

Mr. Ringel, please tell me when and where you were born and something about your family background.

I was born on December 23rd, 1910, in Mainz, a city in Western Germany. And after a few years, my parents moved to Frankfurt. My parents came from what is now Poland. I believe that my mother was born in a little town by the name of Radomysl in the western part of today's Poland.

Around 1905, my parents, who were married, then, for only two or three years, moved to Germany and settled in Mainz.

Why did they move to Germany?

My father was a partner in an export business, in that little town, exporting eggs and butter. And as I remember from my father's stories, about 1904 their warehouse was destroyed by a fire. And at that time, they were uninsured. So they lost everything they had. The business then was restarted by my grandfather and an older son. There was not enough for three families. That may have been the reason why they moved to the west, where they had always done business with importers, German importers.

What did your father do in Frankfurt?

He continued the same business. In other words, he became, instead of an exporter, he became an importer and agent importing eggs, no butter. But as I recollect just eggs, which was an important item in those days.

Where did you live in Frankfurt?

We lived in the southern part of the city. And--

Do you remember the street and house number?

Yes, It was Lindenstrasse 20, a residential area, where we lived from, approximately, 1923 till 1933.

How many members were there in your family?

I had two sisters and one brother.

Did your father have a business place in Frankfurt or was it outside of Frankfurt?

No, it was in Frankfurt. As a matter of fact, we had a large apartment. And one of the rooms was an office. And my father conducted the business from the apartment where we were living.

You went to school in Frankfurt?

Yes, I went to school.

Can you describe that background?

Yes. It was, to my knowledge, the only Jewish gymnasium in Germany. And it was called Philanthropin. It was founded by the secretary of the Rothschild, famous Rothschild family in Frankfurt around 1860 or so.

How many students were in the school?

Oh, the school had-- there were two parts, the boys' schools, which had about 400 to 500 students, including the high school, and a girls' school, in a different part of the building-- perhaps 250 girls.

Where was the school located?

I can't remember this. Hebelstrasse. Now I remember, Hebelstrasse in Frankfurt.

Did you walk to school?

No, on bicycle. How far was it to the high school?

About 15 minutes ride from our house to the school.

As you were growing up and going to the school, did you ever encounter any act of antisemitism or anything personally that happened to you?

I remember one incident. I must have been, at that time, maybe 10, 11 years old, my brother eight. And when I went with my father, on one particular Jewish holiday, to the synagogue--

What synagogue was it?

That was the synagogue called Unterlindau, a German Orthodox synagogue. We were about to cross the street. But before we were reaching the sidewalk, a man, a workman pushing a cart hastened to reach my father, to give him a push with the push cart. Because he saw, obviously, that we were Jewish. And he must have been an antisemite.

Other than that, I cannot remember any antisemitic act. But I was, after all, in a Jewish school, with Jewish teachers and a couple of non-Jewish teachers. So I personally have never had any antisemitic utterances or acts.

Where were you in school when Hitler came to power?

I wasn't in school. I had already entered the Wolfgang Von Goethe University and was a student, a medical student at that time. And in 1933, I had just made my preclinical exam and passed it, quite well.

Could you tell us what happened after he came to power?

It was March 1933. And the Easter vacation had just started when my father, after discussions with his Dutch and Belgian business partners or business relations, decided to make a business trip to Spain, to examine, there, the business possibilities.

Since my father didn't speak any foreign languages and since he knew that French was required-- at least French was required in Spain to converse with business people-- he suggested I come along. I was delighted. I had never been abroad. So I was quite glad with this trip to foreign countries.

We visited first Holland, then Belgium, and, from there, we went to Barcelona, Spain. About three or four weeks-- three weeks after we had left Germany, we received a letter from my brother, wherein he told us of the first antisemitic excesses of the Hitler regime.

He'd wrote that windows of the largest department store in Frankfurt had been smashed, that the Jewish owner had been forced to clean the sidewalk and was humiliated, while a crowd of cheering youngsters were standing there. My father had always had the conviction that Hitler was not merely uttering empty threats against Jews, but that the Nazis meant every word they said. My father was shattered by this letter.

And my brother informed me, in that letter, also, that one of the new decrees had ordered all Jewish students to be thrown out of the universities and colleges in Germany. And that Jewish professors also had to leave universities. With that, my career was simply terminated.

And we decided, at that time, that we would not go back to Germany anymore. Instead we asked our family members-- in the first place, my mother and brother, who had stayed behind, but also my two married sisters, their husbands and

children, to think of coming to Spain. And they all did.

And by July 1933, I had no close relatives in Germany anymore. They were all, by that time, in Spain. And we had settled down and started a new business. However, I as well as my brother, who also was in medical school in Frankfurt, were unable to continue the medical career. We didn't speak Spanish. And no German diploma, high school and college, were accepted by the Spaniards, because the Germans didn't recognize any of the Spanish.

So besides, our lives were rudely interrupted, not only culturally but also materially. So my brother and I, we had to help to make a living. So we gave up the career and became partners in my father's business.

Then, in the summer of 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out. My father was not a strong person. He was asthmatic and had a stomach ulcer. A year later, 1937, it became rather intolerable for my father to stay in Spain. Food became scarce and living conditions, in general, had greatly deteriorated. So we decided, that is our whole family decided, that the time had come, that my mother and my father should leave that war-torn Spain.

Bombing attacks had already been made on Barcelona by the Franco air force. But the question was where to go. By that time, it was already very difficult for Jews, with German passports, to go anyplace. Fortunately, we had a bank account in Holland, in Amsterdam, because of the business relationships that we had with Holland and Belgium. And we still had our original German passports from the pre-Hitler time, which allowed us to enter Holland without a visa.

And so I believe it was early April 1937, I took my parents to Amsterdam, where we found a furnished room for them to live. After a couple of months, when they had settled down in Amsterdam, I returned to Spain and stayed there for another year, until my father became very seriously ill and was taken to a hospital in Amsterdam.

When I got the news-- when we got the news, I rushed to Amsterdam. And I stayed, there, with my parents. I did not return to Holland anymore. I'm sorry, I did not return to Spain anymore, except for a brief interval.

The rest of your family remained in Spain?

The rest of my family remained there until late 1937, when my two sisters, with their children, left for Belgium. So my brother and my two brother-in-laws remained in Spain.

How did you make any money?

It became more and more difficult in 1938 and later on, the end of 1938, to conduct any business with Spain or from Spain. There was little to do. And I had plenty of free time on my hands. And I was looking for some friends, because I was very lonely. And somehow, I heard that a young man, who had been my brother's best friend, lived in Amsterdam. I found his address. We met. And he introduced me to another young man, approximately my age, who, as it turned out, lived only a block away from where I was living.

So slowly, I made some friends. They introduced me-- one of them, Heinz Mona was his name, also from Frankfurt, from the same school, Philanthropin. He persuaded me to join a sport club, a Jewish sport club, Maccabi, Maccabi Amsterdam. By that time, it was already 1939, late fall. And he said to me, let's go to a Hanukkah-- I think it was a Hanukkah evening, Hanukkah 1939-- to play ping-pong. There I saw a young, very pretty girl, apparently or obviously also a member of that club, going around on a tray selling things-- let's say chocolate bars and other items-- to make money for the Zionist movement in Holland.

She was to become, later, my fiancee, Dottie, as she was called in Holland.

Mrs Ringel, could you tell me when and where you were born?

Yeah, now comes the truth, huh?

[LAUGHTER]

No more lying. Yes, I was born in Amsterdam, Holland, in January 1920.

What was your maiden name?

Parfumer. It's a French name but with Dutch origins. Way back, it must have come from a French part.

Could you tell us something about your family?

Yes. My parents were born in Holland, too, my father in the northern part, in the province of Friesland, town of Harlingen. It was a shipping town, lots of sailing ships in the beginning. Later other ships came into what we consider, now, a small harbor of Harlingen. And my father, as a boy, was fascinated by all these sail ships that came in from Denmark and England-- mostly Denmark. And he learned Danish from the crew, when he was sitting there, in the harbor all the time, just trying to catch a glimpse of these ships. And so, as children, later, in Amsterdam, we were taken to the museum that specialized in everything that had to do with shipping, and not shipping so much as maritime, I think you would call it here.

And your mother?

And my mother was born in Amsterdam. And my grandparents came from Holland.

What did your parents do for a living Or your father's business?

My father had a business in filling for furniture, that included filling for seats in cars, taxis, airplanes, trains. So we had a wholesale business delivering to factories that made planes, trains, cars, and mattresses, and furniture, too.

Where did you live?

Amsterdam.

No, specifically, what street?

I was born and I have very faint recollections, now, because I was five years old when I moved from there, but I was born in Brouwersgracht. That was one of the canals in the old part of Amsterdam. And then, when I was five years old, we moved to the southern part of Amsterdam, Bonnstraat 56. When I was five years old. And we lived--

Where was your father's place of business?

That was on also one of the canals, Prinsengracht 532. Funny, I can say that only in Dutch.

Was it a large operation?

Yes, it was. There were four floors. The offices were downstairs. And we had three floors of stock of all kinds.

How many people worked?

Well, I would say five or six depending how busy we were.

Tell me about your years growing up and school.

Well, I had a very carefree childhood. I went to school in the neighborhood where I lived, just two minutes away from where I lived. Nicolaas Maesschool is the name of the school in the Nicolaas Maesstraat. And that was the elementary school. And I went to high school. That was called [DUTCH] in the same street as the other one. All very close to where I lived.

But when I was 13 years old, we moved away from that area, and we stayed in the southern part. But it was about half an hour from school. So I needed a bicycle. And I drove myself back and forth to school.

What street was that that you moved to?

That was Zuider Amstellaan. The name has changed since, but, at the time, it was Zuider Amstellaan. After the war, they changed the name to Rooseveltlaan, honoring President Roosevelt.

How many members were there in your family?

Five, we were two brothers and myself and my parents, of course.

And what happened after high school?

After high school, for a short time, I worked in my father's office. And then I worked somewhere else. And I took classes in commercial correspondence typing and all kinds of office and administrative skills, shorthand and all that. And then the war broke out before I had a chance. Well, I did work in one or two offices after I left my father. But soon after that, the war broke out. And I was still working somewhere when that happened.

Did you experience any antisemitism when you were growing up?

Not really, except in high school, once. There was a young man. I must admit that he was the most stupid one of the class. Isn't nice to say that, but he really happened to be quite dumb. He happened to sit next-- not next to me, behind me. And then when we talk after class [INAUDIBLE] to answer some questions. I heard him, say, oh, that's one of those. But at least she's pretty.

So he was definitely referring to my being Jewish, because I knew he was connected with the NSB, which was the National Socialist Bund. I think that was the constellation. They were the ones who later collaborated with the Germans. All this was very shortly before the war started, before the invasion, the German invasion in Holland came. But that was the only thing. I never, never encountered any sign of antisemitism.

Were you aware of Hitler's coming to power and what was happening in Germany?

Oh, I was very much aware, since 1933, as young as I was. Because there were very heated and very excited conversations going on in the living room of my house. And it affected me a great deal. I couldn't get over the fact that innocent people, who happen to be born in a religion or in a race, had to be punished and persecuted for something they couldn't help. And I was very much affected by that.

But that was still seven years before the invasion. And my father was very suspicious of the situation. He didn't trust it. And we, as children, didn't realize how good his insight was, really. And so he applied for a visa, for all of us, to America in 1937, I think. And the reason? In Holland, it was easier to get a visa to America than in some other countries. Apparently, because there were not that many applications.

I think the visa came through within a year. But my father was not quite ready to go. And so we thought about it for a while. And the embassy, in Rotterdam, sent us some summonses to let us know that, if we don't use the visa within the year, they may expire. Well, we as children, of course, didn't feel like leaving our country and our school. And so we were against it. And my father was not too keen on the idea, himself, although he saw the need for it. But he was easily talked out of it.

So we left the whole idea go. And the visa expired, unfortunately, with the result that, two years later, the German invasion came. And then we very badly wanted to get out, we couldn't anymore.

Mr. Ringel, what happened after you met your wife, who, of course, at that point, was not your wife yet?

No. No.

I think you knew already.

We became friendly. And we also were friendly with several other members of Maccabi.

What year was this again?

I'm talking now end of 1939, beginning of 1940. I was persuaded, again, by that same friend, Heinz Mona, to join the Maccabi tennis club. And he mentioned to me, by the way, the girl you met, at the time, at Maccabi ping-pong, is a member of the tennis club. And she is one of the best tennis players. That was a great incentive for me to join the tennis club. So in spring, April, May 1940, we met again, after an interval of maybe three or four months. And our friendship began, actually, from that time on. Because it so happened that I lived almost next door to the building where the family Parfumer lived.

Next block.

Shortly after I had joined the tennis club, we formed a small group, consisting of perhaps seven or eight young people. And we started socializing. Then came May 10th, 1940, the German invasion. Before that time and shortly after, I tried desperately to get visa, for the United States or South America or any other country overseas I could think of-- to begin with, England, where, by that time, my brother had settled after he had left Franco's Spain. But to no avail. I couldn't get a visa anyplace.

And there was nothing else to do but resign to the fact that now the Germans were there and to make the best of it. And we did. As paradoxical as it may sound, the second part of 1940, summer and fall, were the most pleasurable months I can remember in my whole life. Because I had a girlfriend, for the first time in my life. And friends we were close with met very often and had a wonderful time.

But that ended as the year 1941 came around. Because by that time, the, let me call it, very carefully planned reticence of the Nazis, the German occupation forces, in treating the Jewish part of the Dutch population, changed. A Jewish council of the elders had been instituted in Holland. And the concentration of all the Dutch and other foreign Jews living in Holland had begun, concentration from sending all the Jews, who had been, since centuries, spread out over the whole country, was now going to be concentrated in the larger cities, especially Amsterdam.

Amsterdam had a ghetto, a Jewish ghetto. Or let me correct myself, a certain part where mainly Jews lived. There were non-Jews, too. And incidentally, that is the part where Rembrandt lived and where, today, the Rembrandt house still exists as a kind of a museum in Amsterdam.

The life, our life continued. We were restricted in our movements already.

Specifically, how were you restricted?

Restricted in the sense that we were not allowed anymore to go to movies, to any public buildings, like museums.

No parks.

No parks.

No streetcars.

No, the streetcar--

I'm sorry, the streetcar came later.

--came later. That came already end of 1941. But I'm still talking now of the beginning of 1941. We were still able to play tennis but only in a Jewish sporting club. We were not allowed to mingle with so-called Aryans any longer.

Were you able to work at this point though?

Work? Beginning of '41, yes. Don't you think?

Yes, in the beginning of '41, it was still possible. Although, as far as I'm concerned, our business had stopped completely. Since we were depending on foreign countries, either imports, mainly, it was dead from the day on that the Germans had invaded Holland.

How did you live?

I beg your pardon?

How did you live?

Well, simply from savings and from the bank account. Without thinking of what would happen when, one day, that would be cut off and used up. But life in those days was on short-term. You didn't know anymore what was going to happen a month from then or two months or six months from then. We were living from day to day and were forced to live from day to day. Because, in the year 1941, one decree, Nazi decree after another was published. Generally published in the newspaper that the [NON-ENGLISH] as it was called.

Jewish council.

Jewish council, correct. And this paper was published to transmit, to the Jewish population of Holland, all the decrees with regard to Jews, that they were not allowed to do this and this and this and this. Now, as I mentioned before, we were still able to meet at the tennis court. And it was early June 1941. My girlfriend, Dottie, she had pneumonia at that time and could not participate. No, I'm sorry, let me correct myself.

At that time, his name was Max Schlesinger, the other friend I had met from Frankfurt. He also had joined the Maccabi and tennis club. We both went to play tennis. On that particular morning, when we noticed that there was hardly any one of the other players there. There were a few girls from the central part of Amsterdam but not from the south. We were wondering about that, when suddenly I was paged at that sport club. And it was Dottie, on the phone, who gave me the message that there was a roundup of young Jewish men.

How did you find that out?

I'm not sure whether we still had telephone. Because I think they may have been taken away already by that time, as were many other things, like bicycles. And I may not tell you that in the right sequence. But eventually, that happened. Most of these warning messages, and that one, particularly, probably came from our neighbor, who was friendly with my mother. She was not Jewish. As a matter of fact, she was German, but a wonderful person married to a Dutchman. She probably gave me that message if I recall well.

And my mother-in-law had heard it somehow, too. Or I gave her the message. I'm not sure about that anymore. But the next thing we know, that I was in touch with my mother-in-law. And she quickly went over to the tennis courts with clothes, I suppose-- You know better what she was bringing-- to get Dolf away from there and, perhaps, into safety.

At that time, women and girls were not in danger yet. But I had the conviction. I was quite pessimistic, all the way through, ever since I heard what Germans were up to doing in Germany. I had no illusions. So I was quite pessimistic that that would happen. And of course, very soon afterwards, it did happen that girls were the next target and then middle aged and older people, then, finally, everybody. But anyway, my mother-in-law went to the tennis court. And Dolf will tell you what happened to him afterwards.

What happened?

Well, to begin with, let me correct my wife. She wasn't her mother-in-law yet.

No, but she was eventually.

She was to become. She was to become your mother-in-law. And she, as well as Max's mother, rushed to the tennis court, to bring us some clothes, because we had left that morning with simply tennis clothes. We did have our bicycles at that time. And Max had an address of a Gentile family living about 25 to 30 kilometers outside Amsterdam. He suggested that we quickly jump on our bikes and make it out to that place. It's called Laren, a little town.

And by that time, my mother and his mother had arrived. We took the clothes, went into some bushes, changed, jumped on our bicycles, and left for Laren. However, we had to cross the river flowing through Amsterdam, the Amstel. And we were deliberating for a second, shall we take the bridge, the main bridge over the Amstel or should we ride along the river to about three or four kilometers, where a small ferry could take you to the other side.

For some reason, which I can't remember now anymore, we decided in favor of riding along the river for 10, 15 minutes, and then go across by a ferry. And that saved our lives. Because the SS had blocked the bridge, Berlage Bridge. And any Jewish-looking young man was stopped, and his identity card, with the big J in it, was enough for them to arrest him and hold him.

Unfortunately, Heinz Mona, the young man who had introduced me, whom I had met, and he had introduced me to Maccabi, he was one of the many, many victims, who were caught at that time. In fact, 90% of all young men, members of that Maccabi tennis club, were arrested. And they were all killed in Mauthausen.

They were deported to Mauthausen. And their parents, after a couple of months, received cards, with identical contents, that their son had died of pneumonia or tuberculosis or any other serious disease. They were all killed in Mauthausen. So that particular day, our life, for the first time, was saved by coincidence or whatever else one wants to call it.

What happened when you got to the house of the Christian family?

We were welcomed there and remained for three days, until it appeared that the roundup had ended and would not be renewed for the time being. I returned or we returned to Amsterdam. As soon as we returned, Max and I looked around for a place to hide. And that meant in a Gentile-- in a part of the city, preferably not in the part where the more wealthy population lived, but amongst the workers' quarter of Amsterdam, which was in the western part of Amsterdam.

We managed to rent a small room at the house of a widow, who lived there with her son, unmarried son. And from that day on, in the afternoon, when it got darker, we went to a bedroom, and we slept there.

I cannot remember the reason why we thought, at that time, that the nights were the dangerous part for staying in home. It could have happened also during daytime. But for some odd reason, probably because most arrests, by the SS and the Gestapo, took place at night to hide it from the Gentile population. That may have persuaded us to leave our parental home, each late afternoon, after dinner.

Did your wife know where you were?

Yes, I know. Yeah. But I didn't go into hiding-- I don't know if you want to know this already-- until about a month later, when it became apparent that not just men but women were in the same kind of danger. So there were razzias in the intervals, between the time that Dolf went into hiding and when I started thinking about it or doing it. There were razzias in our street all during the day.

Excuse me. Razzia is the word--



A roundup.

It's an Italian word that was used for the roundup.

Oh, yeah.

I'm sorry.

We saw them out of our window. We saw them across the street. It was a very wide street. But we saw the trucks just going from house to house, ringing the bell, coming back with two, one, two, three, or more people, loading them into trucks. And we didn't need any more explanation. Of course, in the meantime, all kinds of stricter rules had taken place. And it wasn't only-- I wasn't only the one who was pessimistic anymore. Everybody was. But not everybody was looking for a way out or had a place to hide.

Some people thought about it too late. And others couldn't find any place. When that happened in our street, I contacted a young man, who lived downstairs. Not Jewish-- there were mixed families in the block and in our house-- a very nice family. And he helped my younger brother. My older brother was not at home at the time.

He helped my younger brother and me to get into the machine room, where the machines of the elevator were located. But nobody really was allowed to get in, and we had to go through the ceiling, through a-- I don't know what you call it-- an opening in the ceiling. It was really closed. But we knew there was that possibility of taking this square, large piece out. And he seemed to have known that there was a ladder upstairs, once the opening became a hole. And he took the ladder down. And two of us, my younger brother and I-- my brother was, at the time, 15 or 16 years old.

He helped us up there and closed the hole in the ceiling again. And that's where we waited. We had a possibility of looking out, from that machine room, through a small hole, like in a ship, where you can see the ocean. And we saw the other side of the street. And we saw it they continued doing what they were doing.

When they came to our side, we couldn't see it anymore. We heard, later, from my mother, that they had rang our doorbell, like they had done to all our neighbors. And they had asked my mother, don't you have children? And where are you children? She answered, I'm so worried about them. And she knew that we were up there. And she also knew where my older brother was at the time.

She said, I'm so worried. I have no idea where they are. I wish I knew. And they searched the apartment. Couldn't find us. And at that time, middle aged or older people were not taken yet. And they left. When everybody was out of the street and the streets seemed quiet again, our friend, Dick Hutter that was his name, the one who helped us. He was about my age-- he came back up. He opened the hole in the ceiling, got us out. My younger brother went, on his own, to a place where he hoped to be saved. It was in a hospital where my aunt was head of the household, a Jewish hospital. And he hoped to be safe there for the time being, because hospitals, at that time, were not attacked yet. Soon afterwards, that happened, too.

But Dick walked me to the western part of Amsterdam, to the same place where Dolf had been hiding before and where he didn't hide anymore. Because he had, in the meantime, received a better address where to keep himself hidden. So I stayed there, I think, two days and two nights. And she made it clear-- that's the same woman with a son, who was apparently slightly retarded. At least we had that impression-- that she was either afraid or couldn't keep me anymore.

And I found another solution. Or she, rather, was related. I forgot how the relationship was. Mrs Veitz, yes. The people--

Her daughter.

No, it wasn't her.

Mrs. Holzberg's daughter.

Mrs. Holzberg's daughter? Yeah. This older woman's daughter. The son lived with her, but the daughter was married and lived, also, in the western part of Amsterdam. Her husband had come to my parents house and offered, if I couldn't find another place, to keep me there for as long as I wanted-- till the end of the war, as long as I wanted. So that was the next step.

Mr. Ringel, why don't you pick up the Story

Yes, let me go back to the event at the tennis court. Of course, after that, the Maccabi sport club was no longer able to continue. Besides, in the second half of 1941, the Nazi administration in Holland, as it were, took off their gloves. And it accelerated. The events accelerated.

Jews were no longer allowed to use the streetcars. As Dottie mentioned, no telephones. They had been taken away, no radios of course. The restrictions became more and more, until we were put under a curfew. I believe, from 8:00 at night till 7:00 in the morning, Jews were not allowed to be in the streets. Towards the end of 1941, the situation for Jews had become extremely precarious.

The businesses that had Jewish owners got administrators, sometimes Dutch Nazis, very often, the larger ones, German Nazis, who became the new owners. Bank accounts were blocked. And only certain small amounts of money, barely sufficient to keep a family alive, were allowed. All food, everything that you needed to live, actually, was on coupons.

And then 1942 rolled around. And in spring 1942, Jews were ordered to wear the yellow star on the outermost piece of clothing. It had to be sewn on. By that time, it was clear to most Jews that something terrible was going to happen.

I would like to go back a little to the late fall 1941, so the winter before. It must have been around September, October 1941, when a second cousin of mine, with whom I had no previous contact, came to visit my parents and me in our apartment, asking us to help him, financially, to escape from Holland to Switzerland. I questioned him as to how he thought to be able to get to Switzerland. And he gave me the name of that little place in the south-eastern part of Holland, where he would cross over to the Belgian-- cross the Belgian-Dutch border, continued to Antwerp. And there, he gave me the name of the leader of one of the Jewish communities in Antwerp, who would provide him with a guide to non-occupied France.

I made a mental note of the places and names he had given me. And I told it to my parents. I told it to Dottie and also to my friend Max's parents. And slowly, a plan developed, that Max and I should try to get also to Switzerland, to escape. Dottie was against it. She had the intuition.

Well, there was a reason. You didn't mention that just the two of you were planning to go away not me, because he didn't see any danger for women yet. Not at all.

Not only did I not see any danger for women, but, generally, it was thought, at that time, that all the measures of the Germans were directed against the men, the possible enemies of theirs. It turned out that Dottie's intuition and fear were absolutely correct and ours were false. But the plan was there. And before we left, we became officially engaged.

Yeah, but you mentioned that I didn't leave with you.

That's what I'm saying. We decided to leave alone, without you. And before we left, Dottie and I became engaged. My parents came over, went over to the Parfumuer apartment. And there was a kind of engagement, a small engagement party. Although we knew, at that time that, a marriage was not possible anymore. The rabbis had no longer the authority from the state to marry Jewish couples. But we didn't worry about that at the moment.

No.

And so the first days of December 1941, we traveled, by train, to the southern part of Holland, crossed over into Belgium, exactly the same way as my second cousin had told me. And we reached Antwerp without any difficulty.

What was the name of the town you crossed over from into Belgium?

Putten, a tiny little village. The border between the two countries ran approximately through the center of town, one side was Belgian, one side was Dutch. I had an aunt living in Antwerp, and that's where we went, next day, to stay with her. Next day, we went to the main synagogue in Antwerp. We were introduced to the-- I think he was the president of the congregation.

We told him we would like to be taken, by a guide, to non-occupied France. And he said that would be possible. It will cost you so and so much. We had enough money with us. However, one of the transports had just left-- the transport consisted of the guide and two or three people-- had just left, and it would take about two or three days until he's back.

So we stayed in Antwerp, mainly in the house of my aunt. And three days later, we presented ourselves, again, to the synagogue. We noticed that a few men were there. Amongst them, also, the president of the congregation, and they were discussing things rather excitedly. So we said, we are back again. When can you help us to get a guide?

And he answered, don't you know what happened yesterday? We were astonished. We didn't know anything. He said, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. That is in Hawaii. And the United States, since last night, is at war with Germany. Everything is in an uproar. We don't know what will happen now with non-occupied France. There is not a chance that a guide will now leave with the refugees to non-occupied France. Try again in a week, then we'll see how the situation is.

We went back to my aunt. We discussed-- Max and I discussed the situation. And I must admit that, while we were fleeing, I had already remorses that I had left without my fiance. The words she had said to me somehow remained in my mind. She said, I'm afraid we will never see each other again, when I kissed her goodbye.

So I said, Max, are you thinking the same that I am thinking? He said, I believe I do, that the best for us is to go back home. I said, yes. And the next day, we went back, exactly the same route we had taken before. And suddenly, I was standing in front of my fiance, who almost fainted when she saw me back.

It was really incredible.

People later on said to me, that was God's will. Because who is so crazy? Who was so crazy to be already in Belgium, having crossed already one border, and being in touch with someone who could help you escape, to go back and into Nazi-occupied Holland. Well, we did. I never regretted it.

Why did you decide to do that?

We prepared. If I say, we, I mean, again, Max and myself. He knew, somehow, from dealings, a gentleman, a Dutch businessman, who was a stockbroker. He lived in the central part of Amsterdam on one of the canals. He lived alone in a patrician house, where he had his offices and also his living quarters. We were introduced to him by the family in Laren, where we had found refuge after we fled from the tennis court.

His name was Lex Wellensiek from an old Dutch family, Protestant family. He invited us to come and see him. We asked him the question. If the situation should become so critical that we can no longer live in our house, in our homes, would you be willing to let us in, in your house? He said, yes. I knew about it. I knew why you were coming to us, to me. And you are welcome to come here. I will show you my attic. You can live there, in peace, as long as you want.

So I ask him, Mr. Wellensiek, as it looks now, the war may last for another two, three, or four years-- God knows how long. Won't that be much too much a burden and danger for you, that two Jewish young men are living here? He said, I thought about it before you came. This is my decision. When you come, you will stay with me, here, if you wish, until the end of the war. No matter what the consequences may be for me. Don't you worry about it.

So we were prepared. We were prepared, because we knew that it would be impossible for us to hide out in that room that we had rented, in the western part of Amsterdam. The woman was elderly. She was unable to cook meals for us.

And she was very jittery and afraid. And altogether, not a place where we could stay.

As I mentioned before, in April, we had to wear the Jewish star. And on July 5th, 1942, suddenly, I, my friend, Max, and-- sorry, German-born Jewish men and women, under the age of 40, got a card from the from the Gestapo demanding or ordering those people to appear by the end of that week-- I think it was the 10th of July-- at the central station, in Amsterdam, with a knapsack containing only some food and one or two pieces of clothing, for Arbeitseinsatz, which means for "forced labor" in Germany.

As soon as I received this card, I got together with Max. And we decided the time has come now to go and hide out at Mr. Wellensiek's apartment in that attic. I told Dottie of what had happened, that I had the card. And it was, at that time, that I urged her to, if something should happen, if she should also get such a card, that she should go and hide at the address that we had formerly had.

I took off. Max left on his own. And I took off the star, ripped it off from my clothes, from my coat. And walked to the house of Mr. Wellensiek. Max had already arrived. And we entered the attic.

Why do you think Mr. Wellensiek was [INAUDIBLE]?

At that time, I was unaware of what Mr. Wellensiek was doing other than being a businessman and the secretary of the Dutch Reformed schools in the Netherlands. That much we knew. His other activities were unknown. Max and I got-- we learned it. After about a week that we were in hiding at Mr. Wellensiek's house, when he expected visitors late at evening, after closing hours of the offices, he prepared us, that two gentlemen were coming. And he informed us, at the same time, that one of the two gentlemen was the founder of an underground newspaper, Vrij Nederland, Free Netherlands, and that he would have certain dialogues and discussions with these two men.

He also revealed that his house, [DUTCH] 18, was very often the meeting place for the underground resistance movement, that Mr. van Randwijk, the founder of the newspaper, had formed. We never took part in any of these discussions, of course. However, he introduced us. Mr. Wellensiek introduced us to these two gentlemen. They knew of our existence and knew that we were in that house.

How long did you stay there?

We stayed until the 27th of September of that same year. My brother-in-law, Dottie's elder brother, had decided, after he received such a card, around middle of July, to try to flee to Switzerland together with another friend of his. I didn't know about it, because I was hidden. However, as Dottie told you before, that she had also left her parental home after the Germans, the SS or the Gestapo had searched her house. So I knew that she was now-- she was now in Amsterdam, west, hidden.

That was with a family. I didn't tell anything about that yet. Because the circumstances were quite different there.

Yeah.

I knew that she was hidden ahead. I knew her address. So we were in correspondence.

By letter.

Through the mail, using, always, our friend, Wellensiek. Whatever we wrote, whatever I wrote, he put in one of his own envelopes and mailed it to the gentleman or to the family, where Dottie was living and vice versa. Of course, our names were never mentioned. And our only contact consisted through the mail.

Mrs Ringel, how did you get to this Family

Well, I think I mentioned before that the woman--

The daughter--

It was the daughter of the old lady where I had been two days, and who couldn't do it any longer-- was married and had two boys, two sons. They were at the time, I think, about 12 and 14 years old-- not quite, 10 and 12. And they were, in a way, a danger. Because they went to school every day. And it was just to be hoped that they would never, by mistake or on purpose, for whatever reason-- they could be mad at the parents-- and do something nasty or for whatever reason.

But the father was quite a strict man. And he had enough hold over, authority over his sons that nothing ever happened. And it's really a miracle, come to think of the fact that, after I left, and I was there only a few months, my parents-in-law, my future parents-in-law, came to live there until the end of the war. And neither one of the two boys ever gave away the secret to their friends, to neighbors, to their teachers in school. But they continued living a sort of a normal life.

But this was a couple. And as I said, the daughter was the daughter of the woman where I was at first. He worked in a factory, somewhere, like just a blue collar worker, but a very good-hearted, fine man, who really did this out of love for humanity, to do something good. Because he hated the Germans almost as much as the Jews hated them.

I had a little bit of trouble. He sometimes stayed away from work. His wife always went out to find food, which was already getting quite scarce. She took her bicycle and went out into the country to go to farmers and collect as much food as she could to provide for all of us. On two such occasions that she, again, went away, he stayed away from work, pretending, probably, to his boss, that he was sick. And he became a little bit too friendly. But times were different, from what they are now.

So I showed him that I really liked him a lot but was not willing to go into any affair or whatever he had in mind. So thank goodness, it stopped. There was no guarantee, of course, that it wouldn't start again. Because this was already towards the end of the time that I was going to be there. I didn't know, at the time, yet, that I wasn't going to be there the whole rest of the war.

But by corresponding with Dolf, back and forth, we decided that his position, where he and Max were, as well as mine, for different reasons, were really too difficult and impossible to stay there for a long time. So we decided, and we organized, by letter, back and forth, writing always through the name of the man where we were hidden. But the letters were never opened by anybody else. We received them always unopened.

And we planned and worked out a plan, by mail, to get together and, immediately after that, leave Holland via an address that my brother, who in the meantime had gone to Switzerland. He had succeeded and left me with one name and a description of a man who could bring us over the Dutch-Belgian border. So that was the beginning of a possible escape for us. For the rest, we didn't really know. We were hoping and depending on that man giving us more information and possibilities how to continue. Because you could not be sure, from one minute or from one day to the next. And now, come to your spot.

When did you leave?

The exact date was September 27th, 1942. It was, by that time, extremely difficult and extremely dangerous for Jews, and for anyone else, to try to cross borders. Because they were heavily guarded by the Germans. We made use of the address that Eddy, my brother-in-law, had left behind with his parents and that Dottie had given me by mail. I discussed it with Max. We noticed that the meetings in the house, where we were living, became more numerous.

In addition, the secretary, Mr. Wellensiek's secretary, as it turned out, was not simply his secretary, but she was also his girlfriend. Maybe 20 years younger than he-- he was an elderly gentleman, already. And she became rather unfriendly towards us. We noticed, quite clearly, that our staying in that house was an impediment for her, for whatever reasons, maybe for the safety of Mr. Wellensiek, or because she had no occasion, anymore, to be together with him at night. For whatever reason, we noticed that she wished we weren't there.

But Max and I also came to the conclusion that [DUTCH] 18, being a meeting place for probably the most important

resistance group in the country, made it very, very dangerous for us, in the first place, but also for Wellensiek. Any day, the Gestapo could invade the house and find us. And that would be the end. So we became disenchanted with our situation. And we were convinced, we will never be able to live through this till the end of the war.

And that started, as Dottie already mentioned it, the correspondence between us. And we approached Mr. Wellensiek. After we had come to an agreement, then we faced Mr. Wellensiek, in the evening, when he took us down from the attic into his living room. We told him we have decided, all three of us, Max and I and Dottie, who he knew where she was hidden, to try to make it to Switzerland or to non-occupied France in any case.

Would you be willing, we asked Mr. Wellensiek, become our go between, to approach that smuggler in Breda, that is a city in southern Holland, and prepare everything for us? He said, of course, if this is what you decided, I will help you in any way I can. And he did. He contacted the man. He came to Amsterdam. He met Mr. Wellensiek. He told him. He knew, of course, of Eddy.

He told him how much money was required-- a quite big sum of money to take us, three of us, to Lyon, in non-occupied France. He needed pictures, passport pictures of ours, because we were to get false Belgian identity cards, which would allow us to travel through Belgium, up to Paris. A date was arranged, as I mentioned, September 27th, that we should take the train up to Breda. In Breda, he would be at the railroad station, with three bicycles. And he would take us to a farm not far from the border.

When the 27th arrived, it was a Sunday. Max went to meet with his parents. I left to see my parents, who, in the meantime, had been forced to leave their house, too, and also took up residence in Mr. Veitz's house, where Dottie had been living already. So they shared this little, small apartment, now, with the family of four, my parents, and Dottie.

There, I met my parents. And Dottie and I took leave from my parents. And we went to the Jewish hospital in the southern part of Amsterdam, CIZ, Centraal Israelitisch Ziekenhuis, in Amsterdam, where we took leave from Dottie's parents and aunt and, perhaps, her younger brother. I have no recollection anymore, but he was there, too.

All that, naturally, without this yellow star, the Jewish star, and using public transportation. We knew that we were taking a risk. But from that moment on, once we had made up our mind that we are fleeing, we knew we are playing with our lives. It is a roulette. We had to do it. And we did it. Max went his own way to the central station and had arranged, with Mr. Wellensiek, that he would also meet at the central station and would buy the ticket for Max. While Mr. Veitz, on his own, also went to the station to meet the two of us, Dottie and me.

Tell them who Mr. Veitz is.

Separately.

Mr. Veitz--

The man where I was.

Yes.

Let me call him, the landlord, where now my parents were housed. He had bought tickets for us to Breda. And each of us got the ticket, surreptitiously, from Mr. Veitz, a short goodbye, and we went towards the train, met in the same compartment, and road to Breda. Or let me correct myself, it wasn't Breda. It was the city of Tilburg-- much smaller than Breda. We arrived without any incident.

Excuse me, we were sitting in different compartments, I think. We were not all three sitting in the same compartment.

I'm not sure about that. It is quite possible what you say. But we arrived in Tilburg. Across this little station, we saw a man standing there with three bicycles. So we knew that that was our man. We crossed over. He simply said, get on the bike. I will lead you. And we drove. We rode for perhaps 30, 40 minutes, until we came to a small road. We didn't know

where the road was leading to.

We were in the middle of the country. And we saw a farm. He said, here we are. Let's get into the farm. Then he said, I'm going to instruct you, now, what you have got to do. You will be fed here. And you will wait until dark. A young man will come on a bicycle. His name is Jean, a Belgian. And he will take you over the border. I give you, here, the identity cards. Sit down. Use the time to learn, by heart, your name, your new name. The birth dates are the same, the real ones of you. But you must be familiar, now, with all the data that are on this card.

What did you have with you, clothing?

A satchel, I had a satchel. And you had a briefcase.

I had a large briefcase and so had Max. Unfortunately, what happens perhaps once in 50 years, it was a very warm September. And the sun was shining brightly. And we were dressed in winter clothes. We had heavy overcoats and heavy clothes, because we were going towards the fall and winter, which is nasty, cold, and windy, generally, but not in 1942. So that was all we had, plus money, quite large sums for that time. Because we didn't know how long it will take us until we reach official representation of the Dutch government in London, the government in exile, as it was called.

There, they, we hoped will help us further. We had to pay him the full amount to that smuggler. He left. And after dark, it may have been about 10 o'clock or so at night, there was a knock. And there was a young man, standing. And he told us to follow him. He instructed us to stop and to throw ourselves down if he whistles. Because he said, sometimes we may meet people. I don't want anyone to see you.

He didn't say anything of Germans. We did not expect to be. We were totally-- we felt totally safe as long as he was guiding us. And he did. We marched through the dark night. You know, of course, that practically all Europe was blacked-out, no lights anywhere. So we followed him. And we marched, perhaps, an hour and a half or so. At that time, we heard some noises, kind of music.

And he waited for us. When we reached him, he said, you are already in Belgium. We have crossed the border. And what you hear are sounds coming from a bar restaurant that is about 100 yards from here. I will lead you to a shed that belongs to that restaurant. And I want you to stay there until all these visitors, in that shed, have left for the night. The curfew starts at midnight, because it was a Sunday.

It was pitch dark in that shed. We were sitting there for perhaps half an hour and had become very restless, because it took so long. Then we heard the noises dying down. And a few minutes later, he came, took us into that restaurant. We had something to eat there. And then the owner said, I have prepared some blankets and a pillow. Lie down and sleep a few hours.

And Jean told us, I will pick you up, tomorrow morning, at 7 o'clock. Please be ready by that time. We ask him where will you take us? He said, you have to go to the other part of Belgium, all across. We go first to Antwerp, from Antwerp to Brussels, there we change trains. And I take you to a place that is by the name of Menen, M-E-N-I-N. There, the border between Belgium and France runs straight through the town of Menen.