des Roches,** which the hotel, we were able to rent it and then had to staff it with a director and somebody could run the place.

Q: And who did you finally find?

A: There was a miss – miss – Madame **Pon-Pontay**(ph), I think the names were. And then eventually **Daniel Truckmay**(ph), the nephew of one of the pastors took over. And over the year which we were in operation, there were about 75 different students who were able to take advantage of – most of them would – would come settle down, or they would decide to try to go to **Switzerland**, or disappear into the **Maquis**, the resi – resistance. So it was, from that point of view, very successful, and we were able to, as I say, get about 75 students out of the camps, because this is one thing the go-government, or the **Nîmes** committee had pushed for was **Vichy**, get people out of the camps, and into a more or less normal living.

Q: **Chambon** is also a Protestant village.

A: **Chambon** was very definitely a Protestant village.

Q: And that may have influenced your choice?

A: I think that **[indecipherable]** was a Protestant village, the whole area was Protestant, had been since the seven – 15th, 16th century, with the Huguenots. But the fact that there were the two pastors here who were very supportive of our work, and are able to supervise the – the **Maison des Roches**.

Q: I want to go back to **Rivesaltes** a little.

A: Okay.

Q: Do you remember the commander – commander of the camp, Commandant **Hubert**(ph), did you ever meet with him?

A: I did, but not a great deal, I didn't have that much to do with him. I – I know o – I meet all the commanders, cause you had to call, and then when you first went to the camp, then you go in and just let them know you're here.

Q: Every time you went to a camp, did you have to have an authorization by the prefect?

A: Right.

Q: For every trip?

A: Every trip. **[indecipherable]** stopping the prefecture and getting a permit.

Q: At one point you seemed to say, oh, the secretary's signature will do. Didn't you get to be a little more cavalier as time went on?

A: I suppose after you've been through the same thing and asked for the same kind of paper, you get s – you get accepted, and –

Q: Who was Mr. **Froenial**(ph)? You mentioned a messie – Mr. **Froenial**(ph) and he seems to be connected to the **[indecipherable]**. Was he a deputy director?

A: I don't – I don't recall. That's a long time ago.

Q: I know. At one point you come back to **Rivesaltes**, and in your diary you mention that you are appalled by the state, the health of the – of the people. Could you elaborate on that a little, please?

A: I – I re – of course, the conditions in the camp were always very mini – minimum, and I think this was towards the end of – or in '42, where the conditions – the camp, you know, was on a beach, and the conditions around it weren't too great. Cold and windy and this particular time when I come back, I go and visit people in the c – in the **[indecipherable]** or in the barracks. And – and th-this time I went to the barracks, cause you could – they had a real black market going on in every barrack, where if you wanted something special and you had money, you could get it. In other words chocolate, or extra bread or something. But this time I came back and people just looked worn out and tired and hungry, of course. And

they'd – and they'd lost any desire to do any we – or activities were very minimum because nobody had the strength to go to the foyer or read, or to play an instrument. And the men, particularly, were just starving away. And there was not a thing we could do except just encourage them to try and make some plans, which was very difficult, I mean, plan what their life, I mean, have a goal of some kind. And they would just kind of pull the blankets up over them and just lie there. So those are conditions that, I don't know what anybody could have done to improve them **[indecipherable]** cause the food was **[indecipherable]**, vegetables, nothing very substantial, it's one piece of bread, which made a very de – very depressing visit.

Q: Sometimes you stayed several days in the camp.

A: I – usually I'd try and spend –

Q: You had a bag to sleep in?

A: Yes, I slept – well, the **Cimade** personnel were sleeping in – in one of the barracks, had their own rooms, so I had a guest room I could – could stay when I was there.

Q: Can you describe it, what they looked like inside?

A: Small, little cupboard, not much of anything. They were not fancy.

Q: Was it – what were the conditions –

A: No – no ra –

Q: – cold, hot?

A: Both. One or the other. It's either very cold, or else the wind was blowing and it was – there was a breeze, and it was a hot wind. But the – no ru – no running water. The toilet facilities were all army centered, built on the – up above the ground, and two holes in the ground. We did have our own – we had a key to one of th-their facilities that were lined up, about six or seven holes, and entrance to each one, and we had a key to one of the place we could use.

Q: Was it reserved for the **Cimade** personnel?

A: Cima – **Cimade**, all the personnel, whether Red Cross or others. So conditions in camps – **Rivesaltes** was particularly depressing because of the heat, and the – not sand, but kind of rock – rocky soil. And overcrowded, of course. And then you never knew when there's gonna be another exodus, or – then the Germans insisted that the Germans – the Germans in the camp be sent back to **Germany**. It was kind of an interesting way in which – I suppose about a hundred thousand Germans were sent to **France**, cause **Hitler** gave the – the gauleiter, that is the heads of certain sections of **Germany** permission to just do what they wanted besides just get rid of the Jews. So the one near the French border in southwestern **Germany**, so it's simple, we'll just send them to **France**. So they shipped them all down to **France**, to **Gurs**, **Rivesaltes**, other camps. And then a year or so later they wanted them

back. That's when the convoys started. Those pictures you saw were of a convoy being prepared, which was always a very dramatic time, because – well, **Andre Dumas**, who was one of the head **Cimade** people in the camps, got to know the directors and the soldiers all much better than I did. And for one convoy he sat in with the director and decided who would – I mean, not who would go, but whether there was a discrep – whether families being separated. And he'd argue with the man, no you can't send her, because her husband's here, or vice-a-versa. And he tried –

Q: Did that work?

A: What?

Q: Did that wor – succeed?

A: It worked – it – it – it worked in that he was able to keep several families together, but also it took such a toll on him, cause if he took out one person, another person had to take their place. And **Andre** went oh – decided he just couldn't morally do this any more.

Q: It seems you – you reflect in your diary about the absurdity of the situation. Sometimes a woman's husband is 60, so he's excluded from a – a transport. And then she's 50 and – and she – she'll be on it, because she's too young to be

excluded. And if she was actually Romanian, but she was born on the Czechoslovakian border or something like that.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did – did you try to find ways of getting around these –

A: You try anything, but then you also run into the moral dilemma, di – what right do you have to decide that this person should go on this **[indecipherable]**. The refugees didn't know for sure where they were going, I suppose they had some idea. But we'd already by then learned about **Auschwitz**, so the dilemma was, can we really decide that this person should not go, or should go? Now the director of the camp had to make the choice, but that was his job.

End of Tape One

Interview with Tracy Strong
June 11, 2009

Beginning Tape Two

Q: Going back to – to our discussion about the state you found people in – in – in **Rivesaltes**, and the fact that when they're physically so weak and sick, that morally and intellectually, they have no – no desire –

A: They have – they no – not only no desire, but no goal. As long as they had a goal, whether it was just to live another day or so, and they could see some hope in the future, I think that would encourage them to try and do something. But when they just kind of give up and see no future at all, then that's very depressing, not only for themselves, but for everybody else. Because there's really nothing you can do, you can't give them what they really need, is more food, because you don't have it.

Q: At one point you talk about one of the meetings of the Committee de **Nîmes**, and Dr. **Vay**(ph) gave his report. Do you remember? He was mentioning about, he was talking about the dire state of people in the camps, and in your diary you reflect on that, and you – because he said that people were – they tried helping them by giving them more food, or giving them shots, and they were too far gone. And that –

A: I think a s – I think a person reaches a point where they've lost interest. Either they've lost a mate, or they've just seen other people go re – go downhill, you might say. And once that happens, it's awfully hard to get them back. And you can't do it

with just food, you have to give them some reason for living. And it's true they have no reason for living, if they're gonna be sent off to **Auschwitz**. Why bother?

Q: Did you question your beliefs, your religious faith, because of that? Did that make you reflect on what you had been studying, or –

A: Well, it makes you – well, it certainly makes you reflect on what you're doing, whether there's anything else you can do. You can't give up hope on them, because then you've also gotten in the same situation that they're in. So it's a matter of maintaining your own spiritual feelings and beliefs, that there's gotta be a better place, and a better time. But you – if you can't see any future, I mean, **France** was in a very sad situation, economically and e-every way. And I think I found that particularly true right – right after the big debacle, the French couldn't realize what happened to them. They knew they had the biggest army in – in **Europe**, and it just disappeared, dissolved.

Q: You also mentioned that you were worried about the capacity to adapt of people who had been immigrating and moved around from place to place, and –

A: This was the difficulty, you would – everybody wanted to get out, and not everybody would put in a request for an exit visa, or for a visa from – and everybody had friends. Like there was one – one person who was dif – different – di – whose rel – relative worked in the church office in **New York**, Dr. **Forell**(ph).

And of course, he took a personal interest in this relative, and wrote to us about his relatives in the camp. I said, well, if you can get him a visa, that the best thing you could do. Well, even with all his connections, he couldn't get a visa for her. So you had to tell a person, well, not now, but keep on hoping, keep – so it was not surprising that people would try and walk out of the camp and head for the frontier.

Q: Do you remember if any of them were caught?

A: Oh, some were caught, I mean the – I don't know how many hundreds had tried to get across. But – well, even, for instance, a person with an American passport, and a visa like **Ronald Elliot**, who was one of the leaders of the World Student Christian Federation, came to visit. This was before **America** was in the war, of course. And he had an exit permit, and wi – so he came down to visit **Rivesaltes**, which is fairly near to the border. And we'd showed him around and spend the day or so with him showing him different parts of the camp and situation. Then he got on the train to go to **Cerbere**(ph), which is border into **Spain**, and was turned down for some reason, they didn't accept his exit visa. So he'd come back and we spent another day with him, put him on the train again, about three times before he finally got across. And he had all the papers he needed, but s-some folks in there along the way decided well, why should I let him go? So –

Q: You mentioned that sometimes the guards gave you trouble, going from one part of the camp to the other because perhaps they didn't recognize you, or they had orders, or other times they let you go right through.

A: Well the camps were not run in very fashionable, very military way, and the thing that – oh, I think I mentioned that Madame **Jurano**(ph), who was a Swiss lady, a very good friend from **Switzerland** down visiting, and she got so mad when the – she went into the camp and there was the guard smoking, and talking to her with cigarette in his mouth. And being the good Swiss, she felt that was disgusting. But that was typical of the camps, I mean, s-sol – soldiers were not – they were civilian guards, or soldiers, they just had no discipline at all. So you could – in one way it was very easy to get in and out of the camp, another way you never knew when they were gonna crack down and make it more difficult.

Q: At one point you – you mention even organizing activities for them because they seem to be bored.

A: Oh, they were. I mean, who likes to stand at a gate for eight, 10 hours? It didn't work out too well, cause they'd come one time and then not show up for another month or so.

Q: At one point you mentioned looking for the **Madagascarians**, or the people from **Madagascar**.

A: **Madagascar**.

Q: And could you tell me a little about them?

A: Well see, this was a mil – originally a military camp, and it was set up for troops in north **Africa**. The beginning of the war, they'd come and stay there, then go up to the fr – to the front lines. And evidently these were **Madagascarans** who were in – recruited to fight and then the war was over, so they didn't come. Eventually they came to work in the – to work in the work camps. See, the Germans, or the French and Germans tried to put everybody – every male, into work camp, cause there were so many soldiers who were still prisoners in euro – in **Germany**, and they needed a lot of workers. In fact, some of our students were sent over to **Brest**, which was a big submarine base for the Germans, and worked in the foundations there for a while, until some colonel, German colonel found out they were Jewish and sent them back.

Q: You mentioned in **Marseilles** somebody comes in and wants some workers from **Rivesaltes**.

A: Yes.

Q: What did he want them to do?

A: Probably labor.

Q: He heard that you had cheap labor?

A: Labor, maybe a farm, maybe work. It's amazing when you take out a whole army of young men, how qui – hard it is to get anything done.

Q: You mentioned you remember when **United States** enters the war after **Pearl Harbor**, and you write in your diary on the ninth of December, 1941 that we've entered the war. And that is the beginning of a period of uncertainty for you, because you don't know if you'll be able to continue your activities.

A: Well, we knew that the Germans were in control at **Vichy**, although not openly, and I'm sure they are not happy to see **America** come into the war, or the – or in th – in fact, for a while, as I recall, we, after **Pearl Harbor**, **Japan** declared war on us, and we declared war on **Japan**, but not on **Germany** for about a week or so. So –

Q: You mentioned that you went into **Les Milles** and somebody told you that they had a – a secret radio.

A: Yeah. I suppose every camp had some secret radios like that. They try and hide and so they get news long before we would. But that –

Q: What was your feeling when you heard that **United States** had entered the war?

A: I suppose like everybody else, kind of shocked. And then, course I started thinking whether we should really get out, or we could – **Lowrie**, I know at one time, wanted to leave right away and go back to the **States**, he wanted to get involved in the war effort. And I guess he found out it wasn't that easy to get out as

quickly. Eventually he went to **Switzerland**, along with, I think, most of the other Americans who were working in one of the various organizations. But at the time we didn't know whether we're gonna be taken, put into camps, as the Americans in **Germany** were, of course were. But there they had the protection of the consulate, we had no protection at all. And we could have joined the people in the camps.

Q: That was a serious consideration.

A: It was, very definitely, whether we should try and leave while we still could.

Q: And you decided to stay on?

A: We decided to stay on, that we had a responsibility to work. And there was no, at the time there was no outward expression from the Germans **[indecipherable]** still unoccupied. I think the thing that took it off was the French navy was down in – in the **Mediterranean**.

Q: **Toulon**?

A: In **Toulon**. And the – eventually, the Germans wanted the navy and the – the French scuttled the ships, which was a big blow to the Germans. I think the German after that were – were much more strict. And eventually they did just take over all of **France**.

Q: And what happened at that point?

A: At that point we were – had either gone to **Switzerland** or went – actually, I think I talked to one of the young **Cimade** fellows who had helped smuggle people into **Switzerland**. He showed me how to get across the barbed wire. Take your coat off, throw the coat over, then jump oh – jump over, but I didn't have to do that, fortunately.

Q: Let's go back a little. There was a point where the French were inspecting the camps. They had a man named **Andre Jonfur**(ph), who was from **Vichy**, and he was doing a report on the camps. Do you remember ever being present when there were **Vichy** officials visiting the camps?

A: Oh, I must have been there at times, I don't recall any mention with them, or meeting them.

Q: There was also a point where the German general **Danika**(ph) started visiting the camps. It was in July 1942. You – do you have – remember hearing about that?

A: I remember hearing the Germans were coming to visit.

Q: But you weren't present?

A: No, I wasn't present.

Q: Was anyone you know present, like **Dumas** or **Lowrie**?

A: Oh, I – **Lowrie – Lowrie** didn't go into the camps too much. He – that was the functionaries of the higher government. No, I don't remember. Those are the things

he kind of just took for granted. He knew the Germans could come in any time, and there were Germans stationed in **Marseilles**, but the French wanted very little to do with them.

Q: **Rivesaltes** kept changing its disposition. Apparently they kept moving people from one **ilo**(ph) and barracks to another. And you mention that you had to change your barracks and your **foyer**. How – do you know wh-why that happened?

A: I think what – the reason they moved the internees from one **ilo**(ph) to the other, they had certain **ilos**(ph) that they were getting ready to ship people out in, and they wanted to get them into a barracks all together.

Q: Did you know that?

A: Oh, I knew that was the reason for their shifting them.

Q: But you shifted your **foyer** with them?

A: We didn't shi – we didn't – I don't think we shifted the **foyer** at all.

Q: Did you see any changes in the camp, was more barbed wire, or more – or –

A: Not more barbed wire, but you could tell when a convoy was being organized, because everybody was more or less on their – on edge and nervous about who was going, who wasn't going.

Q: How did that work? Were you – you were present when they were starting to prepare the convoys?

A: Well, we were present that we were doing our job in the camps, in trying to keep as normal a situation as possible.

Q: You were still bringing in paper and paints and –

A: Penci – pencil –

Q: – and musical instruments.

A: Right. We were trying to keep things going as simply as possible, but always behind, you know, in the background there was always this uncertainty about who was going to show up. And once they got into the **ilo**(ph) that was being evacuated or sent out, then they – that was –

Q: Do you remember which **ilo**(ph) it was?

A: I don't recall which one.

Q: Do you remember who put the list together, it was the comman –

A: The commandant – well, the Germans would ask for say, 150 Jews, and the commandant would have to pick out 150 people to go.

Q: Were there times when you actually went and said – you – you told me you didn't want to be involved in the choice, but did you plead for somebody at one point?

A: I – I didn't, cause I was in a little different situation. The French could do it, because they were talking to Frenchmen. But I didn't feel it was my job as an

American to get involved in it. And then the French eventually – and the **Cimade** eventually, as I said before, **Andre Dumas** found out he just couldn't do it morally any more.

Q: Do you – you have a camera with you, and –

A: Had a what?

Q: – You have a camera with you at – at some point.

A: Yes.

Q: Because there are pictures that were with your collection in – in **France**, and they were pictures of the – what we think are the deportation convoys. Do you remember how that was set up? You got up in the morning and all of a sudden people –

A: Well, you knew something was coming up, because people getting very nervous and uncertain. So when they actually started assembling people, get ready for the trucks, I think we all were in a very – very near there with an open window. We couldn't go over to the ke – to the convoy, of course, because the – there were soldiers – there were not a lot of soldiers around, there were soldiers around, but – so that's when I took the pictures, from inside of the – a window, about a hundred yards away.

Q: What was your motivation in taking the pictures? As some sort of proof that this was going on?

A: I think just it was another event in the camp. Always a sad one, and discouraging one, but –

Q: Did people –

A: – I happened to have my camera.

Q: How did – how did people prepare for it? Were they allowed to take something with them?

A: Oh they – they were told to pack a suitcase, th-they have to carry it.

Q: Were there children?

A: Not many children, no, mostly adults. But there were families. Although by then I think most of the small children had been taken out by the Swiss Red Cross, or **[indecipherable] enfant**.

Q: How long did this go on, the preparation and the gathering of the people together?

A: Oh, oh, the whole thing culminated in one day.

Q: They –

A: Where they did bring the people out, and they were standing there, of course. Their friends were standing around saying goodbye. And then the – the

[indecipherable] all the trucks showed up, and they put them into the trucks to take them to the railway station.

Q: They were open trucks?

A: Yes.

Q: And they went –

A: Those were big, coal burning trucks that smelled terrible.

Q: Did the people – were the people given anything to eat or drink while they were waiting?

A: I don't think so. I don't think they were fed –

Q: They waited all day without anything?

A: I'll say it didn't take too long, once they got them assembled, and just brought the trucks in and took them out.

Q: And –

A: Not a very pleasant time, but th-th – you always wonder well – well, should we have done something, but then what – what could you have done? You certainly could not revolt, or start a revolution.

Q: Were there people who – who were saying goodbye and didn't –

A: Oh yeah, because th-these were their friends. Most of the people had come together from **Germany**, and had shipped down here and known each other in

Germany for years, maybe. And then for some reason one group was sent off – sent back to **Germany**, and others was kept in the camp. And eventually the camp was – I assume was completely liquidated.

Q: You're just talking about **Rivesaltes**?

A: Yes, but that was after – after I'd left, and after **America** was in the war. Now, the Spaniards were still there, had been there for oh, probably four or five years. Could I take a quick break and stretch my – my leg going to sleep. **[break]** You want to talk more about deportation?

Q: Do you remember we were talking about how people were saying goodbye and they were – were there – was there ever a moment where somebody was on the truck, or ready to get on the truck and then they didn't go?

A: Yeah, there were times like that, when people –

Q: Can you describe that?

A: Well, it's always dramatic, because normally they tried to run things very smoothly, just put people on the truck and drive away. And then if at the last minute there's a change in people, like if somebody intervened, or if somebody else had called **Vichy** with a name of a person they wanted to take off, or – and **Vichy** would respond to the camp, they'd have to take them off the truck.

Q: And what could be some of the reasons that the person would be taken off?

A: Oh, who knows? Hard to say. They had enough influence to – to get through to a minister in **Vichy**. It would take quite – quite a deal of influence, but then many of these – many of the Germans had been **functionaires**, had been important people in **Berlin** or in **Germany**, and may have known the French deputies, or some – I mean, I – I don't know what it was, but it could be any one – any reason.

Q: And when the person actually had to get off the truck?

A: Truck. Then there'd be somebody else who'd be put in their place, which was real dramatic cause they'd – they'd say they cut **[indecipherable]** 150 people and stop there, the next 10 people in line would be sent back to the barracks, or be kept there until the trucks left, if they didn't have to change. So it's – it was dra – always dramatic and tragic time, cause you hate to see anybody – anybody be taken away.

Q: Did you know exactly where they were going? You knew they would go to the **Rivesaltes** train station, but did you know where they were headed after that?

A: Up to **Paris**, I think it's in **Drancy** where the camp was, and they'd probably spend some time there, and then they go back to – then they'd go to **Germany**. Where they – which camp they went to, **Buchenwald** or **Auschwitz**, wherever they – or in some cases they were – if they were young enough, they go back to **Germany** and they put them under work camps. Because **Germany** needed a –

needed a lot of workers too with the whole army out of the country. So you couldn't – you couldn't say for sure or not.

Q: At the end of the day, what was the atmosphere around the camp?

A: Very somber. Very quiet. Nobody really felt like doing anything, because you'd been pretty well drained just watching them leave. So what –

Q: Was your religion any consolation?

A: They what?

Q: Was the Bible or religion any consolation?

A: I don't think so. I suppo – I think there may have been a service of some kind, but not necessarily. No, it was more or less just a complete let down when you work with people for a number of months, and then some of them disappeared. I guess fortunately, we didn't know for sure where they were going.

Q: How – did you – you were present at several of these events, of these deportations?

A: I think only a couple.

Q: Were you ever present in other camps when people were being sent on to this type of action?

A: No, I – they more or less transfer one camp to the other, and the camps are all different. **Gurs** and **Rivesaltes** were probably the two big camps for German – German refugees. **Vernet** was more of a political – political prisoners.

Q: You also went to **Noé** and **Recebedou**?

A: **Recebedou** yes, I do remember those two well.

Q: And **Les Milles**?

A: **Les Milles** was right next to **Marseilles** and – and that was a more hopeful camp, cause that's where they were – those who had their first papers in order and had to get more papers would ca – go to **Les Milles** cause then they go into **Marseilles**, see the consulates and work on getting their final papers together, so that was a – much more of a transient camp, even though very active with artists and – and a library.

Q: When you knew that the – you – you were present at two of these convoys, did you find out when others were going to occur?

A: I don't recall, I don't think so, no way. I don't think anybody knew because the germ – Germans would make the decision, we need 150 or 200 or 300.

Q: But every time you went back, you weren't sure the people you knew would still be there.

A: That's right, you're never sure.

Q: Did you – did you run into the workers from **OSE** who were saving children? **Andre Salamon**(ph) or **Liese**(ph) **Hannow**(ph)?

A: Yeah, I – I knew the workers, I don't recall them at all particular. I knew they had a good –

Q: You did see them?

A: I did see them, and knew they had a good organization going. And they were – I think they were mainly interested in trying to get these wer – young people into some kind of a job work, or training for jobs.

Q: And also the children.

A: Children, yeah.

Q: Maybe we'll take a break here.

A: You want to –

Q: Is that okay? **[break]** I want to go back to **Rivesaltes** again.

A: Good.

Q: And I want to talk a little bit about your contact with other groups, not just the students from **Germany**. Do you remember meeting the Spanish?

A: Very much so, cause the Spaniards had been there for about three years, three or four years, since the end of the Spanish revolution, and they'd pretty much settled in and made their own position there in the camp.

Q: Did they have more freedom than the others?

A: I'd say they did because they'd been there longer, and they knew the way around. And th-they had no place to go either, they were – they weren't too welcome in **France**, but there – on the other hand, they took care of them, the French.

Q: Did they have the same rations as the rest of the people in the camp?

A: They must have had more, because they did their own cooking. I think I mentioned once that they invited me over to dinner, and they cooked Spanish rice on an open fire out in the middle of the camp. And served a very good dinner, which I appreciated. Food was pretty much a central thought in everybody's mind all the time. But – so when you had a good meal, then the – made a lot of difference.

Q: Did you speak Spanish?

A: No, I just **como estsa**, that's about it.

Q: You communicated in French?

A: French, yeah. They'd learned enough French by then to get by. But they – they weren't really internees so much as just residents in the camp, because I say, they had no place – they couldn't go back to **Spain**.

Q: Did they make – were they part of the work brigades?

A: They were part of the leftist government.

Q: But in – in **Rivesaltes –**

A: Oh.

Q: – were they sent out to work?

A: No, as I recall, I don't think so.

Q: Did they come to your **foyer** to partake in artistic activities?

A: They did, but not as thoroughly as we would have liked. They – they had pretty much their own life, and they pretty – and they were pretty well, so well established that they had a family life.

Q: Did they need –

A: Having lots of children, and –

Q: Did they need instruments, or –

A: Some, yes, not – one or two of each. You'd find a violinist or a guitar player among the Spaniards. But I say, th-they already – they'd been there so long that they were – pretty much had a routine to their own life going.

Q: Did they par – did they participate in some of the shows that were put on?

A: Oh yeah, they would come to those.

Q: And did they – did they perform in them?

A: Once in a while, not – not a great deal, they –

Q: What kind of things did they do?

A: Well, as I recall, the Spanish dances. They had more energy than the Germans, because they had, I suppose, better food that they prepared themselves. But, course they wanted – they didn't want to get too settled in **France**, because they wanted to go back to **Spain** eventually after **Franco** left. But tha – they didn't see any future, because they c – they knew they couldn't go back to **France** – to **Spain** without being put in prison or shot.

Q: Were you in contact with any of the other populations? There were **Roma** in the camps.

A: Not too much, they had their own life pretty much, so – and again, they were – di-didn't have to stay, they could move out if they wanted. But again, they'd have to earn – earn the living someplace, and like in most countries, they were never fully integrated into the population. They had their own – own **[indecipherable]** and own – own life pretty much settled. It was a really mixture of people from all over, actually, **Mediterranean** area.

Q: Did you know – it seemed in your – the diary that you mention more the people you knew in **Rivesaltes**, it seems like you spent more time there, or that you were able to – to create more activities in **Rivesaltes**.

A: Than anyplace else?

Interview with Tracy Strong
June 11, 2009

Q: **Gurs –**

A: No – **Gurs – Gurs** was very active, except **Gurs** – my ma – main memory of **Gurs** was the mud. It rained a lot up there, and once it rained there was no drainage in the camp, so you were wading in through mud. But that – that's what deterred everything happening in **Gurs**.

Q: When you brought things into the camps, whether it be paper or paints, or instruments or books, did you have to use ration tickets, was there – how – how did you go about buying thi – this –

A: Oh, you could buy paper, pencils, pens.

Q: And books?

A: Books, if you could find books, or they were donated books. Instruments, I'm not sure where they came from, but we were glad to have them.

Q: But you had a budget for that?

A: Yeah.

Q: It was from **Geneva**, or from **Marseilles**?

A: Oh, no, well, the budget was for **Marseilles**, for **France**, but the money all came eventually from **Geneva**.

Q: When you had to go about interviewing students to eventually you wanted to take to **Chambon**, how did – how did that process go about? Did you set up shop in – in one of the barracks and say come in and talk to me?

A: No, there are people you knew, having been there, and then the local French committees also would recommend students. Once in awhile there'd be a French student that needed help, or needed to get out, get away. So the local committee would do – run across students who needed help. Cause see, we were there to work with all students, not just internees or refugees.

Q: People who were living outside the camps.

A: Yeah.

Q: And needed ma – they needed material help.

A: And they needed a boost up at this time, because jobs weren't too plentiful in **France**.

Q: Was there an age limit for – for bringing students to **Le Chambon**?

A: Probably more a lower age limit. We needed – we weren't looking for high school students, but there weren't too many of them anyway.

Q: You –

A: **[indecipherable]** the top age limit, I don't think there was any stated limit but by the fact that there weren't too many older – older students, say over 40. There were, I think a couple older men, by that they're in their 40s.

Q: So when you finally got a list together of say five boys that you would like to take to **La Maison des Roches**, how did you go about – concretely, what was the – what were the steps?

A: Well, first you had to get the release from the camp, which means you had to prove that there was a place for them to go, and that they would be – not become a charge to the state.

Q: And who could give you that release? The **commandant du camp**?

A: Commander **du camp**. And then you had to get permission from the – for travel, of course, and then permission to settle in **Chambon** at the prefecture there.

Q: So you needed to go to the prefecture in **Perpignan** for the travel and the – and **Pre-Onvelet**(ph) for the **Ch-Chambon** –

A: **Chambon**.

Q: – because it's **[indecipherable]**

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: **[indecipherable]**

A: Yeah.

Q: And once you got those authorizations, you could – you could take them out of the camp.

A: Take them out, or they – they could come on their own, like the five students I knew best just made their own arrangements. They'd already had a – a border trip to **Switzerland**, so they knew – well, most of them knew, pretty much, how to get around. And the train service wasn't too bad, it was slow, so they arrived pretty much on their own.

Q: And the first – the first students that you took into **Les Roches** was – that was probably around February '42?

A: I think – yeah, that's when the bulk of students seemed to have come, but there had been some there a little earlier, once the camp had opened. Was a matter of getting not the camp, but getting **La Roche** opened. Main thing was getting heating – heat for it, cause **Chambon** was cold weather and they were coming out of the warm **Mediterranean** weather. So until you get it heated **[indecipherable]**. Fortunately it was well furnished. There were beds and blankets and everything else over there.

Q: How m – what was the capacity at **La Maison des Roches**?

A: Probably about 20 at any one time.

Interview with Tracy Strong
June 11, 2009

Q: At one point it seems in the collection that you left in – in **Paris** that you spent a lot of time at **La Chambon**. Were you teaching there?

A: No, I was just interested in getting it going, keeping it going, and – and it was our big wa – a big project for the European Student Relief Fund. **Mel-Melby** came down a couple times from **Geneva [indecipherable]** not too far from **Geneva**.

Q: Were there any girls in the – in the house?

A: No, I – I'm just trying to think. I never thought of that before, probably not. I don't know why, whether we never ran across girl students. Hard to say. No, I never thought of that before, that there were no girls.

Q: When did **Daniel Truckmay**(ph) take over? You said there was a couple there and then **Daniel** took over.

A: They stayed about a year as I recall, from January or February to the beginning of '42. And then **Truckmay**(ph) came and took over afterwards. Unfortunately **Daniel Truckmay**(ph) was taken when the Gestapo raided the camp – raided the –

Q: Home.

A: – the **[indecipherable]**. And **Truckmay**(ph) volun – actually volunteered to go with them, and ended up in the concentration camp.

Interview with Tracy Strong
June 11, 2009

Q: What was your last – when were – when were your last activities in **France**? When did you finally decide to leave **France**, and who decided it? Was it your own decision?

A: It was my decision to go back to **Geneva**. That's when the Germans **[indecipherable]** the Germans going to take over all of **France**. So, as I recall, I went – must have been November or so.

Q: And you took a train?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: You have official papers?

A: Nothing special, I had just had to buy a ticket and – and – and of course I had American passport, which always helps. And I didn't – I had a permit **de ce jour** for **Geneva**, so I could always get back into **Geneva**.

Q: Who took over some of the work that you were doing in the camps when you left?

A: Well, the **Cimade** was still there, you see. **Cimade** were all French. And –

Q: **Andre Dumas**?

A: **Andre Dumas**, **Per**(ph) **Griese**(ph), **Palos**(ph). So the work continued for a long – I think the camp folded in '43, as far as the Germans were concerned, or the refugees. Spaniards were still there.

Interview with Tracy Strong
June 11, 2009

Q: Do you remember meeting a man called **Maurice Dubois**, and his wife, who was American, **Ellen**? Apparently they were connected to Protestant organizations.

A: **Dubois**?

Q: **Dubois**, **Maurice Dubois**.

A: I remember the name, but I don't recall under what circumstances –

Q: **Friedel Bohny-Reiter** speaks about him in her book, the Swiss – **secours** Swiss nurse, speaks about him and his wife.

A: No, I didn't –

Q: Perhaps they were from **Switzerland**.

A: I imagine from **Switzerland**.

Q: So when you got back to **Geneva**, what did you do?

A: Oh ma-main work there was, well, of course there were refugees in **Switzerland**, helping them get settled. But our main work was with prisoners of war, to identify students in the prisoner of war camps, particularly in **Germany**, cause we were in **Switzerland**. But we were doing the same in **Canada** with German prisoners, and – although I had nothing to do with the work in se – **America**. But we were sending books and identifying, putting them in touch with their colleges, when we found out where they – where they had gone to college, and whether – I was glad to run across one who went to **Yale** or **Oberlin**.

Q: So from –

A: So that – so that – and I did that pretty much. Then I had another activity, you see, there were a lot of American aviators who were interned in **Switzerland**, cause their plane was shot up and they couldn't get back to **England**, so they pulled into **Zurich**, and of course, the Swiss interned them. But interned them up – then the Swiss tourism office was very dull in **Switzerland** there. Two Germans come in, but nobody else, so the hotels were empty, so the Swiss put them up in a nice big hotel up in – oh, what's it called? Up in the mountains. So the aviators, once they got over the shock of being shot down settled into kind of a touristy – touristy life. They could ski, and they had – they were getting paid still by the embassy, or getting it by the arm – air force.

Q: And your official role was – were you a chaplain?

A: Chaplain.

Q: A Protestant chaplain.

A: Protestant chaplain.

Q: And did you hold services?

A: Regular services **[indecipherable]**. And then any time pray if they were dead **[indecipherable]** we – Americans had a open cemetery in **Münsingen** outside of **Bern**, so we'd hold a service for them there.

Q: At – at any point did you think about en-enlisting to fight in the American armed services?

A: I did in ’44.

Q: And –

A: After – and I did enlist and went – actually th-the American aviators couldn’t get out of **Switzerland** until American troops had arrived on Swiss border. And then they stayed **[indecipherable]** wanted to get rid of them, we get a – and they wanted to get back to **England**. So they brought in two – several planes, must have been two or 300. And I went out with them, went to **England** with them, flew out with them.

Q: And that’s when you enlisted?

A: Enlisted then.

Q: Did you go through some sort of training, or did you –

A: Oh yeah, I went through basic training in **England** and in **France** and ended up in **Germany** in – well, let’s see, I-I was on my first leave in **Paris** on May 10th when the war was – the armistice was signed in **Reims**, which was a big celebration. The Americans were very welcome then.

Q: You were in uniform?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you were part of artillery, you were –

A: No, infantry.

Q: Infantry. Infantry. And what were you doing in **Germany**? You were sent with the second armored division, or –

A: No, I was – actually I was sent to – first to **Marburg** and a redevelopment camp or re – re-deployment camp, and I was there for, I guess four or five months. They arrived there and they found out I could speak German, so they put me on the staff – or not staff, I mean, transferred me to their – they wanted somebody around to speak German. But then –

Q: What did your duties consist of?

A: Just being a soldier. Not much of anything, we –

Q: But, interacting with local population –

A: – we – oh, we had – we had – no, as a re-deployment camp, the soldiers would come in from all over **Germany**, being shipped home. And way – they spend maybe five or six days there before they were sent home, off to **Bremen**, or take a ship back. And then my transfer to **Berlin**, to military government and the education department in the German youth – the German youth activities section. So became head of the – see, **Berlin**, of course, was divided into four parts, and I

became the head of the youth activities section for American zone – American – American section of **Berlin**.

Q: But you were still in the army?

A: Yes. Not ru – well, I was for a while, then I went back and demobilized and flew back in as a civilian, which was quite a switch. I remember I came back on a troop ship.

Q: You went back to the **United States** to demobilize?

A: Right.

Q: After the armistice?

A: After, oh yeah, so it was – must have been ’45, end of ’45. Cause I remember I came – there was a freeze on hiring, so I had – couldn’t get **[indecipherable]** right back. And eventually I had to come to **Washington**, and wait for transportation through the **Azores**. And I remember going out to the airport in my civilian clothes, and all these colonels and captains are on the same flight, and they all stood around and waited for me to go on. Here I was, I’d been a buck sergeant, and I couldn’t figure out what this, after you sir. They didn’t know what my civilian rank was, so that was an interesting time.

Q: So you went back to – to **Switzerland**.

A: I went back to **Berlin**.

Q: Back to **Berlin**. And you stayed –

A: I stayed – stayed until ’49, came back to the **States**, got married, took my wife back with me.

Q: Your wife was – was German?

A: No, she’s American.

Q: And you met her in the **United States**, or –

A: I met her – I met her in **Berlin**. She had been in **Moscow** for a year with the embassy. And we got tired of being cooped up in the embassy for work and for play and everything else, so she wanted – when she asked to go to **Russia**, she wanted to meet the Russians, but she couldn’t get out of the embassy.

End of Tape Two

Interview with Tracy Strong
June 11, 2009

Beginning Tape Three

Q: So you decided to go back to the **United States** in 1949. What made you decide to go back to the **United States**?

A: Well, I'd been out of the **States** for 10 years, I figured time I got back, and I was interested in getting into education, so I came back to **Stanford** for a year and got my teaching credential.

Q: What made you want to go into teaching? You were – it seemed that you might have been destined to be a minister or a pastor in – when you went to divinity school.

A: Oh, I was – I think I wanted something a little broader than just a minister, and a – and working in the educational branch in **Germany**, where – re-educating the German youth, I figure that education was the field I wanted to work in. So I came back and my wife and small baby and a German Shepherd dog –

Q: So you had – your family was your wife, your – your baby and the German Shepherd at that point?

A: Right.

Q: In 1949. Wha-What made you choose **California** and **Stanford**?

A: My wife was from **California**, and I had an uncle who was a superintendent of schools in **Palo Alto** or **Menlo Park**. And they had a house we could use for a year

or so, while I was go – while I was going to **Stanford**, that's why – one reason I picked **Stanford**. It's a good school.

Q: A very good school.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you feel a lot of change when you got back to the **United States**? You'd been living in **Europe** for 10 years.

A: Pretty much so. Not as much as I thought, cause I'd been in touch with Americans all along, and I'd been in the army long enough to realize that what I miss were all the little things that you forget about.

Q: For example?

A: Oh, about **TVs**. We didn't have a **TV** for a couple of years, so – for a number of years. And of course, driving was no problem, but –

Q: Why was it more of a problem, there was more traffic in the **United States**?

A: There was more traffic than – than in **Europe**, although I did have a car in **Europe**, but particularly around the big cities, traffic was heavy. Freeways were something new, although I'd been on the **autobahns** in **Germany** which were enough of a problem.

Q: So you finished your master's degree in education?

A: Right.

Q: And what was your next step?

A: Looking for a job, and I finally found one in **[indecipherable] Coalinga** in **California**, which is in the **Fresno –** central part of **California**, teaching world history to a bunch of kids who were growing up on farms in that area and were not interested in world history, particularly, although a bunch of good students.

Q: And did you teach any other subjects?

A: French, a-and social studies.

Q: Did you stay in the same school system for your –

A: For three years, then went to **Beirut**, **Lebanon**, where I spent five years there at the international college. And then after five years in the **Middle East**, I came back to southern **California**, to **Garden Grove** in – which is in **Orange** County, right next to **Disneyland**, and stayed there 25 years. Became principal of a high school. **California** was growing so fast in those days that first time I went there, there was one high school in **Garden Grove**, within 10 years there were seven high schools, with all the feeding schools. So I was principal for 10 years in southern **California**.

Q: Did you remain in contact with any of the people with whom you were friendly during the war? **Andre Dumas**, or **Lowrie**?

A: **Andre Dumas**, I stayed in, **Lowrie** I s – I stayed in touch, mainly through Christmas letters. But I lost track of some of them.

Q: Is the time that you were working with the European Student Relief Fund, and your activities in the camps, did that give you some sort of – some sort of skills, negotiating skills, or skills to – to – to learn to get things done?

A: I think it gave me a greater appreciation of people, understanding of people. I'm not sure it gave me any special skills, except I think I found that Americans are not very much interested in **Europe**. Right after the war, they'd had enough of the war, and – and **[indecipherable]** so, in matter of teaching, you tried to bring in the things that had happened and their influence on their lives, but most people were much more interested in getting jobs and buying cars and living.

Q: At one point in your diary you are at a meeting of the **Committee de Nîmes**, and you've heard one of the dire reports that Dr. **Vay**(ph) gave about malnutrition and – and you ha – you reflect upon what – that you thought man was intrinsically good, but maybe the cruelty and the absurdity that you saw around you shook you. And you seemed to talk about perhaps we are in the grips of demonic forces. Seems that you were –

A: I don't know if I went so f – well, maybe I have **[indecipherable]** demonic forces, but a – I certainly realized that the world was not a peaceful place, and that in some ways there was very little you could do to make any changes. You could change individuals, and that's why I concentrated on individuals and working with

them, whereas major changes were something that it was really very difficult. You realize there's gonna be crises around the world. **[indecipherable]** I was talking to a group of – actually at a Holocaust museum in **Philadelphia** and – where **Hans Solomon**(ph) was – lives. And one of the questions after this **[indecipherable]** group of students who said, well, can the Holocaust ever happen again? The only thing I can say wi – look, there's enough – enough – enough problems already, wa – like dur – like all in the middle – in the **Middle East** and **Serbia**, crises like that, in north **Africa**. And I'm not sure we settled all those yet. I ju-just hope that it never can happen again on such a schedu – scale.

Q: When you mentioned being able to perhaps not change everything, but work with individuals, there's a sense of – of hope and satisfaction when you finally get some of those students out of **Rivesaltes** to the **Chambon**. And that was an example maybe of as an individual.

A: Well, that was – that was a big step, cause we worked so long and hard we – for it, and then failed the first time to get the nod and then went back a second time. But I think when you see people actually in the situation where they're changing their lives, which it was, cause they could just as well have been on a convoy. Except they were all young, they would probably not go on to a camp, they'd go on to a work camp someplace. But there's some satisfaction to know that you helped a few

people like that. It was a much more critical situation than today, and change came about so quickly, too.

Q: It gave you the courage to keep going on.

A: They what?

Q: If you – it gave you the courage – it seemed to give you the courage to keep trying.

A: Yeah, it gi – gives you – you have to have some results, and some – I don't want to say victories, but some positive results, otherwise it becomes a pretty dreary world.

Q: You remained in contact with **Hans Solomon**(ph), or did you find that you connect with him again in **Chambon-sur-Lignon** in 2004?

A: I saw him then and then I saw him earlier this year in **Philadelphia**. So it was kind of pleasant to get back there and talk with him.

Q: Is there something that you would like to add about your experiences in – during the war and what you accomplished, what you didn't accomplish?

A: I think as I reflect back on it, I realize the very extraordinary times. That I was very fortunate to be able to be in a situation where I could do some – some good, not very much. But it gave me an appreciation of difficulties people have and that you can do something, even though very small, just by giving a person a book, or

crayons, or artists. At least give them temporary relief from their situation. That we're not gonna solve all the problems right away.

Q: When you started writing your diary and it seemed mostly destined to – for your parents, sometimes you even write to your mother and dad. Were you conscious that you were living in extraordinary times and that you had to get it down, because you were actually in the midst of something exceptional?

A: Well, I felt – first, my letters to my parents, we've always corresponded. And I felt if I could at least open up with somebody, and give them some sense of my feelings and my beliefs, that would help – help to go on to continue with the work. And the diary I just felt **[indecipherable]** this is a special time, and –

Q: You mentioned that sometimes you felt lonely, and that you would like to come back and have somebody to talk to at night.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you realized that to accomplish something you needed to be part of a group. You mentioned the feelings of camaraderie you had at **Yale**.

A: Yeah, I – I think everybody's looking for somebody to express – to be able to sit down and talk with, or just relate to, especially when you're 25 or 26.

Q: You mentioned –

A: And th-the **Cimade** was a very good group from that point of view, and a – they would meet with them regularly.

Q: You mentioned coming in to one of the camps, for example **Gurs**, and talking with a student who – his name was **Max**, and he was so appreciative of the fact that you took time to talk to him. He was working in the kitchen. So you were aware of that, you wrote it down, that every human being needs to be recognized.

A: Yeah, I think you begin to realize that people want to share, and always need somebody they can open up to, and can talk to, and felt that through education there was a possibility of helping people realize what they want to do. It becomes a very personal thing after a while, looking for a warm contact with people.

Q: You must have established it with your students, if you stayed on and – for 25 years in one school, and – and probably there was an exchange there.

A: Yeah, I still have friends among the students that I knew. But also realize that a lot of the work in education is very temporary, and that you don't – I mean, every day is not a major day. A lot of days are very routine and that you have to get used to it. You try and break out of the routine and make a difference in people's lives.

Q: Would you like to add anything?

A: I appreciate the chance to be here and to talk with you about this, cause I felt ri – was looking over my diary, I realize that – what extraordinary times they were. And

you mentioned you might even think of publishing it, well I – I have trouble getting thoughts down now. I mean, as I say, my children want me to write memoirs, which takes me time to get going on it; my computer skills are not too great. So, glad to be able to share this with you, and –

Q: We're very grateful, and the **Rivesaltes** Internment Camp Memorial especially is very grateful for you having come all the way from **Boise**, **Idaho**, and having made the effort to remember some of these times that were sometimes painful. And I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

A: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate being here.

End of Tape Three

Conclusion of Interview