United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Leo Bretholz
January 29, 1992
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PREFACE

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LEO BRETHOLZ
January 29, 1992

Once we start they're going to look at you for a while and adjust the light.

Camera beep

Should I just lean back?

Yeah, you do whatever you want, but you can look at me. Can you briefly and simply tell me what the underground was like in France?

The French Underground movement was made up of two major organizations. One was what was called the FFI-- that was the abbreviation for Forces Francaises de l'Interieur--the French Forces of the Interior, and the other one was FTPF--Front Tireur Partisans Francaises (ph)--Snipers and Partisans--uh, what you might call uh, uh what do you call these organizations that fight uh governments and the establishment (pause) um Front Tireur, uh what do you call them in the Middle East they're called the...

The Guerillas.

The Guerillas, right. That was the second group. The difference between these groups was very fundamental. FFI was under the direction of the exiled French government in London. Charles de Gaulle was the man who gave the instructions and gave the direct. The others were Front Tireur Partisan Guerillas, and they worked on their own, they had their own command and did not listen...to what the directives that came from London because they have a special interest. They have an interest to maintain for instance the French infrastructure. Because once they were coming back as victors, they wouldn't want to have to rebuild so much. Or they had an interest to protect mainly in properties. Let's say there was an English-owned British-owned property somewhere in the center of France, and in that uh factory--in that factory was now producing war materials for the Germans. Now, the FTPF would go after those places and bomb them or destroy them. The French Forces would be interested in not having these factories produce those tanks or those weapons, but they would like to maintain the property as an entity, so how to do one and not do the other without destroying, so there were these dichotomies. But, FTPF didn't listen to it and did their own. The French Forces of the Interior had a command, and that, as I said, came out of London, and they had their military or para-military commanders here and there. The FTPF chose

their leaders from within their ranks, who were rag-tag people. Now what did the FTPF include? Pause. This was 1941, 42. That was just 6 years after the end of the Spanish Civil War. So they had people who had come from Spain and refugees, and were glad to take up arms against the German Fascists again. They were deserters, to be sure, from the German army. Now the Germans had incorporated into their army some people from Russia, from the, from the Eastern Occupied Territories--the Georgians especially, the Ukrainians. There were rabidly pro-German, in fact. So some of them after had been incorporated into the German army, and were then taken prisoners--escaped from the prison camps, maybe, and joined the FTPF. Or they were disenchanted with the German army, and decided well, this is not for us, and deserted. And then there were real German deserters. Then there were a lot of people from Alsaise Lorraine. Those people who had been...quite a few pro-German, but many anti-Germans, who were the Lorraine people, who were taken into German, into the German army refused to go along with them because at heart they were French, and that reason had changed hands so many times. They were deserters. And then, last but not least, there were the Jews. And the Jews had formed a group that was called Armee Juive (ph): the Jewish Army. That group was not so much into fighting as into more harassing. Road blocks, blowing up tracks, going into the little villages, and attack a Gendarmerie station, and get some arms if they were available. But mainly to produce false identification cards, and administrative things that would help people hide out safely, escape safely, children to be transported to Spain, to Portugal from Spain, perhaps to North Africa or to Switzerland. Now, the group that I finally wound up with in Limoges was one of those Armee Juive (ph). The group was called, the whole Armee Juive, was really called the Sixth. That was a nomenclature that we, that was given, that we adopted, well, whoever was in charge decided that's what it will be called, the Sixth. The Sixth didn't mean much, didn't mean anything, in fact. It was just drawn out of the air. But to the French melise (ph), especially, that was the French collaboranai, colab...borationist uhhh….paramilitary work that was under the Vichy, and they did the dirty work for the Gestapo, in fact. But, to them, the Sixth was something ominous, something to be watched--looked out for--watched for, or be...afraid of perhaps. Why? Because in their mind, if we were called the Sixth, there must have been a first, and a second, and a third, and a fourth, and a fifth. So, to them the Sixth was something that was sixth in succession of a series, and to us, I mean, this was mainly what I, personally, was engaged in after my various escapes, and when I finally acquired that nom de guerre (ph), that French name, Henri LeFevre (ph), and our group did this, produced this for us, identification cards. To be sure, the French Resistance, the Marquis, was formed in the Southeast of France in the French Alps, and in the area where I first was in the Rhone Valley, but that resistance part in Northern part, in the Northern part of France, above, North of the demarcation line did not really mean much until shortly after the landing in Normandy in 19--in June of 1944. That's when they got more into action, and that's when the police in France joined up, up to that

moment in the Northern part of France, the Marquis and the Resistance was not so much organized as mainly, mainly people individually started resisting in grouping uh because in in Northern part of France, the Germans had pretty much the run of things, if not, the collaboration of many people in Paris, including perhaps the police. There's an interesting book out by um David Jones. The book is called Paris in the Third Reich. Not and the Third Reich, in which he propounds the idea that had Germany won that war, Paris would have become the capital of his new Europe because that was the main gem in the crown of his uh conquests. He always wanted, Hitler always wanted Paris to be the showpiece, so he propounds the idea uh that uh, that the French may have even gone along with the New Order. So in the Northern part of France there wasn't much resistance, to make a long story short. Our, the, the, the Southern part was where the beginning was, and this was basically what uh, the resistance did. There were many arrests, many people killed, many people executed summarily executed. Very good friend of mine, Eugene Bass was uh killed in Saint Jenian (ph) in Southern France when he delivered a pack of ID cards and was arrested at the train station by the Germans and two shots into the head. He is listed in that book uh Deportation des Juives as one summarily executed. Um...it was...hit and miss, it was run...what it amounted to be one step ahead of your pursuers then you had it made. It was not something that we could say was so well-organized that if it had endured for much longer that we would have come out the winners, I don't think so. Uh Armies, the German armies were defeated, and that spelled the end of it, but as an outfit, in hindsight, it was an adventure, but I don't think, as the outfit was constituted, or the whole movement was constituted, they could have fought the Germans on an even, on an even uh, playing field. They had all the tanks, they had all the ammunition, but things turned out differently.

How did your group get away with it?

Beep.

And I want to go back to your specific resistance activities and your group, and I want you to tell a little bit about how you were able to get away with it.

(Clears throat) After my various escapes, and one from the training in motion, the deportation train, and later a jail sentence, and I served 9 months. And again a forced labor camp, and again being taken to a train to a work detail, escaping again this time from a standing train. I was contacted by the, my friend, a young fellow, who had escaped with me. We had communicated, and he knew where I was hiding after my last escape, and he sent me false identification papers. What he sent me, basically, was a birth certificate, which served later to establish an identity and identification cards and ration cards and everything that was connected with legalizing your,

legalizing as it were, my false identity. And I could live with that under the regime, and uh after the war, if I would have wanted to, I could have continued that particular identity, in that identity. So after my last escape and hiding out, I was sent these papers with a letter of recommendation to join up with a group in the Rhone Valley, in a little town called Saint Valier (ph), South of Lion (ph), which at the time was hotbed of Gestapo activity under the aegis of Claus Barbie. I joined with that group in November of 1943, not really knowing what that group was. To me it was a place where I'm going to go to hide out with other young people who had run away with other not just young people, men who had run away, you know, with children or women, but when I got there, I knew after a few hours what it was. Speaking to people who they were, where they came from, and I realized, I just been sent to a place where we will do uh illegal underground activities. What happened in that particular area, or in this particular camp was mainly instructions--how to circulate with our papers without being detected. What to say if we were in a place like a restaurant , and an inspection team came in uh, a patrol came in; how to act, act natural, and do never speak your, let on that you speak uh the language other than what you are, Frenchman. Don't fall into traps. And they were teaching some of us young people certain uh trades there too, so that the time should not go entirely. With the knowledge that within some time, we will be sent to certain areas where they can use our services: underground activity. Little did we know at the time when I got there that in a few months later, we would be notified by the mayor of that village that there will be a raid. Evidently that mayor knew what this camp was all about. But we were notified that there will be a raid on the Centre de Preapprentisage, the Center for Preapprenticeship--that's what it was called. A name that was innocuous--didn't mean much--they gave us the uniforms of the Compaignon de France, so that we were incorporated into that whole image of New Europe. And a majority of the people in this camp were Jewish. My friend who had sent me to that camp with a letter had that from his brother, and his brother had, uh, what friend of his as he explained to me, had already had a contact. That's what they did there. Little did we know that when that mayor notified us, that we will, this is the time when we would have to disband, and the whole thing was disbanded, and um, 60 or 80 of us who were there, that was less than 100, were sent into various areas of Vichy, France. And I was sent into an area near Limoge, a little town called Chalou (ph), and in Chalou, I connected with uh Jewish underground, and we were there to produce false identification cards--that was our main endeavor. A very good friend of mine who was part of this group, a young lady by the name of Marianne Kohn, just a couple of weeks, 3 or 4 weeks before the liberation, had been put in charge of a child's, children's convoy to Switzerland, and arriving near the border of Switzerland, near the town of Animus(ph), she and her truck driver in the truck, were stopped by a Nazi patrol that materialized at the last moment, and the kids were actually in plain view of the Swiss border. Soon freedom would be theirs, but that never came because they were arrested. They were beaten about, not the kids. The kids were then handled by

the mayor of Animus (ph), who said he was going to put himself in charge of these kids. Marianne Kohn was arrested. The truck driver was arrested. She was interrogated. She didn't divulge anything, and then the henchman from Lion came to interrogate her in her cell. The story wound up with her being killed with a spade to her skull, and uh, a week or a few weeks after the liberation her body was found in a shallow grave together with another prisoner, a lady who was with her in the cell, and then a poem was found in her, in her pocket, of her jacket, of her bloodstained jacket, where she had written about the hobnail??? booth, and the, and the, uh, you have uh key chains in your fists, and you are, but I'm not giving in and all that sort of thing, and I'm not going to speak, I'll talk tomorrow, but not today, but she never had a chance to talk or not to talk because she was, she was um, no she said, she said tomorrow I will betray, not today, you can't get me to betray today. Tomorrow. I know what you're doing, but I know what I am going to do, and then she was going to slit her wrists with a file. But she never got to that, she was killed. Anyway, that was the tragic story of one of our people, and uh when you go on the war front and you uh you shoot it out with the melise(ph) or the Germans, that's a quick thing. It's either them or us, and that's a sort of action out in the field. But there is more to the underground than the field and the confrontations. There is that resistance of uh, sacrifice, and doing what you think is right, and this Marianne Kohn really personified everything that was good in a person, that knew what she was doing. She was very studious, she was very pert little person, loved children, and loved life, a poet, a musician. And that was also part of that that underground, that resistance, that had to be there because documentation was very important. In fact, that was on the 10th of June, 1944, that was the destruction of the village of Oradour (ph). That I was on my way to Oradour (ph) with a pack of cards, identification cards, and my friend, Eugene Bass, took a batch of cards to go to Saint Jenian(ph), a village beyond. Why did he do that? Because his mother was in that village hiding out. So he took that area because at the same time he could visit with his mother. So when he arrived at the train station, they caught him with these cards and killed him. And when we were on the train, on that commuter train between Limoge and Oradour, Circlan (ph), that's that village that on the 10th of May was burned to the ground--and we had heard of it that put, women and children put into a church to be photographed. And then the church was burned to the ground with straw and hay on the outside and gasoline put over it. That was the tragedy of Oradour. And, when we were on that train going to Oradour and we saw the German column proceed alongside on the country road next to the train, next to the railroad track, we knew that they're going somewhere for some sort of action. So some of us decided we are not going to go to Oradour, we are not going to go further. In fact, the next stop, we will get off. Because when the Germans go into that direction, we don't want to go in that same direction. That was also part of the learning process. When you see trouble that you cannot...don't want to be involved in, just find another way. Be one step ahead, think ahead. So we got a station before, and we found out that whoever descended from the train in

Oradour, from the train, was also arrested, was part of the, the killing, was killed right in Oradour. So there was another time when I escaped just by sheer luck because I decided not to go to Oradour. First things were escapes. This was not an escape, but just, uh, uh a preemptive sort of uh, uh decision that had to be made. The cards were never delivered, and the people to whom they would have been delivered were no longer alive anyway. Pause To deliver some cards

Beep

when I, when I collapsed because I had a hernia, a strangulation hernia, and I had an incident in a park where a nurse walked by, and she said, "You will have to be taken to a hospital." And I resisted that because they would recognize circumcision, and in in France, French people didn't get circumcised. Mumble...non, non-Jews. And I wound up in a hospital, and it was an emergency operation. And when I woke up there was this nun, a Catholic hospital nun, her name was St. Joan of Arc, a beautiful black-eyed young nun, about maybe 19, 20, maybe 21 years old, and she when I woke up, and I had a hot uh breaker (?) hot water bottle at my feet because I had that infection you know, and I had a drain in my stomach then, groin. She said to me, "You don't have to, have to worry. As long as I am in this ward," she says, "You don't have to worry about anything." That's what she said to me. Later on I wrote to the hospital to get some documentation on that--I needed that for Germany for, you know, compensation, that sort of thing. Uh, I asked in that letter that I wrote to the administration, "Is Sister Joan of Arc by any chance still at your hospital?" They said, "No, she was transferred somewhere." They said, "either Normandy or Brittany." I think it was Normandy. "She's in another hospital, but if we have some communication with her, if we have a chance to speak to her, we'll tell her that you asked about her, and it's nice that you did ask about her." So that was a, there was a rabbi in, in uh, I think it was the Grand Rabbi of Strasbourg, Abraham Deutsch, and he was the fellow through whose offices we always had our communication, but he was a rabbi in Limoges, but he had all this uh information and uh letters and uh instructions came through his office really, you know, and when I was in that hospital, I still made sure that I was in touch with Rabbi Deutsch, that he knew what was happening to me, because I had gone to deliver some cards, and dropped right in the, well to get some information from kids in uh, in an orphanage to see what they needed to be done, and I all of the sudden had disappeared off the street, so I had to send message to Rabbi Deutsch later after a couple days, after I had uh, you know, sort of gotten out of uh anesthesia. So these were all little, little uh incidents that uh that um, were part of that whole uh mosaic of uh, of, of uh events you know.

All right, now let's not do the train now. Let's go back, and why don't you tell me how your distant cousin saved you when you were hiding. Just tell me that little story, and how she saved you when

you were hiding in the attic.

Oh, Annie, yeah, she's now a lady of 69 living in Belgium. What happened was that before we were, before I had my escape, I lived in this town, Coterrey(ph), you know all these, all the information there. Uh lived in this town Coterrey near the, not I lived there, we were sent there as Jews to go into what was called forced residence, residence assignee, assigned residence. Again, there was a mayor responsible for letting us know there will be a raid, so some of us took to the mountains. Pause. About a handful of us took to the mountains to hide out. Annie, who was with her parents there, was a Belgian citizen, and Belgians, and Luxembourgers and Dutch people, at first, were never as much affected by that as people who had come from Austria, Germany, Poland, East, or apatri (ph) meaning stateless people. And then she was a girl, and women were not immediately, some of them were, under some sort of dispensation there. But, men and young men, of course, were taken. When we came back from the mountain, and knew that there was no longer able to live in this town of Coterrey, which was near the Spanish border, about 2-3 miles away from the Spanish border, an enclave from which it was very hard to get away, and to get to, but that's what they wanted, they wanted us sort of captive. I decided within a day or two we will have to get away from here. I will have to get away because I could no longer be there out of the 1500 or so people, who had been there to find the Jews. There was just about a, maybe a couple hundred left. And I went up to the attic in the place where we lived. My family and distant cousin, they said, "You will stay up in the attic until a few days from now when you will be able to leave here, when the, when all the tumult had died down, and there is no longer, uh maybe, uh inspection or patrols. And I went up to that attic and stayed there with a little bit of provision that I took along, and there was a cot on the side that I was lying on, and a wooden door, as it is in attics, like a storage place with a lock, a padlock on the outside, and that wooden door had panels, and through these panels, there were cracks. You could actually peep and see what's going on. So I had to be sure that I was out of the range of vision if somebody would look in, and was right on the side, standing against the wall or lying down or sitting on that bed. At one point, I heard, from time to time, my cousin would come up anyway, would say, would find out if I am all right, if I need anything, water, or anything like that, and they would supply me in these couple of days. But at one point one afternoon, I hear steps, and they were not the usual steps of, of that young woman or her mother. But there were several steps, and there were noises. And I was in there and moved my head to the crack, and peeped out, and there was Annie and two gendarmes with her. And they wanted to know who had the key to that lock to the, that's what I heard him ask her, and she says "I don't know. We just moved in here a few months ago, and never had access to this, but, the person, the landlord who owns this, what was called a villa, something like that, that was called la pergola, Spanish name, "They may have the key, but we will have to get in touch with them to get the key,

but what is it?" "Well, we are looking for this fellow that was living here with you, and we'd like to look for others also." She says, "Well, he went away. He went away and never heard from him." or some such excuse. And when they were debating the issue of the key, whether to get in or go get the key, they tried to get near her, and touched her, and sort of (pause) told her that if she would give in to their wishes, uh they would just forget about the whole thing. And when I heard it, that just sent a shiver down my spine. And they bent down over her, and tried to uh, caress her and fondle her and kiss, and she resisted to some extent, but also didn't want to make it too, to annoy them too much, or anger them too much so they shouldn't get back, and after a while they just got done with her, walked down the steps again with her, and uh, I don't know really what happened after that, but, there was Annie, and due the fact that she sort of played along with them, I think they did not insist on getting the key, or maybe breaking the door down. But, in their perception, someone who just disappears overnight, because they had all our names, and we had to register every two weeks with the mayor. Another thing, as a follow-up to that. A couple of years ago, I sent a note to the city hall in Coterrey just to inquire about the name of the mayor, because I never knew the name, telling him also that he had done some good for us by notifying us, and that I live now in America, and I might write some memoirs, or just, uh write some uh mementos on the uh, and that would be good for me to know his name, and they said, of course, the mayor died since then, but we have his son's name, and he lives in Limoges, in fact, and he's about 80 years old now h,a ha. So, uh that was the, that was the story in the attic in Coterrey. So when you first said Annie, it so happens I have a cousin Annie who lives here in, in America, that, for a moment I didn't Yeah, in fact I'm going to see them in Belgium when I go there this, in May.

-----any---comical stories you mentioned once about the ----

beep

When uh, you were, you had, you were stopped to have your---

Okay. That was after my escape. (Whispers) That's interesting. Think about the ---- when you saw the film naturally. The clip. Pause. After my escape from the train in Northern France, I made my way back to the Southern zone below the demarcation line, into a town called Barnier de Bigor (ph). That was also a town where we were sent on assigned residence, forced residence. There were many friends there, and there were many of us Jewish families there, and we lived there for maybe close to a year, over half a year anyway, and from that town we were later sent to Coterrey. But when I came back after my escape I went down to Barnier de Bigor, because there I had friends, and I knew the family, Spearer (ph), who lived there, would probably take me in because

that's the family I stayed with after I ran away from Coterrey, and then I was deported, and then I came back to them.

Okay, we've got to stop, we've got to change--

Beep.

Now we're going to start with the transports out of ----

In October of 1942, in the beginning of October, after I had run away from this forced residence in Coterrey, I made my way into Switzerland with a false identification card, travelling on train to the Swiss border. The Swiss arrested us and sent back to France. the Gendarme took custody of us, sent us to a camp in southern France called RiveSalle(ph) on the 20th of October, maybe a couple days later, yeah on the 20th we were sent to RiveSalle to Transeille (ph) that was in the north of France, near Paris, near La Boucher ----, and we stayed in turn in Transeille till the 5th of November. On the 5th of November, in the evening we were entrained in the uh cattle cars in the train station of Le Boucher. The process of putting us into trains was very simple. They counted out 50, got into the train at the end of rifle butts--they pushed us in, and after the 50 were in the train, in that cattle car, in the car, they closed the doors and locked them. There was a family of four, they would count out 48 49 50 and the 4th person, that would be the 51st person , a little boy of four, went into the next cattle car. He was not allowed to be with his family. The family was protested, and that didn't help. If they would have protested more they could have been killed. The father first. The family was worried. What would that little boy think of us? And the boy would think, thought the parents didn't love him. so this was the separation of families that began right there at the embarking into the transport. There was one bucket in the center of the car for the uses of relieving, to relieve yourself. And that bucket within a couple of hours overflowed, that stands to reason because there was 50 of us in that car. What we had seen in Transeille some of the atrocities. A friend and I Manford Silberbaser decided that if we can we have to get away. And there was no use trying anything while we were standing from about 5 or 6 in the evening till the next morning which I later found out through the book that it was about 8 o clock. We had no notion of time. We had no watches we had no all that was all taken away from us. So uh during that night, during that long night waiting as to what’s going to happen. When are we going to finally start? Because we didn't know what their schedule was. They went by schedule that was particularly prepared and organized and beaureaucratically enforced. Uh we were thinking, what can be done. Luckily for us, the two windows that were at the opposite ends, diagonally opposite in the uh one had barbed wire bars and barbed wire, the other one had just bars. Barbed wire is

never a real obstacle because, if they are rusty they break very easily, you can break them very easily, but the bars are still an obstacle so we set all night and wondered how can we make sure that these bars that are there at a distance like this become separated enough for us to be able to squeeze through. While we were sitting there thinking, it materialized in our minds that this is the way we going to do it. We'll have to twist them in some way, separate them in some way. we couldn't do it while we were standing because the patrols were outside of the cars seeing that everything is okay, shining up and down and looking and shining in to see that everything's ok, but as soon as the train started in the morning, we were out of Paris, about a half an hour or so out of Paris, we decided our task to pry these bars apart. And we know that when you make a cloth wet, it has tensile strength in wringing it, you can wring it, and when you twist it it becomes like a tourniquet. So we took off our sweaters, pullovers, v-necks, and dipped them into that human waste in the bucket, and didn't even have to use the bucket because the floor of the squatting in it and walking in it, and inhaling it, and it's still up there in my nostrils right now when I talk about it. And uh we used these sweaters to twist around the bars, these are the bars twisted around and twist, twist, twist until all the liquid had poured out and had been twisted out, by that time, it had developed that strength, and we did that off and off alternating between him and myself until the bars started to somewhat move in the frame. We saw them move. Why? Because the rust in the frame started falling down in dust. Rusty dust. And when we saw these bars moving, that was the light at the end of the tunnel, to use a cliché, or uh what do you call it a metaphor. That was it. We knew that if we continued that often enough, that eventually, these bars would be giving enough for us to be able to bend them. Up and down up and down until finally they had moved enough where we could bend them into the into a position where the opening was wide enough for us to be able to squeeze through----At a given moment we did, and after we escaped, and uh we uh lay there in the in the ravine for a while that almost seemed like an eternity made our way into a village, went to a bake shop, the apprentice came to the door and told us there was no bread now, not until the morning, and we said we're not interested in bread, we would like to know where the village priest lives and he said he was going to take us to his house or home which was right adjoining the sacristy uh joining the church, and we got to him, we had torn off our Jewish stars. I feel now that if we had them on it would have been more reassuring for him because he would have known who we were although it could have been a trap, but uh, he recog--we told him that we had escaped from a train were very frank with him, and we didn't know, he could have been a collaborator too you know, but we felt we were in good hands as we saw the face of the man. And he said yeah they come through here several times a week, and uh we know we know that but you know, he says I can let you stay
here for the night. But in the morning, very early, I have to get you out of your warm bed, because between 5 and 6, a patrol can come by here almost---. So he gave us milk and bread and cheese

warm milk, put us into a feather bed, into a crisp white sheet, and that after being in Transeilles with a straw on a cement floor and vermin and uh putrid stench and it was like you were on a cloud. And when he woke us with that soft voice in the morning Hey Fellows Leg----Vous que vous levez. You have to get up. Vous que vous partais. Vous partir. You have to get away because you know, gave us a m---to another colleague of his, also another priest in the village, not too far, and we spent the next day in his place, an adjoining stable, not a barn, a stable, and we spending that night lying between cows two cows, and gave a cozy feeling to fall asleep hearing them chew the cud and that odor still yeah when I go through a countryside today I say ---and it's really an interesting uh aspect, and I go through a countryside and I smell manure dung, I inhale it with a relish ha, ha like its ah (laugh). I said well, that brings back memories you know. But it is interesting that these little things are all a process of surviving, and a process of resisting. You look back at some of the things with horror, you look back at some of the things with a different kind of feeling, a feeling of freedom, and you have made it. In fact, the feeling after we had escaped, whatever will happen from now on will never be, will no longer be an obstacle, because if we made that, we will be, we will come out of it all right. That was our gut feeling. so we did make that escape in that respect. And we walked a country road the following days, a couple of days later, and I told my friend Fred, I said Freddy, 30 years from now we'll talk about that-we won't believe it. He says You're crazy. What you talking about 30 years from now. YOu don't know what's going to be 3 days from now. And he was right. Because I wound up in jail after that. But again. All that was an aftermath. And even when I was in jail serving a 9 month sentence. From a year it became 9 1/4 months off for good behavior. Even when I was sent to jail, I knew wherever they're going to take me from now on in, I will not let it happen to me. And that's just the way it worked out. Pause I had the desire, the deep desire, the...premonition with it that I will come out of it, if for nothing else, but to be able to tell a story, because those who have gone and have perished are not able to do it. So we are here, and that's in hindsight, everything just fell in line for me, thank God.

Were you heroes when you got out? Time is running out.

Beep beep beep beep beep beep

Beep

The question was, do I consider myself a hero, what I did, something heroic? It's uh strange, an escape, is not being rewarded by a medal. That's a thing that heroes get as a as a as a token. but, there is a reward for that. The reward is that we survived. I survived to be able to tell a story. That

is enough of a pass it on so that maybe future generations can learn from it. But heroism is not something that you plan or that comes after big consideration of what you're supposed to do or whatever. Heroism is a spur of the moment phenomenon. Somebody saves, like it happened some years ago, a young lady from the icy waters of the Potomac, in Washington, that man when he got up in the morning, didn't say today I'm going to become a hero. I'll be a hero. He happened to be at the time, at a place where he took something into his own hands, and said I'm supposed to do that, and that night and that evening and following ensuing weeks and months he was interviewed, and it was a heroic thing in a way. And heroism springs from a fear basically. Now when you see a monument of a general there in a park, and he has won this or that battle, and he was a hero and he was decorated for it, what that monument doesn't tell you that stone or bronze statue does not tell you is one thing: how scared he may have been at the time when it all happened. So, my escape is not so much heroic as it is as they say in the uh ethics of the fathers, there isn't a thing that hasn't its place, and there isn't a man who hasn't his time or something of that, I'm paraphrasing it vaguely. But it was the right person at the right time at the right place, and there's two factors in that particular escape, in that whole situation of my survival. One is fear. And not just fear spelled out normally but with a major capital letter. FEAR. And the second is luck. There has to be an amount of luck or fortune or fate. what do you want to call it--something metaphysical. Because the train that left 2 days earlier--according to what I hear there was one escape attempt by a man, and he fell under the wheels of the train, and his legs were amputated, and he was thrown back into the car to bleed to death. So we had to be lucky after we had taken the decision, for it to succeed. And all the ensuing months to be arrested and to run again and to escape and to have a situation with a German SS officer in that train station in Limoges when I was observing something as was the truth. and I told the man then that I was just watching something, not observing, there's a difference between the two because I was there to find out something. But that is my point of my escape. The question was, Are you a hero? I don't like to relate to myself as a hero, because it was fear and luck, and I don't even ... enjoy or...exalt in the term survivor. There are many people in the world that have to survive in circumstances that are not life or death like. Mine in this particular time because 72 hours later I would have been gassed, according to the statistics. But people have sometimes have to survive on a daily basis. we see that in our cities, we see that in present life. But what survivor is, has a connotation, almost on a, it's almost a word of curiosity, you know. I often feel that when I speak to schools, and people ask questions, they…I'm an object of curiosity, and I don't want to be that. Because what survivor is, connotes a special situation that you're in , a special character that you are, a special place in life that you have. Yes, we are survivors. the word tells you that. But the real heroes are really those that are no longer here to tell the story. They are the people who went there and .... martyrs in a way, yes, but, quite heroic because...They were good people, and uh especially when we speak about children, I see my own granddaughter,

when I look at a million and a half children lost they were the real...what do you call it? In football, you call it unsung heroes, in a way. Unsung. Remembered. But very much unsung. there could have been a nation today, a million and a half children growing into a fully grown nation. As uh Gerda Weismann Klein says, "they were ordinary children, but quite a few of them could have been extraordinary." Extraordinary. These were the heroes.

Can you tell about on the train when you made the decision and how, how different people felt on the train about your decision to escape.

It is interesting when you're together with a group of people of 50 coming from all walks of life, a microcosm if you will, of, of Jewry, of humanity, abandoned by the rest of the world, or at the time we didn't quite sense that we were abandoned because we were given all kinds of psychological means to think that we were going to be working and resettled and that sort of thing. People were trying to talk us out of escaping, especially the males in that train. There was one woman on crutches there, I've often mentioned her. Deep-set, dark deep-set eyes, grey streaky grey hair, taking care of a young child...who was there without parents, on a crutch, on crutches. She had a leg amputated, and she pointed that crutch at us, punctuating the air with that crutch like a weapon. "You must do it! Run, run! You will tell a story!" And others tried to talk us out of it. We had to work feverishly on this thing because we never knew when the train would come to a halt, and the guards would step down and try to look, lucky , again luck. Luckily for us, the train did not stop during that period during the day, where they would come by and see perhaps a notice that something has been worked on those bars. They were trained also to watch out for things. Like we were trained, or like we, sixth sense tells us what to do and what not to do. Yes. And the psychology of it was, "Why did they try to talk us out? Because before we left the camp, our belongings were taken from us. Jewelry, watches. And we were given a receipt with a number, and our name was on it. And that receipt said that this is what we deposited. And we were told "don't lose that because you won't get your things back when you get there." That was the psychology. Now, when we worked feverishly, and they tried to talk us out of it, foolish, we'll all be killed, they will discover you that you're missing, and they'll take it out on us. Well, if that's the feeling that you have, then, we are not going anywhere where you deal with human beings, certainly, which only fortifies our premonition that where we're going we're not going to make it. Rumors had been flying, but they were never entirely confirmed, verified. And then they said, Look what we have in our hand! They wouldn't bother giving us this if they didn't mean to return these things to us! That little receipt for the meaningless little pieces of jewelry in this respect at that time, all that had no more meaning. It was just something you wanted to hold on to because that presents you with a feeling that you're still alive. But, to them, that certificate was, in fact, that

little receipt was in fact a document telling them that they will be all right, that they will be alive, and to me it doesn't didn't mean anything. That was the psychology of it. And we had to overcome, not only our own, perhaps sometimes hesitation. There was still this thing we have to get out and jump, and there's still danger ahead. That one thing vs. them admonishing Don't leave us in a way. Stay with us. Don't do it to us. Now, Manfred Silver was, and Leo Bretholz, we were single young man. And it's part of a young person's makeup to be somewhat...adventurous. Maybe not thought out too much. Just to do it. Impulse.

beep

Start with you and your friend?

Coming back one more time to this hero thing, there were some people that had a lot to do with me during those months and a couple years. First of all, the priest. Now, there's an unsung hero. He could have gotten into trouble. The lady in Limoges with whom I boarded and my friend Eugene Bass. Hiding us out up in the attic, knowing who we were, Madame Bergot, lovely lady, non-Jewish, had a tragedy of her own when she was 21, lost her husband in the third (?) world war, never got married. A life like this, always helping people. This nurse in the hospital, that I mentioned before. By her telling me that she knows who I was, but as long as she's going to be there, nothing's going to happen to me. That's a little unsung heroic story because she put herself out. She could have just gone about her way without saying anything. And uh, I don't know. Madame Bergot's name I know, and that Sister Joan of Arc, I know Saint Joan of Arc. she was a saint. But that priest's name I never knew because names in that moment didn't mean much as long as he didn't know ours, we didn't know his, but his actions meant so much. So that's more but, what you might consider heroic, or in a , in a uh vague description uh description of it, something that borders on, on, on maybe being heroic or being there when you're needed. Maybe that's also a point, but uh, whoops.

beep

We want to go to the choices, and the difference in choices, like you and your friend on the train were young men, but, choices that other people wouldn't have, like families.

The um, it is very simple for young people who are unattached, want to be impetuous, adventurous, take it into their own hands, make a decision at the spur of the moment, uh well thought out, or not thought out at all, but a decision that had to do with basically survival in mind. And I have to come

back to the big word 'fear'. No matter how a family that was in the, in the , for instance, in the cattle car. No matter how such a family would have wanted to get out of the situation, no matter how much a father perhaps seeing me squeeze through, would have been tempted to also squeeze through, and get to freedom. There was that family situation that would prevent him from doing so. But this relative of mine was in that same train. And she was the one that handed me my bag, my rucksack, through the through the window, between the bars, handed it to me, and I put it over my shoulder. Tony Goodfry (?) She went to Auschwitz and perished. And these faces, I see. The choice was ours because we were free, unfettered in a way, to do it. Free to jump and go and do what we wanted to do. Families couldn't. Ill people couldn't, infants couldn't. Somebody came and was dragged into a cattle car on a stretcher. Actually brought from a camp on a stretcher. Couldn't walk. These people couldn't. And it so happens that according to what I hear, there were less than a dozen attempts at escape during that period from Transeilles to Auschwitz, during the period from Spring 1942 to almost into the fall of 1944. There were about a dozen attempts at escape and only several, three or four succeeded actually. So, when I did mention my escape to Professor Gilbert when he wrote the book Holocaust, he became very interested in it. The first question was, "If you were on that train, so how are you here talking to me?" That's when I told him about the escape, and he was especially interested in the aspect of the Swiss having sent me back, because he had a very prominent chapter there on Switzerland, and their dastardly acts during that period. Not everybody could make the decision. In fact, not everybody, is quite, quite, quite an understatement. The majority could not make decision like this from a train, because trains were quite often entirely without windows at all, especially in the East. The trains were also packed much more in the East, about 100 I understand, per cattle car. And the escape routes were not as available, although some people tried to hack a board out of the out of the floor. There were sometime older cars and they were loose anyway, and with an instrument that you may have fashioned, manufactured in camp, a knife or a some such sharp instrument, you could do it. Some of it went through the roof, perhaps trying… but there was, not everybody couldn't, could do that. In fact, the psychology, and that's again, prevented you from doing foolish things to endanger yourself. You could get killed for that, they will take it out on you, and the proof of it is up to the very last minute, and these are the reports, then they were taken to the gas chambers, being told that it was showers, and they were told to hang up their clothes on those hooks, and put their shoes right under their clothes, so when they came out, don't forget where you hung ‘em, don't misplace them, because you will not be issued new clothes or different clothes or other clothes. That psychology worked unto the very last minute when the men and women and the infants in their arms walked into the gas chambers. Nobody in France could believe in these cattle cars, that they were going to transport us 72 hours---we didn't know how long we were going to be in this transport--turns out about 72 1/2 hours. Nobody, having been put in that cattle car at the moment. You would talk to

people would actually believe that they're taking us there to be killed or gassed. Because if they wanted to do something to us, they could do it right here. Why drag us 3 thousand miles? That was so Machiavellian. It was so organized. So psychologically prepared. Up to the most minute detail. All that created at once the conference???? that we just remembered that happened 50 years ago last week...on the 20th of January. Everything was meticulously prepared, and the word went out from the SS, from Himmler, and from the generals, colonels, that when you will, nobody in the future will believe that anyway. So you don't have to really worry about it. And that, that is, that was the psychology of it. Why we were so unusual in having done it when others didn't do it because we were free, and they were not free to do it and they were also as I said, never quite psychologically prepared to believe that it was within the power of a human being to do that to another human being. And I come back to the ---- to a child. To a child (whispers). That's a big tragedy. That people still believed in people--the goodness of people. And you see Winds of War in the last segment when the woman opened the door, opened the door for her and she stands there and she talks to the SS man standing there with his dog and his white gloves, and she said, "Sir, we have 7 people, 7 dead people in this car." and he turns to her, and says in a very wry smile, "These are the lucky ones." That's when she realized that she was confronted with somebody who was not really human. But in the car, as the car was rolling on to the French countryside, that beautiful bucolic countryside, nobody could believe that this was possible to be happening, because human nature doesn't want to believe that uh another human being can do that. Anne Frank says that, in the last sentence, at the bottom of it all I still believe that people are good. Final sentence in her, in her diary. And that's what the belief was, that, no matter what they say, what the rumors say, that it isn't quite possible. There were these gamuts of moods running through that train, from prayers to tears to despair, resignation--quite a bit of hopelessness. And some people were telling jokes. To overcome--to stay alive or show life.

Beep

I want you to talk a little bit about how Germans saw Jews, and how things changed in Vienna. How do you remember the changes?

Your question is about my, how I remember what happened in Austria. Let me say at the time of the Anschluss, the annexation. I was 17. I just turned 17. It was an overnight traumatic change. People who were your friends on the 10th of March and the 11th of March, were no longer your friends on the 13th, or at least showed that they were no longer, or at least maybe you thought they were your friends before, and they were really never friends. To a young person like myself, maybe I did not feel the impact as much as perhaps parents felt when it happened because they had

to worry about their children. but it was an overnight turmoil. More so emotionally than anything else. There was a disruptive, uh, an interruption of a normal life. this was March. We had neighbors with whom we were very friendly and they were Christians and at Christmas time, that particular year, in previous years when we were smaller we would go to their apartment and help them decorate the trees, share the cookies, go to school together. Overnight, within hours, Vienna was transformed into a sea of swastikas. Where did they come from overnight? They were not manufactured overnight? It was a total metamorphosis of, of attitudes of feelings, of emotions of uh relations. Everything more emotionally and...psychologically, than the physical aspects of it. Although, physically, within hours, or a couple days, the Jews were taken out to the streets to scrub the streets, and they were given little brushes, toothbrushes, to go and try to rub away oil paint that the Austrians had painted on the sidewalks and on the walls (German quote): Red white and red until we're dead, which was Shushnik, the Austrian government's slogan not to vote for a, a referendum to vote for Austria to remain Austria. That was the Austrian colors, red, white, red, and still are. So how could these Jews, these women, children and elderly get these oil painted slogans off the sidewalks. It was impossible. But this was part of the harassment. And sometimes this was done to the strains of Wagner's music, you know. Tanheuser and ---------. People dancing around. And poking fun. And elderly Jews having their beards set afire with matches. And then the fire, the flame finally seared towards the chin. They would take buckets of water and pour it into their faces. These were....utter denigration, harassment, for the pure joy of doing it. This is what we saw in Austria. Hundreds of thousands of people standing on the Heldenplatz to ---- off the heroes in the Innerstadt (?), the first district----. And applauding, cheering, receiving the Germans, the Nazis. The Austrians later claimed that they were the first victims. I did not see at that time, and I can say that without any hesitation, I did not see any victimization of the Austrian non-German, non-Jewish population, although, those who were part of the socialist movement, and those who were in the labor unions, they were also hiding out, and some of them ran away, and I know that the Center forward of the Austrian football team called Austria--------Matthias Sindilar?? committed suicide because he was emotionally so inflamed by that, what had happened, yes that happened. But if an Austrian wanted to put on a brown uniform, and walk with that brown uniform, nobody would have known what he was thinking. He could have done it. But the Jew couldn't do it. But basically the heil, heil, heil, heil, and zeke heil was a shout that was heard, I only wish it would have been heard far enough so that some of the western powers would have done something about it at the time, maybe in hindsight, they might...have a feeling that could have prevented a lot of things, if they would have right then and there started with to resist Hitler. But Austria instead they went to Munich and gave him another peace. And that land for peace thing that we hear a lot of now, pertaining to the Middle East as far as I'm concerned, the land for peace has really, in history, nowhere in history you can go from beginning to end of history books, land for peace has never

worked. Because those who want land are never satisfied with that land. It's like a spider. Hitler caught Austria, and that was his first victim in that spider web. And He wasn't satisfied, there would have had to be more. In fact, the resistance should have come before Austria, when they walked into the Tsar land (?) the Germans and the French should have resisted. But that's history, that has not much to do with my particular story, but being the question is how did Austrians and how did Germans because I had more contact with the Austrians than with the Germans per se, but the Austrians, uh, were not really the first victims. They received the Germans with open hands, as far as I can see, and History has borne that out--I'm sure there's always exceptions.

Now, um assume that I don't know what a deportation--explain to me what a deportation is.

To deport someone is to send someone against his will into a place, where he will be exposed to hardships, to harassments, to forced settlements, to um....um...be in a surrounding that isn't his, in a country where, where he doesn't even, nobody speaks his language, and it is uh, it is this the, the, the, the forcible shipping of people into areas away from their home in order to fulfill a certain agenda, a political agenda, where he uh he uh, a plan that was conceived to uh to .....to do harm to a certain group of people. People get exiled Because they have politically done something to uh... Napoleon was exiled. The Kaiser went into voluntary exile. Uh, we hear about uh, South American dictators, they go into voluntary exile. If they had not voluntarily taken that exile upon them, they may have been arrested, tried, and maybe executed. Or if they live in a country that doesn't execute, they would have been deported. They would have been asked, other countries would have been asked to accept them. Like Archbishop Trifor (?) was in Detroit after he was denaturalized here. He was deported. Nobody wanted him. Finally Portugal took him in. He was the fellow with this...the head of the armed guard in Romania, killed uh thousands of Jews. Lived in Detroit.

What is deportation to you?

De de…what, in France?

In, throughout Europe.

Throughout Europe, deportation means taking whole populations, and moving them against their will into an area of confinement, where they were exposed to the wind, and all the vicissitudes that came with being in, in that particular confinement, and these confinements were camps.

beep

We have to quickly sum up what did it mean to be deported?

Under the nor, under normal circumstances a deportation of a person takes place when that person or that group have made an attempt to topple a government, or to do something that is not lawful, do something that is against the law, and they could be deported, they could be as undesirable aliens or as uh whatever the designation is. These Jews, men, women and children, were deported for nothing else but to send them from their country of residence in to an area to be confined in camps, they can be called concentration camps, and the real word for some of them is extermination camps. To be deported, not as they said, to be resettled, but to work but for one thing namely to be exterminated. But, that was in the case of the Jews. Deportation normally means the sending away of a person or a group of persons who are at the moment under some cloud of suspicion, or endangering uh a situation, a government or uh a rebellious, or instigating away from their home. Deportation is a word, is also a, a form of punishment. It's banishment and punishment. Ina way you're being exiled...away from your home of origin into an area where you are not at home. As long as you're away from the place where you are not desired. And Jews were undesirable under the German occupation in these various countries that they were deported from.

I want to get back to Oradour, and I want you to tell me what that massacre was and tell me about the confusion of the -----.

There was, there were two Oradours in the area of Limoges. One was Oradour Surglane, and one was Oradour Survaires. Glan G-L-A-N-E, and Vaires, V-A-I-R-E-S. The German division das reich who had advanced from Toulouse towards the frontlines in Normandy, that was on the, after the 6th of June landing in 1944, had encountered some resistance maquis activity on the way up from the south to the west, to the coast, and , they had been informed that the village of Oradour, being that they had already been harassed and attacked, and were already in the village of Toulle, and had uh, was it------, but anyway in the Corais, had already hung a lot of males on butcher hooks in front of butcher stores, and their families had to parade in front of them to see that. Being that there was restistance to the advance they had taken that out on these mens, were taken hostage. They advanced and had heard that the village of Oradour in Otvien, the department, well Limoges was the capital of that department, had a, a maquis, a resistance movement. Except they confused Oradour Survaires with Oradour Surglane. It was the vaires on the river vaires, survaires means on the river vaires, that really had a resistance, small resistance uh detachment, and there were arms there in that area. They confused them. They went into Oradour, arrested the mayor, and asked him to show them the cage of arms, and he says we have no, we have peaceful citizens. We don't, you can search the village. They arrested them, and in the main square, there's a report, I have that report also, but, there's a report on the main square, they were getting ready to saw his legs off in front of the populace, and his two sons begged them not to do it, and ...they would stand in for him. They still did it, and then killed the sons too, and in the village between 8 and 900 people were killed that day. That was the confusion. They went in there, told the female and the children's populations, Come to the church and we'll photograph you, and that was the end of them, they were massed into the church, and as I said before the church was surrounded by hay and straw and was set aflame, and of course, today that village of Oradour, a quarter mile away, or an eighth of a mile away, has been built up again, and this ruin, the town where the ruins of the church are, and with other mementos, is still there in the original site of Oradour with all kinds of mementos like baby carriages and dolls and shoes and buckles and belts and toys and that sort of thing. That was the tragedy of Oradour for which there was trial held in Bourdeaux, and uh some of ‘em were sentenced to, well the---------- amount of sentences.

Uh, tell me how you witnessed the November pogrom of--------.

I did not witness it. Talking about the Kristallnacht, I did not witness, because I was lucky

enough, again, a stroke of luck, that I left Vienna on the 25th of October. 1938. The Kristallnacht happened during the night from the 9th to the 10th of November. It so happens, during that night I had already escaped Vienna, swum, I had been swimming, uh to the to the Sour?? river into Luxembourg during the night from the 31st of October to the 1st of November, it was All Saints Night, after it had been raining for about 5 or 6 days. I had to swim a river that the smuggler had told me I will be able to wade through, and he said to me, Keep a pair of dry socks in your coat, and I put 'em in my coat, and the next step was up to here in water, so here go my dry socks. And, um, I did not, I did not witness it in Austria because I had a strong feeling had I been there I would have been arrested with so many young men that were. My mother had beseeched me to leave, and she was the one that prevailed upon me to leave, and I see this woman's eyes in Vienna--grey hair, she was prematurely gray, and uh it was due to her that I am frankly alive today. Had she not sent me away then, I would have been there on Kristallnacht. Who knows, this is all conjecture. But, during that night from the 31st of October to the 1st of November, I crossed the river, and from the 9th of the 10th of November, I was smuggled into Belgium, and there was about 6 7 8 people in this car, and the smuggler that smuggled me to Luxembourg, was also the one that smuggled us to Belgium. As we approaching the Belgian border, going North from Luxembourg, in the Adens region, we looked to the right and there was a strange appearance in the skies, a strange coloration into reddish and purplish, and uh weird colors, almost like some sort of natural phenomenon, and it was interesting to view at the time, but little did we know that this was Kristallnacht, and all of Germany was aflame. It wasn't till the next day, the 10th of November, arriving in Brussels that we saw the headlines describing, headlines speaking about what had gone, and then reading further of what uh, the tragedy of it was. And that is the way I witnessed Kristallnacht from a distance, just with its reflections.

Tell me about your who in your immediate family survived, and what happened to some of your siblings.

When you speak about immediate family, nobody in my immediate family survived, my mother and two sisters were gassed. My father died a natural death in Vienna in 1930, he was only 39 years old. He would not have survived. He was an activist. He would not have survived in Auschwitz. I know. Then there were figuring that on my mother's side were 10 brothers and sisters, and on my father's side 9. Quite a few of them were married, had children. I have still a few surviving relatives in Israel now. And an aunt in Paris. Couple cousins. I have 3 cousins. But between 40 and 50 members of my family perished, immediate family, speaking about. Family, family. My mother and 2 sister. I said goodbye to them in Vienna in 1938 on the 25th of October. That was hard. Very stark scene that brings this back to my memory, and I will never forget it, is

when I went to the hospital to visit my younger sister, she was then confined with scarlet fever. She was not only in confinement, but in quarantine. This was incurable (?) at the time, had to go to the hospital, there was no injections for that. Scarlet fever was a quite uh current thing. And I went to visit her to tell her goodbye, she was on the 2nd floor like a little elevated at the window, and I, in sign language, wrote, told her that I will be leaving tonight, and she wrote on the blackboard, Good luck, I hope I see you soon.

Put one more roll up.

beep

I want to go back to the story of Annie again, and, can just encapsulate the story, and then talk about how you talked with her about it later when you were hiding in the attic.

That story with the hiding in the attic in Coterrey was a very scary situation because I had just come back from the mountains, and I didn't want to be caught again. But , uh, as I said, before, these gendarmes went up the stairway with her, and in order to entice her to, to, to uh to open up, they don't know what they, she didn't want to open up, and she had no key to open up, and they could have broken down the door, but um, when they approached her and made advances to her, and she sort of implied yes, if you would just get off the stairs, and just go down, she'll talk to them. Now later, when we talked about it, she told it to me with tears. Never went into any kind of details, but I don't think that they actually violated her, because it was in the house where her parents lived also. But uh, later when we spoke about it, it was just another aspect of a moment of tension that worked out to the good rather than what it could have worked out, namely, I could have been arrested right then and there, and sent into deportation rather than two months later, two months later when I was sent back from Switzerland and it could have been a whole together different situation, but later on in life, we talked about it when I visited Belgium again, and it was a tense moment. It was mainly, we talked about it in a very light way. No details uh to any effect.

How was it different for people in your mother's generation to experience the war? From how it was with you?

You mean in 1938?

Through the whole thing. In general. In general terms.

I, I wish I wish I could really other than speculate. Conjecture. Have some sort of a, I wish there would have been a but in that transport where my mother and sisters were, how she took to that situation, and how she coped with it, and what her trepidations were and what her thoughts were, and what uh the feelings, and when I heard that they were in trucks, and were gassed in trucks, I almost was relieved actually, because I know when you travel in a truck, you can doze off, you can fall asleep, you're tired, and then you just doze off and that's it. Because this is odorless and colorless, and uh it can kill you these gasses, uh carbon dioxide that kills you. But, how was her generation taking it? By sending me away, I know it was a trauma to her. It must have been. Because we do that when we send kids to camp only for 2 wks or for 2 days or for over a day or, or day camp. We admonish them. We say take care of yourselves, and when you go away for a longer time, it is Do um, write to us, let's keep in touch, don't catch cold. My mother coped with it , I hope in a in a courageous way. She had 2 daughters with her. She had become a widow 8 yrs earlier, and she was used to life of hardship perhaps. Unfortunately, between the end of a hardship after the 1st world war, and then the depression in the early late 20s and early 30s. To 1938, there was very little breathing room for them to recover. So i think the life of my mother and my relatives and my uh grandparents during that period was one of hardship all the time, overcoming. My grandparents living in Poland had to overcome pogroms at the turn of the century and even the early 20th C and harassment. My mother didn't have much time to probably cope with anything. Just to know that there's enough= food on the table the next day for the kids after my father died and she was a seamstress, and she did the best and we went to school and we had our we had our food and we had clothing and we had schooling and we went to movies and we had good times and bad times, but I could never really go into a detail then and ask my mother, How do you feel about this now? Because it was all spur of the moment decisions, and we couldn't sit down and discuss it really. We could discuss the fact, yes, you have to leave rather than us. Why? I knew was going to have to go through a river, and perhaps swim. I was the scout, I went there hoping that if that succeeds, that eventually my mother and sisters would be able to follow. But from 38 to 1940 when the lowlands were invaded, and I was a refugee, and I had no financial means, and to have a smuggler smuggle you, you need to pay somebody. So, I hope that eventually I will accumulate a little bit, and, maybe get somebody to help, but there was not time between 38 and 40 in those --- between- 1940 the lowlands were attacked, but in 39 the war started on the Eastern front, so after that there was no leaving anywhere anymore, so it was just a year had gone by, well maybe a year and a half, and, and uh, that was, that was uh the end of our being together in a way because uh it , if it had lasted longer, if the Germans had not attacked in 1940, but maybe in 1941, maybe there would have been a chance for my sisters and my mother to follow me to Belgium. But, we did correspond, yes, they wrote to us in veiled terms, in cold terms, that things were bad and that was happening, and they were going to a ghetto and all that sort of thing, but um, I think In the life of a Jewish mother,....any Jewish person, I think one little more, one other little period of suffering was just a, was just another , another segment of a of a totality

of uh sad events. This was part of the psyche. Did not have time to go into any kind of details as to what she thought of the future. Yeah I know what she thought of the future, "I hope we'll see you soon. " That was the hope. Naturally, that was always the hope. If you don't have any hope anymore, then you don't have anything. And it was hoping against hope of course, which at the time we didn't know. And anything I would say, as to her feelings or attitudes I would only be guessing and using another conjecture.

Who was Marguerite Bergot? Just give me a little portrait.

Marguerite Bergot was the lady whom I referred to before, who was the owner of that little house that I stayed in, in uh in Limoges. Uh, I lived in an attic, monsad (?) it's called in French. Apartment. And uh actually shared it with my friend, Eugene Bass, and when we had people come into Limoges from our groups from surrounding areas, with cards, or with material, with uh painting materials, with inks, or just communication, they would come into Limoges, they would also stay with us. Something in that little Monsad up there that one bed and 2 armchairs we may have had 6 or 8 people sometime up there, and then we just stretched out on the bed or made do for one night on the floor in the bed on the chairs, and uh, there was no running water in that monsad, we had to go out to the corridor one flight below, and bring water up from that faucet to a wash basin. And Madame Bergot was the owner of that place, and she knew exactly who we were, she knew me by name, she knew me by name, uh, Maxon ReLefevre. Later she learned my real name, she knew all about war names, and when somebody would come to the door and inquire, or ask any kind of questions that she would feel were sort of digging into or trying to find things out she would just play so dumb as can be, I don't know what you're talking about. She was a very witty lady, she was a very good lady. A constant smile. And uh very human, and understanding. And Madame Bergot sent me a silver napkin ring engraved with MB, and she says, That's for your son, because my son had the same initials, Myron Bretholz, so she just gave me that as a token. We went to visit her in 1970, yes in 1970, and uh, no actually not, that was 1970, we didn't go to Limoges. in 1954 we went to Limoges, my wife and I. And we went to visit Madame Bergot, and we walked through the Limoges main square, and they have a market there 3 days a week, china ware all over the place, people are just stepping over it. You wouldn't , some people would think that's a crime, to step on china, you know, but there she was, Madame Bergot in the main square, and we fell into each other's arms, "What you doing here?" I say, "Well, we came to France, we just on our way to visit you." and my wife met Madame Bergot, very, very nice and pleasant get-together. that's when she gave us, she sent us letter, and that ring for my son. And uh, she did a lot. Yeah, she's also one of those little heroes, that uh, unsung heroes, she's no longer alive, Madame Bergot. Marguerite Bergot, yes. Beautiful lady.

Thank you. Thank you very much.