

What happened once you got over the Belgian border?

The guide took us to a shed, which was pitched up, and said stay here until I come back and tell you that it's all right to enter the restaurant, or the bar, actually. And we found ourselves in a place where we couldn't even see our own hand in front of us.

It may have taken half an hour, maybe 45 minutes, until the noise that we heard coming from maybe 100 yards away died down. Not long after that, our guide, Jean, returned, and said, now, follow me.

He took us to that little house where the bar and restaurant was. We entered there was the Belgian guy there. And he greeted us. And apparently he knew all about us. We ask him where are we, actually? He said, you are now in [PLACE NAME], a village just across the Belgian border, in Belgium.

We knew already that we had we would have to take a streetcar to the first city or town, from where we would take a train to Antwerp, change trains in Antwerp to Brussels, and then from Brussels on to a place where the French border crosses through the middle of the town, by the name of Menin in French, Menen in Dutch.

The owner of the bar told us-- they brought us some blankets and pillows, and said, you can lie down here. It was in one of the corners of the main room. You can sleep here, pass the night here, and Jean will return tomorrow to take you to Antwerp.

Jean left and said, I'll be back at 8:00 in the morning. Please be ready. He returned the next morning, after we'd had a short breakfast, and we continued our trip. The streetcar was not far from that house.

We got to Antwerp without any incident, which took us to the central station. We boarded the train, which was very crowded, because it was Monday.

Were there German soldiers around?

We didn't see-- we saw perhaps soldiers, but no SS or--

No Gestapo.

--or Gestapo.

People out to catch you.

Just soldiers.

Yeah.

We got to Brussels, changed in Brussels. We again saw some uniformed Germans there, but the trains were not checked. We felt secure by having Belgian identity cards, so we were not actually worried or any kind of anxiety.

What date was this when you got to Brussels?

That was now the--

28th.

28th--

28th of September--

Correct. 28th of September.

--1942.

Right. We reached Brussels, changed trains. It took us almost all day to travel from the one side of Belgium, the northeast, to the southwest. We passed Ghent, or Gand, and Courtrai-- Courtrai, or Kortrijk. These places I knew from before.

And towards the evening, we reached Menen. Jean took us through that little town to a small hotel, and we got in there, and he registered.

We didn't speak a word. He did everything for us. He spoke to the owner of the hotel, registered us, the three of us. And then he turned to us and said, I'm leaving now. I stay here with my relatives. I don't want to become too known here. So use you will be-- everything is paid for you, and you will be sleeping here. And I come tomorrow again at 7:00 to pick you up from here.

Well, we had no suspicion at all that it would not be so. We went to bed and got up very early next morning, came down to have breakfast. Must have been 6:30 or so. And 7 o'clock passed, but Jean wasn't there. It got 8:00, and we became restless.

By 9 o'clock we not only were restless. We were highly uncomfortable. And it was clearly visible to others that we were uncomfortable.

I approached, or one of us approached the owner and ask him, do you know why Jean hasn't come yet? He said, I don't know Jean. I have seen him for the first time in my life yesterday, when he came with you. Who is he?

So we said, he's a friend of ours, and he is to accompany us to Paris. We said Paris, because the Belgian identity card allowed us to travel up to Paris-- not further. So we could say that without endangering ourselves.

So we still waited. A man who was having breakfast together with us suddenly came over to us, and he said to us, I noticed that you people have Dutch accent. You speak Dutch. You must be from Holland. I said, yes, that's correct.

I assume you are trying to get to non-occupied France.

I said, no, that's not the case. We are going to Paris to visit relatives. And we are waiting for our friend to come.

He completely ignored my answer. He said, if you want to, I can bring you to Lyon, and you would be there by tomorrow morning.

Again, we thanked him, but we were not sure whether this man could be-- was a good or bad Belgian. So by now, we not only were sure that Jean had abandoned us, but that our staying any longer was quite dangerous. So we got up and left.

Where'd you go?

We had no idea.

No place. Just out into the street.

You tell now how you came to-- please, continue now. [INAUDIBLE] et cetera.

I think you do better. Because you remember the details better.

All right.

Sorry.

We were--

I'll fill in, if that's OK.

Sure.

We were wandering the streets, through the streets of Menen, which was much larger than we had expected to. We didn't know where to go. We may have walked for perhaps half an hour, an hour, maybe, in circles, just to keep on walking, discussing all kinds of plans.

Should we return to Amsterdam? We said that doesn't make sense at all. Dottie said, because we are-- then we are running exactly the-- or more of a risk to be caught than if we try to find a solution here. But why? How can we find a solution?

Suddenly, Dottie stopped, and she said, wait a minute. The card that my parents had received from Eddie, her brother, from Switzerland, didn't the card mention the following? I passed through Menen, and I met that nice man, Josh-- the guy with the jewelry all over him.

Lots of rings--

Lots.

--of jewelry on this hands.

[CROSS TALK].

Of course, we didn't know any such person, but my brother was probably thinking of the possibility that someday we may follow his footsteps, in his footsteps, and perhaps could use him or find him somehow. So we looked out and thought now he was going to look for someone like that, like a needle in a haystack.

By that time we had reached the main street, and the main street was crawling, as it were, with uniformed German and Belgian Nazis. So we figured it is much better if we get off the main street.

We saw what is called, in French, patisserie. Patisserie.

Pastry shop.

Pastry shop, and a café. We entered that. There was a Flemish-looking woman alone in that store. We entered and ordered something. And that lady looked quite confidence-inspiring to us. So I believe I approached her and ask her in French whether she would be willing to help us. And I told her we come from Amsterdam, from Holland, and we are trying-- we are going to Paris, but our guide who was to take us has disappeared.

Do you by any chance know anyone, a man here in town? His name is Josh. Josh is a first name, in French. By the name of Josh, who is apparently known for the lots of jewelry this man is wearing on his hands and fingers.

She said, no, I don't. But if you go up main street, to the second pub on the same side, the owner of that pub, he knows practically everyone in town. He may be able to help you. But remember, I said the second pub, not the first one.

We decided that I would leave and try to find that mysterious Josh, who must have had some kind of connection with my brother-in-law because there was a purpose. There was a-- intentionally, he mentioned that name and the place,

apparently thinking that if we want to flee, that we could use that man. That could have been his only reason.

I ignored the first pub. When I passed it I saw it was crowded with Belgian Nazis, all in their black uniforms. I got to the second one, set down in a corner, ordered a beer, and motioned the owner, who came over to me.

And then I said to him, we have lost a friend of ours here in town. We don't know where he is. And we have got to go to Paris. But I have to give a message to a man by the name of Josh. He is known for wearing a lot of jewelry. I don't know his last name. Could you help us? Could you help me locate this man?

He smiled and said, you must mean Josh Creupelandt, because that is one who wears a lot of jewelry. And he said it's about 10 minutes walk.

I was elated. I quickly left and reached the house. He wasn't home, but his wife let me in. And she said, wait a few minutes. He is on an errand. He will be soon back.

That "soon back" took almost 45 minutes. And I became not only nervous, but extremely, extremely agitated, because I knew that Dottie and Max were waiting in that caf ©, not knowing what had happened to me. I could have been arrested. And I was afraid that they may get into panic, and leave, and then where would we meet again?

Finally, Josh Creupelandt walked in. I quickly told him the whole story. I had nothing to lose anymore. Besides, I knew from Eddie that this man apparently can be trusted.

I said, do you remember Eddie Parfumeur. He said, of course I know. Where is he? I said, he is in Switzerland. Oh, wonderful.

Then I told him what has happened to us. I said, can you take us to Lyon?

He reflected a minute, and then he said, yes, I could. It will cost you each 10,000 francs.

You have to mention that Lyon was in non-occupied France.

Yeah, I believe I--

He said before.

I believe I mentioned that before, at the beginning, that our goal was to reach non-occupied France, Lyon, where we would find a representative of the Dutch government.

Did you have that kind of money?

I said to him, we have paid the other guy already more than half what we took along. We don't have that much anymore.

Well, in short, we agreed on half the sum-- that is, 15,000 Belgian francs-- for taking us to Leon. He said, half? I will take you to Paris. In Paris you will stay for three days, until my colleague picks you up. I will get in touch with him. I have my own ways of communication. Francois will call for you and take you to Lyon. To Francois you will have to pay the other half of the money.

I said, OK, that's fine now. Please, I have to leave. Where do I meet you? He said, take your friend and your fianc © and your friend. He come back right away.

I rushed to the caf ©. And when I entered, I found Dottie in terribly excited. And that is really an understatement. She was all alone. Max wasn't there.

I said, what happened. Where's Max? She said, he went to look for you. I didn't--

Ready? OK.

I entered the café, and saw Dottie sitting alone, and terribly excited, which is an understatement. She was almost in panic. And rightfully so, because she was now all alone.

I said, where's [Max. She said he left to look for you, and I was against it, but he was panicky, and he left me alone here.

So I said then the only thing-- she asked me, did you find that Josh? I said, yes, I did, and we have to go there immediately. But first I have to look for Max.

At that, Max returned, to our great relief. I said, for god's sakes, why did you leave, and how could you look for me? You didn't know where I was. I could have been arrested. And then you leave Dottie alone, then you are alone and she is alone. That was a very dumb thing to do.

He said, well, I didn't know anymore what to do, and I said, to which bar did you go? He said, to the first one. I opened the door and I saw all these black uniform Belgians, and I quickly left. I said, you could have caused all three of us to be now in German hands.

But quickly, let's go. I tell you the story why. We thanked the Belgian lady, and we rushed to Josh, and I told him what I have been arranged. When we got to Josh, he said, rest here for a minute. Catch your breath. Offered us some wine, et cetera.

Then I will take you still tonight over the French border, because the border guard is someone I know quite well. And you won't even have to talk to him.

After about half an hour we left the house. He took us through side streets. And suddenly, we reached a street where there was a barrier across the street. He said, this is the French border.

There was a little-- what is it called? A guard house. He walked over to that man, whispered to him, took our three identity cards along, showed it to the men. The barrier went up. We walked through. He said, now you are in France, in occupied France.

Again, we walked for maybe 10, 15 minutes. And we stopped in front of a house. He rang the bell. A man opened. And the two greeted each other like old friends. They were relatives, by the way.

And he said, here I have three friends. I would like them to stay here overnight. Please give them dinner and a room, and I pick them up tomorrow morning. So he said, please be ready, early, by 8 o'clock. I pick you up and take you to-- I myself take you to Paris.

What town were you in at this point?

Now we were in French Menen. It's the same name, but it's the French side and the Belgian side.

The next morning, he took us to the station. Had a railroad station, that is. We took a local train. In about an hour we were in-- wait a minute. I have to think what the name of the city is. Luik.

Liege.

Liege. I believe so.

Liege is right, but I don't know if he went through there. I don't think he did.

No, no. It was a-- well it may come back to me. It's in northwestern part of France, close to the Belgian border.

[INAUDIBLE]

No, no, no. We were already in France.

There Josh said to us, stay close to me, because this train will be very crowded. That is the train that takes workmen to Paris. They commute from here.

Indeed, it was not only crowded, but we had even some difficulty getting into the train. We managed to be in the same compartment. We traveled for about two hours and reached Paris.

All three of us were elated that now we were in that big city, Paris. I knew it, Paris, quite well. Dottie and Max went there for the first time in their lives.

But while we were crossing the train station, moving towards the exit, first the guide, Josh, behind him, Max, then Dottie, and I as last one, I suddenly felt a hand on my shoulder. I froze and swirled around, and I was looking at a French gendarme.

I had my briefcase stuffed with our clothing, and other--

Your clothes.

I beg your pardon?

Your clothes.

My clothes.

We each had one.

Yeah, my clothes and other paraphernalia in there. And the gendarme said to me, in French, may I see this bag of yours? Please open it.

I opened it, and he went inside with his hands-- both hands. And he said, bon, merci.

In the meantime, Max and Luke and I were ahead of Dolf, and we looked back, and all of a sudden we see that he was stopped by a man in uniform. And we thought this is it. That's the end of it.

What are we going to do? Go back to him, talk to him? Or we just pretend not to know him and continue walking? Just try to keep an eye on him? So we thought this was really the end of--

What did you do?

And we slowly walked on, and tried to, corner of our eye, to see what was happening. And we saw that he was-- that Dolf was opening his briefcase. And apparently we were hoping that it was just a matter of checking what he had with him.

But it looked-- when you see a uniform, and you were used to all these German uniforms-- see, we weren't even sure what the French uniform looked like. And also, we didn't know how far the French were to be trusted, which they were not.

But it all ended well. There was nothing in his briefcase that was objectionable. And he closed it, and Dolf followed. But it was a few minutes of terror for us, and I'm sure for Dolf just as much.

Sure. Josh told us that they are looking for-- what do you call it-- food, all kind of smuggled food from outside Paris. That's what they did, fortunately.

Josh took us by a metro-- that is the subway in Paris-- to Montmartre, which I could say is the red-light district of Paris. Very famous.

Infamous.

Or infamous.

Both. We got off there, and Place de Clichy, the heart of Montmartre. He guided us through some side streets, and stopped in front of a strange-looking, illuminated, with an illuminated sign, neon light sign, Hotel Eden-- Eden. The Eden Hotel. Well.

Paradise.

It was a, more or less, a brothel. Josh took us in there, and a woman, a French woman, elderly French woman, heavily made up, greeted him like a lost girlfriend, which apparently she was. And he told-- he whispered to her, and she greeted us very warmly, assigned two rooms to us, and said, my children, you can stay here, and you will be safe here.

We paid Josh then and there half of the agreed amount. He left us and said it will take three days until Francois will come to pick you up from here. He is now in non-occupied France, and he will return after tomorrow. Then he will accompany you to Lyon. So he left, and we were on our own now.

We went out. We felt so secure that after we had been fed, we went we went to the boulevard.

It's very strange how you can feel secure just because you're in another country, as if the fact that nobody knows you there gives you more security. But that was, in my case, at least, another factor.

In Holland I definitely looked Jewish. I had dark hair, and somewhat curly. And I knew I looked Jewish in Holland. But in France, all of a sudden everybody had dark hair, and I felt less Jewish than the French who were not. And so I personally felt more secure, and I asked Max the other day, and he said, yes, he felt that way too, because he definitely looks very Jewish, but not in France anymore. At least he felt that way.

And so did I, because no one knew me here. What struck us--

And of course, we didn't have the stars on, which gave us quite an advantage.

Obviously. And we no longer were wearing our heavy winter clothes. We had left them in the hotel.

And another factor was that we had Belgian identity cards without the J. We didn't have in Holland. You know, we have infamous J on our identity cards.

What struck us in Paris was that we saw so many French women walking arm in arm with German soldiers, that a fraternization which was totally unknown to us in Holland, because there was a hatred, such a hatred between the far greater majority of the Dutch and the Germans, that there was no fraternization at all.

Also we saw that the stores in Paris still had some wares to offer. There were still things to buy, and one could buy. We didn't see any food stuff in the windows, but many things that had disappeared from the shops in Holland for at least a year already.

After a walk we, we bought some papers, newspapers, and went back to our hotel. The next day, Max said to us, my father and I, we have done business for many years, when we still were in Germany, with a firm here in Paris. And my father visited him, visit the owner many a time and became quite friendly with him.

I looked up. I looked at the telephone book. The firm still exists. What do you think? Should we go and visit this man who knows, of course, of my name, my father's name, and of our firm we had? Maybe he can give us some tips. And if, god forbid, it should happen to us again, that Francois does not show up here, maybe he will be able to help us to get to [INAUDIBLE] friends.

It sounded very smart and logical. So we did. We walked through the ground the Grand Boulevard, and we found the address. We went up there to that. They were located on the first floor. We went upstairs.

And a receptionist asked Max, can I help you? He said, I would like to see Monsieur-- I forgot the name of his business relation there. She said, what is your name? So he gave the name. She said, one moment, please.

She went to another room and called someone. A man came out, approached us. Again, spoke to Max, and said, I heard that you asked for Monsieur So-and-so.

We all three noticed immediately that this man spoke with a heavy German accent, and that he must have been a German. So Max said, yes, I did.

He said, what is the purpose of your visit? Max said, my father is a good friend of his, and I just wanted to give him-- bringing my father's greetings.

So with this, he invited us to come to the next room and ask Max what kind of business did you do. He said, well, I, as well, of course, as my father, are numismatists, and we have done business with Monsieur for at least 15 years.

Oh, he said, that's interesting. Well just one minute. Excuse me one minute. He left the room. We looked at each other, and we knew exactly what was going to happen. With this, we opened the door, and passed, rushed--

Bolted out.

--bolted out past the receptionist, who looked at us with surprised eyes. We ran down the stairs, out in the street, around the corner to the subway station, to the metro station. And we didn't stop until we were inside the train taking us back to Montmartre.

It could have, if we would have waited another few minutes, it would have cost us our lives, probably. From that moment on, we decided, we'd better stay indoors. It is not as safe to go out in Paris as we thought it was.

The next morning, there was a knock at the door, and there was Francois, who said, I have been in touch with Josh. Look, show me your identity-- the Belgian identity cards. We showed it to him.

He said, I want you to know that from here on they will be doing you no good as soon as we leave Paris. However you don't have to worry. I will not take the express train, Paris-Lyon. That one is always checked by the Germans and by the French. We will take locals, and reach the demarcation line in a roundabout way.

So we ask him, where will you take us? He said, I take you to Le Creusot. That is a town not too far from the demarcation line. There we have to take a bus to a mining town called Montceau-les-Mines. Coal mines are there. And through, or just outside Montceau-les-Mines runs the demarcation line.

We will stay in Montceau-les-Mines in a bar, restaurant, hotel that I know. And the next morning I take you over the demarcation line, where we bought a train to Lyon, because then you are in non-occupied France. Sounded fine to us. He said, tomorrow morning, early, I come here and take you to Gare de Lyon, and we bought the trains there.

I want you to do one thing. Don't be on my side. Just walk behind me as inconspicuously as you can make it. And don't ask me any questions. Just follow me.

Didn't we send our luggage, or the luggage-- the, you know--

Not yet. Not from Paris. No, not from Paris. That we did from from Le Creusot. Yeah. But we still had our briefcases and, Dottie had her tote bag.

Next morning, we took-- we met him at the Gare de Lyon, where he was waiting outside, and lots of people in and out that station, railroad station. He had tickets already. We walked behind him, followed him through the-- to the entrance, and boarded the train.

He had also asked us, please, don't talk to me. Do as if I don't exist. You have foreign accents. It is too dangerous. Fine. We did what he had told us.

The train was a local Paris-Dijon, a town in-- more to the southwest of Paris. After about an hour's time, we were now alone in the compartment. He said, now you have to pay me the other amount, the other half of the amount that you had agreed upon with Josh.

I said, excuse me. The agreement with Josh was that we pay you the half of the amount once we reach Lyon. We are still far from Lyon.

He said, oh, no, I said to Josh that as soon as I take you on the trip, I want to be paid, because I'm risking my life. I said, but so are we.

Nothing doing. Unless I get paid now, I get off the next stop, and you are on your own. You can continue alone.

He had us over a barrel. I consulted with Dottie and Max, and we came to the conclusion we have no choice. We have to trust him.

We paid him the amount, and we continued. We changed trains in Dijon, took an express train.

We did see some German soldiers walking along that station, but they were not interested in checking any identity of anyone. We boarded that express train to Dijon, and-- to Le Creusot, and we reached Le Creusot in the afternoon at about 2 o'clock.

We sat down in a outdoor restaurant, ordered something to eat and to drink. And Francois turned to us and said, you see across this place? It was like a marketplace. You see across there is the bus stop where the people are waiting for the bus. As soon as the bus comes, that's the one we are taking to Montceau-les-Mines.

But no bus came. We were sitting there for half an hour, for an hour, maybe an hour and a half. In the meantime, Francois got up, became nervous, went over, talked to the people, came back, and said to us, I don't know. They don't know why the bus is delayed to such an extent. But it ought to be here any minute.

Again, he went over. And when he came back, he said there is a delay. They don't know how long it will take. It may take at least another hour or more. Why don't you give me-- and he turned to Max and me. Why don't you give me your bulging briefcases which are so conspicuous, and I--

For all three. Mine too.

Yours too? All three of them. Why don't you give me your luggage that you are carrying, and I will go to the railroad station and send it ahead of us to Lyon. Give me an address in Lyon. We said we have no address in Lyon. Then we can send it [FRENCH]. That means it stays there in depot until you come.

We looked at each other, and we didn't like that at all. Why should he do it? Maybe he wouldn't come back?

We said to him, one of us said to him, we have nothing to do. We have to wait. Let's all four go to the station, and let's

walk a little. He said, OK, fine, if you want to.

We all walked to the railroad station and parted with our luggage, got a receipt, and slowly walked back. The bus hadn't arrived yet. But after another half hour or so, it already began to-- dusk was falling. There was movement in the crowd that was standing there across where we were sitting. And we heard someone calling out voila, le bus.

The bus was there. It was an old dilapidated vehicle. We got up, and before we went over, he said to us, you get in first, and please go to the rear of the bus, and don't talk to each other. And I will sit in the front. When we reach Montceau-les-Mines, I will get off first, and then I will wait at the corner until you come out, and you join me. And then you walk behind me.

All right. That's what we did. The bus left. At that time it was already dark. And it was chugging along the road. We didn't know where to. Everything was dark.

We had traveled for perhaps 30 minutes or so when the bus stopped in the middle of nowhere. And the bus driver got out with flashlight. Someone else, one or two passengers, followed him. And they were talking in French. We couldn't hear in the back what was going on.

But finally they came back, and the bus turned around and returned from where it was coming. And all three of us, we thought, now what are we going to do? Staying in Montceau-les-Mines? Is he going back to Montceau-les-Mines.

But that wasn't the case. We heard from-- that the conversations that some passengers had that the road had become impassable by British bombs. The British had bombed Le Creusot, which was a one of the most important towns in France with armament factories. Schneider, the large French armament industrial concern, was located in that town. So the British had bombed the town and had damaged the road to Montceau-les-Mines. So the bus driver had to take a roundabout way, which took at least another hour to an hour and a half.

It must have been about 10 o'clock at night when the bus finally came to a stop somewhere. Everything, everyone got out. We were the last one to leave the bus. And we barely saw, still, the outlines of Francois. We hastened and reached him at the corner just when he turned around the corner.

You don't know up to this day whether the man tried to just run away from us, or whether he was so cautious that he turned the corner. Anyway we caught up with him and walked behind him through the darkened streets of the town.

Then he stopped. He saw an entrance to a courtyard. There was a shed in the back. And to the right of that entrance to that yard, we saw a small building standing, a low building. We could barely see where we were.

Francois turned to us and said, this is the back entrance of the pub, and to a little hotel.

I don't know if he even told us that. He said, wait here till I come back.

Yes, you are right. Yes, correct. Yes, yes, yes.

He didn't know where we were, and he didn't even tell us.

Yes, that's correct. He didn't tell us.

We just found it out later.

He said, just wait here for a moment. I have to see whether everything is OK.

Yeah.

That's what he said.

And he disappeared--

Everything is--

--somewhere in the dark.

He opened a door, and for just for a second, we could see light coming out from a room. What kind of room, we didn't know. And he went in there.

We waited five minutes, 10 minutes. We became restless. Then 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, we knew something was wrong. It couldn't be that he had to talk so long. So Max said, maybe there are still persons in that pub, and Francois doesn't want to take us in there. So Dottie said, but at least--

We didn't even know it was a pub.

We didn't know. But at least, he said, then, if some people he doesn't want us to meet are in there, then he would come out and let us know. After another few minutes, we decided we cannot just stay there in the street. Any person passing us could become suspicious.

Besides, there was a curfew. There was a certain time that you are not supposed to be out anymore. So anybody out in the street was suspect.

We didn't know where the curfew would start. So finally, we decided, we are entering that same door where he had disappeared.

We opened the door. It was some kind of a kitchen with a stove to the left, and a wooden table in the middle, and there were six or seven people, four men and two women sitting around the table. They all looked at us in amazement.

I addressed the lady, who asked me-- who had ask us, who are you, in French. Since I was the most fluent in French, I answered her, we are three fugitives from Holland. We had a guy by the name of Francois who took us here, and he said we could stay here overnight. He entered about 15, 20 minutes ago, and said to us we should wait outside, and we call us, and he hasn't called us.

With this, a man, apparently her husband, owner, said, this damned-- yeah.

Some kind of a scoundrel.

Scoundrel or his traitor, scum. He had he-- he betrayed you. That is one of those who betrays people. We have had more of those.

You know what he did? He hoped that the Germans, who always patrol and check the buses from Le Creusot, they usually wait at the bus-- where the bus terminal is, and they check all the identity cards, because we are close to the demarcation line. He wanted you to be arrested, but your bus came two hours late, so the Germans didn't wait anymore. Otherwise, you would now be arrested by the Germans, and god knows what's going to happen to you, would have happened to you.

With this, I said, please let us stay. Here we cannot go outside. We don't know where to go. We don't know what to do.

The woman turned around and said, I'm very sorry. I can't do that. I have been in trouble once before. The Germans come here every day to check. And I can't risk my life and that of the other people.

There were chairs. We sat down without being asked to. And I said, madam, if you send us out from your house, we will die. You know that. You can't do that to people. We are innocent people, and we are fleeing to save our lives. I beg of

you, don't send us out.

Everyone was looking at us. We had no choice. We had to tell them exactly how things were.

With this, the man, her husband, got up and said, let me try to find that scoundrel. I have a suspicion where he might be. With this, he left.

But we really didn't want him anymore, because we didn't trust him.

Of course we didn't trust him.

Went through the back entrance and walked out the front entrance. But the other man said let me try and--

No, not yet. Not yet. That was later.

Don't remember that he went up to find him.

No. Yes, that the owner left. I know it. I remember that very clearly, because of the fact that when he left, he had practically given us permission to stay until he came back. And his wife no longer insisted that we leave.

The other people-- there was a young pregnant woman sitting there, her and three men, apparently coal miners, the way they were dressed. They ask us some questions, and we told them about what has happened to us, and that we had been betrayed in Belgium already.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. And the door opened. Two German soldiers with rifles were standing in the opening of the door. All of us froze. But most of all, the three of us, because to our minds went, this is the end. Goodbye.

Just was no doubt. I can only remember how the other two looked. I've never seen them look that way. Their eyes were just as large as-- as cups. And they looked like they popped out. And that there was just panic written all over their faces. And I must have looked to them exactly the same way--

You did.

--in my despair. I picked up the cat that was on the floor, and I started-- I picked it up on my lap and started petting it and petting it, just to give ourselves, in a desperate position, as a sort of a casual air. And then we were just hoping for the best, I think. You take it from there again.

The woman jumped up and greeted these two soldiers, especially the one corporal, effusively. Ah, my chers amis, and then grabbed the corporal by the arm. Please sit down and sit down. I bring you beer. And in a second she was back with two bottles of beer and filled the glasses of these two guys.

The older of the two, the corporal looked around and smiled, and saw the pregnant woman sitting close by. And he started making obscene jokes about her belly, and in broken French, half-German, half-French. And everyone was laughing about these stupid jokes.

Everyone was really putting up a good act. Perfect actors.

Max and I, we turned away from-- our faces away from the Germans. And looking at the other men so as not to face them. back was the woman immediately and filled the glasses again. And they continued. The corporal continued talking, and joking, and speaking to another man who understood a little German. And--

And we made believe we didn't understand German. Not a word.

And meanwhile they kept on drinking and drinking, and the glasses were filled three, four, five times.

Suddenly, the corporal, he was already red in his neck and face, he turned to the woman and said, who? Pointed with a finger to the two of us, Max and me. Who are these-- who are these people? Again, our hearts stopped.

The woman said very nonchalantly to, ils sont des voyageurs. They are travelers, which could mean 1,000 things and nothing, without protecting us. It was a totally neutral, ingenious answer. Ils sont des voyageurs. Some travelers.

He was satisfied, apparently, and he kept on joking, and drinking, and talking.

And then the door opened, and the owner returned. And he immediately knew, overlooked the situation, knew that nothing bad had happened, and sat down next to me. There was a seat free next to me.

And while the German soldier was babbling, I ask him-- we spoke to him, any news? He looked at me and said, not now. So I kept quiet. Finally, after an eternity-- it was at least an hour-- the soldiers got up, auf wiedersehen, and left.

Well, we started breathing again, and everybody started talking at the same time.

It was the most incredible relief, that none of us really thought this was going to happen. They didn't ask us for our papers, and didn't doubt her words. Just left.

But a minute later, there was a knock, and the door opened. There were the two again. And again--

So then we knew, now they're going to ask for our papers, because they talked to each other outside, and one must have reproached, probably the older one who looked more serious and more suspicious, suspicious of us, he probably told the younger one, what did we do? We should have found out who these people are.

That's what went through our mind.

That's what went through our mind, all three of us, probably, separately here. But we have more or less the same idea, that this definitely is it.

But what really happened was they had forgotten their-- well, one of the two had forgotten his--

Rifle.

--rifle in the corner, because he had a little bit too much to drink, and remembered later, came back just to pick up his rifle, and left again. That was definitely the end of that episode.

We waited a few minutes, but fortunately, they didn't return. And that's when the owner said, I couldn't find the guy.

You see, he said, this is the back room of our pub. The pub is there and closes at 8 o'clock. He must have known that, because he came in and ask us-- gave us a fictitious-- it's one or the other name. Do you know whether he was here? So we said, no. So he left through the front and disappeared.

So what are we going to do now?

Did you have any money left?

We still had some money left. Not much, though. Very few. A few hundred francs, which wasn't much, really.

And one man, with a miner cap on his head, he suddenly started talking to us. He said, look. I know in what predicament you people are. I cannot do anything for you. But I have a cousin. He is also a miner, mine worker.

He has a German permit to a-- hunting permit in the area. He knows this whole area like the pocket of his trousers. I'm going to talk to him. Wait here. I'll return.

So he came back after maybe half an hour, and said, I spoke to my cousin. He's willing to do it. Tell me, people, do you still have some money left? We said, very little. He said, do you think that each of you could, for the risk this-- my cousin is taking, that you could spare-- might you spare 100 francs each. That was like asking for \$2, \$2 each. We said, oh, yes. That we still have.

He said, if you can't, he will take you without money. But he will take you over the demarcation line. So we knew that we were now with the good French people.

He came back and said, my cousin is willing. Please take off your shoes, because the curfew is on already, since quite a while.

It was after 12:00 by then.

After midnight.

The curfew was 10:00 or 11:00.

And--

We went barefoot.

Silently, through the darkened street, for maybe 15 or 20 minutes. Tiny little houses, very poor neighborhood. He knocked at the door.

And a youngish man opened the door, and he greeted us very friendly, and he said, you poor people, what you went through, come in, come in. And then his wife came and greeted us. His cousin left, wished us good luck.

And he said, you must be hungry. You haven't eaten all day. Did you? We said, no, we didn't. So his wife--

Please, continue.

Because you know better what happened there. I can't remember.

Well, she offered to give us something to eat. We didn't even realize that we were hungry. We had other things on our minds. But she quickly put together sort of a dinner in a one or one and a half room little house. But before she-- or while the potatoes that she had peeled were boiling, she got both of her children-- or were there three? I'm not sure anymore.

Two, two.

Two.

Two children on a bed. They were sleeping of course. But she was so proud of her children, and she wanted to show us her two-- the two kids. And so we ate a salad and some potatoes, and slept for a couple of hours, I think.

Yeah.

Till very early in the morning. Just started getting light.

I would like to mention something, that as soon as we lay down, [NON-ENGLISH] got into shock.

I didn't go to shock.

Yes, you started shaking violently from the horrible excitement that we had just gone through. And I don't know. Perhaps Max and I too. Because now came the reaction of that awful day, that horrible-- these horrible 24 hours that we have gone through. And we must all three of us be shaking.

We had about three hours, two or three or four hours sleep, when the mine worker awakened us, got something to drink, and a short breakfast. It was not daylight yet when we left.

While we were walking, he said to us, we will have to walk about half an hour. Then we will have reached the outskirts of Montceau. I will stop when we reach a kind of a-- how do you call it? A dry riverbed. That divides occupied and non-occupied France. And the demarcation line runs through this dry river bed.

You will stop. I will tell you where to stop. And I will cross it very fast and run up the embankment on the other side into that forest that you see not far. And I won't stop until I have reached the forest.

I will look out whether it is safe for you to cross. Because very often, on both sides, German soldiers are watching there with machine guns. So after I am safely on the other side, I will give you a sign.

We reached that point. He said, stop here. Then he looked around. Then he raced across that riverbed and up the other side and kept on climbing like a quick animal, and stopped.

Then he signaled us, and all three of us, we raced down as fast as we could, crossed that riverbed, up the embankment to the other side. He kept on running. And we followed him for maybe five, six minutes.

Then we came to a some open part of that forest. He stopped, waited until we came nearby, embraced us, and said, now you are in non-occupied France.

Then he continued, non occupé mes pas libre. It is the non-occupied part, but not free. Remember that, my friends.

So we continued until we reached a kind of a road, a dirt road. He said, I will go. I will walk with you until we reach the first village. It is called [FRENCH]. There is no train station there, but I cannot go further than that, because I don't want to meet people who perhaps know me from-- that I live in the other side. It could endanger my life.

We reached the-- we could see that little village where we stopped. And we gave the man 1,000 francs of the maybe 1,500 we still had left. He didn't want to accept at first, but finally he did. And we thanked him, and we embraced, and he gave us pictures of his children, which Max still has--

Yeah, he does.

--up to this day. Yeah, he kept it.

We--

The village, [PLACE NAME], did not have a railroad. It was about 10 kilometers from the first little town where there was a train to be had. We were tired from walking, so we decided that we stay in [PLACE NAME], a little village, very friendly people.

And to our surprise, food was no problem. We didn't need coupons, which you needed anywhere else. And they ask us whether we were refugees. We talked freely there. Because in spite of the fact that we were told it is non-occupied France but not free, the people were friendly, full of understanding, and sympathetic.

So we felt almost at home before the war, as it was before the war. You saw no police, no soldiers. It was too small, too insignificant a place.

There was one little inn. That's where we stayed overnight, and had a bath, which was the greatest luxury since we had left Amsterdam.

And in the evening, when we had dinner, the owner, a farmer, by the way, he said to us, are you leaving tomorrow for Lyon? We said, yes, we would like to, only we don't know how to get to [FRENCH].

He said, I have to do I have to do business in [FRENCH], and I go there by horse and buggy. If you want to, you can hop into my buggy, and I take you along. We were delighted.

And strangely enough, once we left in the morning, it was a bright, beautiful day, and we were riding through the French beautiful landscape, we felt so elated, in spite of what we had just gone through, that we started singing all the songs that we possibly could remember. And we were in a elated, happy mood.

He delivered us to [FRENCH]. We took the train, a local train, which took forever, but we reached Lyon without any incidents.

First thing we did in Lyon was to go to the depot and claim our luggage. We got it back indeed, but half empty. Things, anything of value, was stolen. Very little was left. But the main thing is we felt now safe in-- to be in non-occupied France.

We walked through the streets. We didn't know where the office [NON-ENGLISH], Netherlands office, the unofficial--

There was no consulate anymore.

Yeah, the unofficial consulate of the Netherlands, where it was located. So we saw a couple walking down the street with two girls, apparently their daughters. We walked up to that family. And in our best French we asked, could you please tell us where the [NON-ENGLISH] is?

I think we had looked up the street in a telephone book, but we had no idea where it was, so we asked. We looked for the [NON-ENGLISH]. Would you tell us how to get there?

Well, in the best Dutch, they answered. It seemed that you come from Holland. It was so obvious from our accent. They have fled just a few weeks before us, before we, she said. And, well, they showed us exactly the way how to get there. Next thing we did, I think we immediately went there.

No, no. I want to--

Oh, you want to tell more about this family.

--and something else. He asked, what's your name? So We told our names. And When. [NON-ENGLISH] said, my name is--

[NON-ENGLISH].

Parfumeur, he said, I helped a Eddie Parfumeur, a few weeks ago to get to Switzerland. Are you related to my?

That's my brother.

It was her brother.

That was the craziest coincidence. It just seemed unbelievable, because what they told us, we didn't even know yet, that he had gone to Switzerland, but was sent back into France by the Swiss.

Expulsed.

Expulsed. And there was quite a time that the Swiss did not take any refugees in. So he was sent back, landed somehow again in Lyon, met them. He had no money with him anymore, and he didn't know how to get back and try again for Switzerland.

And they were diamond dealers, and very wealthy. They helped them with money. And he had promised to pay him back, but he said he wouldn't dream of getting back the money. But my brother apparently had borrowed that money, and planned to give it back after the war.

And on the second effort he made it to Switzerland. But they hadn't heard from him anymore, but we already knew that, so we could tell him that the end was good. He was in a camp for refugees in Switzerland. Cossonay, quite well known among the refugees.

We reached the Dutch office. We were greeted by that representative with, you cannot stay here. There are roundups going on, and there are Gestapo agents not in uniform, but Gestapo everywhere. You cannot go to a hotel, because you may be picked up tonight.

What I can do for you is I give you papers. Do you have any papers? No, we have nothing. The only thing we have are false Belgian identity cards, which, of course, are of no value here. So he said, OK, I am allowed and entitled, by the Dutch free government, to furnish documents to you-- passports.

He asked Max and me, are you Dutch citizens? We said, no, we are stateless. He said, from now on you are Dutch. Until you reach safety, you are Dutch. I give you passports, a kind of passport.

So we all got passports. We were all born in Amsterdam. And we are all of Dutch nationality.

But he said, you must find yourself a place, a safe place, talk to others here. There were a lot of-- quite a number of Dutch young people milling around in that consulate. See whether you can find a place where you can sleep. And as soon as possible, get out of the town.

So we ask him, get out? But where to? How about Switzerland?

He said, oh, no. I have no guide, and I can't help you at all because it has become almost impossible to get into Switzerland. The Germans and the French, they are watching, and the Swiss, the Swiss throw you out as soon as you get there.

I said, well, then the other border is Spain. He said, what do you know about Spain, he asked me. And I said, I lived there.

So he says, what do you want? What are you waiting for? Then go to Spain. That's your best bet. I said, yes. That's what we aimed for. But how do we get there?

He said we have a representative in Perpignan. His name is such and such. You tell him that you got the papers here, and he should help you to, first of all, to be legalized in Perpignan, until you either get an exit visa. I said what is an exit visa?

That's when he explained to us that all men, in the age group of 18 to 45 must get an exit visa from the Vichy government to leave the territory. And then he said, if you have the exit visa, then you can get a Spanish visa, transit visa, to England, that our government will issue. You do get a visa for England, but only once you are in Spain.

Said, can we get it? He said, lately, no one has gotten an exit visa. It will be no problem for [NON-ENGLISH]. But for you, two men, yes. But first get to Perpignan, and then you see what happens.

We spoke to a young woman who was just leaving that same day. She said, I have a place. There is a fur dealer--

Furrier.

--a furrier by the name of Edelman. I'll give you the address. I have been put up there, and it's a very nice family. They are Polish, but they live in France already for many years. They will definitely take you in.

That's where we went. Immediately we were taken in and fed by these people.

Next day, we boarded the train to Perpignan.

Forget where we slept.

Yeah. The night, we were put up on the--

In the basement, in heaps of--

Heaps of hides.

Hides.

Hides?

Hides. And the smell.

And jute, the bags, you know, jute, the course material.

And we got--

A pleasant--

--plenty of lice from that.

Not lice, but-- not only lice, but bedbugs. It was terrible.

We reached Perpignan. Perpignan I knew because I had stayed there for several times when I traveled from Spain, before the war, from Spain to Belgium and Holland. I had always, on my way back, stopped in Perpignan. I knew Perpignan.

We went to a hotel that I remembered, Hotel de la [FRENCH]. And we got two rooms. We still had a little money. And we thought, well, what can we do now?

So I said to Dottie and Max, I'll tell you what I can do. I have a friend who lives in Figueres. Figueres is across the Pyrenees, the first town on Spanish side, in Catalonia. We have been not only doing business regularly, business with this man for several years, but we had become friendly with him too. He was about 20 years older than I am-- in my eyes, an elderly gentleman. I'm going to call Mr. Delfo tell him that we are here.

I know that he is a big shot now in the Franco regime, because he had been a Francoist man, and his sons had escaped from Barcelona, had never served in the republican army. He may be able to help us. And maybe we can-- I can borrow some money from him till after the war.

Firstly, we got to the hotel. And next day, I went to phone him. He was happy to hear me. I didn't tell him that I was with a friend, but I just told him that, with my future wife, we have made it.

I said, could you come over here? I have things to discuss with you, because I didn't want to speak on the phone about these items. He said, yes, I'll be over in three days. I am the president of the International Red Cross in the province of Catalonia, and I can easily travel back and forth. No problem for me.

The next day, we walked around in Perpignan. And when we came back to have lunch, we were approached by a young man. He said, in perfect Dutch, I heard you speaking Dutch. Are you a refugee? So we told him the whole story.

He said let me introduce myself. My name is Fred Manheim. I come from The Hague. And tell me-- and we told him everything.

And I said, you are from The Hague. Do you by any chance know Echo and Rita Corman? He said, they are my friends. They are here in Perpignan. I said, what? Yes, they are in the Hotel de la Loge.

By the way, he said in the Hotel de la Loge are far more Dutch people, all refugees. We have all come from Nice, because the French started picking up Jewish refugees, so it was not safe anymore. We came to Perpignan. And we are all waiting for our exit visas.

Come over. I introduce. I show you. And your friends will be thrilled to meet you.

So we met with our friends. And there was great jubilation that we had all made it. We were told they all waited for their visas.

Rita, our friend from Amsterdam, she was from Amsterdam, she called me from The Hague. They got married shortly before they fled. She had an exit visa, but he couldn't get one. He was still waiting.

We went to the consul, or rather the Dutch representatives, and he gave us a paper for the police, and we got a temporary--

Visa.

--Dutch visa.

That permit, permit to stay in Perpignan. That is, we showed you the one document that we still have from [NON-ENGLISH]. The condition is that it had to be renewed every month. It was given for one month to the other.

We stayed in Perpignan. And our friend Delfo came. I told him what-- the whole story, and said to him Mr. Delfo, we need money.

He said, you have nothing anymore? I said, only Dutch money, which is useless here or in France. No one could change Dutch money which we still have, maybe a couple of thousand of guilders.

He said, you can go to the [PERSONAL NAME] that we have used before the war. Remember him? I said, yes, I remember. I didn't think of him. He said, he will change the guilders for you, and then you will have enough. Otherwise, I give you as many pesetas as you wish.

I ask him whether he can do something for us. He said, I cannot help you with the exit visa. The Spanish visa I can help you, but I said, look, it may come to a point where we will have to try to get illegally into Spain. Can you help us with a guide?

He was taken aback. He said, where do you want to go? I said, we want to go to, of course, to Spain. And then we want to try to reach England.

I saw something in his eyes, and I regretted that I had said that. And it plagued me from that moment on. Why was I so dumb to mention that we go to England? I knew that the man was pro-Franco, and that he may resent that. He was

against England.

What year was this? What was the date?

That was 19-- in November 1942.

I went to the forwarder. He changed the money. He said, where do you live. I said in the Hotel de la Loge.

He said, it's much too expensive. I have a little empty apartment of my brother, who is a war prisoner in Germany. Why don't you take that? I said, how much will it cost? He said, nothing.

We moved into that house, that little--

One room.

--one-room house. It had an outhouse. It had a little kitchen in that large room, and it had a bed, and a couch.

Cot.

A cot. We put ourselves up there, and we were quite happy there.

And we stayed there for several weeks, getting together each day with friends and other Dutch people. We had actually a very good time. But still active, to try to get out--

We passed the time in Perpignan getting together, playing bridge, and simply waiting and waiting. By that time, it was now the middle of November 1942. It had become quite clear that the young-- the men who were waiting for their exit visa would never get it, because they didn't hear from Vichy. And an emissary who was sent to Vichy came back with the news that it is totally unclear and uncertain when, if ever, the exit visas would be given out.

No, it was not middle of November yet. It was the beginning of November. I must correct myself.

We weren't that long in Perpignan.

Yes, we were there until the 11th. But this, I am talking now of the first days of November. Rita was urged by her husband, by our friend, and by us to leave, not to stay any longer. You are legal. You have a Spanish visa. You have your papers all in order. Get out. What do you want to wait here?

She very, very reluctantly left Perpignan, finally, but I had to promise her I, the one who had lived in Spain and had the friendship with that Spaniard across the Pyrenees, that should we ever leave, leave clandestinely, go over the Pyrenees, that I would not leave her husband behind. I promised her that. And she left.

We had often dinner in a restaurant where we didn't have to give coupons. We had to pay more money, but the food was also much better. The owner was an elderly French lady. And somehow a German-Jewish refugee, a little older than we are aware, maybe in his late 40s, befriended this woman, and he lived there. And he started talking to us, and we found out from him that he was from Germany, had left his non-Jewish wife, et cetera, et cetera.

And one day, I ask him, tell me, Mr. Ehrlich, you live here now since eight month, as you told us. Do you know guides that bring refugees into Spain? He said, as a matter of fact, yes. I do know one. I said, would you be willing to give me his name?

Since we had created a kind of friendship with this man, because we had been there very often, he knew our story, and we knew his story, he said, I do better. This man, who lives in AmÃ©lie-les-Bains-- that is a spa up high up in the mountains in the French Pyrenees. Once a month he comes to Perpignan doing some shopping. He is due any day now to come here. When he comes, I introduce you to him.

Indeed, the man came a few days later, and I spoke to the man, and said to him, I have friends in Figueres. I don't know whether we can get our visas. If we don't get them within a reasonable time, can I count on you that you will take the three of us over the Pyrenees? He said, yes.

I said, how much will it cost us to do it? He mentioned the amount which we still had. We were able to pay that.

OK. I said here, I leave you my phone number. I have to know when you come, and let me know, because then I pick you up from the train station, because we continue further to another place, which is, in my opinion, safer.

A few days passed.

And we needed a certificate from a doctor.

Yes, yes. I know. But we got that a little later.

In the meantime, it was, I believe, the 10th of-- the 9th or the 10th of November, Echo came from-- our friend Echo came from the Hotel de la Loge early in the morning, running to our little apartment, very excitedly. They had just heard that American forces had landed in Casablanca and other place, and that there were rumors already that German troops may occupy the rest of France, so-called Vichy France.

And a day later, on the 11th of November, that's exactly what happened. On the morning of that day, Dotti, Max, and I met with our friend, Echo, and we decided to try to call the passeur, as he was meant-- as the smuggler or guide was called in French, that I was to approach him and tell him that we would come in a day or two.

We were told we need to move from one place to another, especially the frontier area. You needed a so-called sauf-conduit. That means a safe conduct. It's a paper. You will see, Dottie still has that original paper, which was given out by the prefecture-- that is the police station-- which allows that person to travel in that particular area, and it gives also the reason why, what the travel is for.

We were told that you must go to a doctor. The doctor will have to certify why you go there, for health reasons, if you want to go to that spot. But how to do it?

Again, we went to Mr. Ehrlich. He said, I know a doctor. You can go there. Tell him whatever you want. All four of us. That is what Dottie mentioned before. All four of us presented ourself to the doctor, and said that we would like to go-- we would like to go to AmÃ©lie-les-Bains.

And he said, why? Is there an epidemic broken out amongst the Dutch? He said, you can trust me. You want to cross into Spain, right? We said, yes. He said, wait. I give you papers.

He wrote out for each four of us a medical statement that we had trouble with the stomach on account of food poisoning or something, and that we needed a stay in AmÃ©lie-les-Bains. We went to the police, the policeman for foreigners. He winked at us, but signed the paper. He was a good Frenchman.

As I must say, at this occasion, we found in Perpignan, and in that part of France, only good French, helpful French, anti-German French, who helped foreigners as much as they possibly could. We had the papers now safely in our hands.

The next morning already-- it was the 12th of November-- we heard noise early in the morning. We quickly got up, and we knew the Germans are marching into Perpignan.

[INAUDIBLE]

I don't know why. I had that urge to see these troops marching through Perpignan. I went to the main street, and I saw some French citizens standing there, tears running down their cheeks, others in fury, watching them marching down,

marching through Perpignan.

I rushed back. By that time, our friend Echo had also come. I had telephoned the guide in AmÃ©lie and told him we are leaving this afternoon.

There was an electric train leaving Perpignan for the mountains, and going to the Spanish border high up in the mountains. It was largely unknown to any foreigner that such a train exists, because the main line from Paris to the French to the Spanish border ran through Perpignan, further on to [FRENCH], the last town in France, and that connected with the [NON-ENGLISH] on the Spanish side.

I said to my friends, we are not going to go through the main line, because the Germans may be standing there watching who is leaving or tries to leave. Let's go through the mountains with the electric train to [PLACE NAME], Spain. And that's what we did.

We were just about leave that apartment we had, that little house, when another young guy, the youngest of all of us, maybe 19 years old, from The Hague, came rushing to us. You can't leave me. You can't leave me. For god's sakes, you have to take me along. I'm going to die here. I have no one. If you leave, I'm alone here, it's my end.

So I decided, OK, so can we do-- take him along? So we were now five of us.

We all had bought some sugar--

Cubes.

--cubes of sugar that the guide had advised us to, and a few other things that he had said we should buy for us. But otherwise, we had simply the thin jacket, because our coats were gone.

We took the train and arrived late afternoon in AmÃ©lie-les-Bains. There, the man was waiting for us. He got into the train. He said let's continue to Arles-sur-Tech. Tech was a mountain stream coming from Andorra down to Arles-sur-Tech. And that was the end of the line.

We got off there. It was dark. And he said to us, we are now beginning to cross the Tech, through to Arles-sur-Tech, and then up the mountains. Follow me.

We are not going. There are no ways. There are no streets. There are no paths.

I find my way. I know the mountains. But you have to stay close behind me or you will lose me. It's too dark.

How far was it, in terms of distance, over that mountain.

He never told us--

Didn't know.

--what the distance--

It's a good thing we didn't know.

--what the distance was. My estimate is that it could have been 10 miles. But we had to climb over a whole--

Range of mountains.

--range, the breadth of the Pyrenees, from France into Spain.

And only so it was the next mountain. And he thought that's the last one we have to get over, until you were on top, and then you saw there was the next and the next. And so we never really knew how far and how high we had to go.

Our guide was really a very well trained psychologist, because he never told us what was ahead of us. He knew that we were totally inexperienced. We had never been mountain climbing. Surely not. [NON-ENGLISH] was born in Holland, the flattest country on earth, or Max, who had never been up mountains, nor I, for that matter, those high mountains.

We crossed through that little town of Arles-sur-Tech, which is now a well known and famous Dutch spa, and--

Dutch?

I'm sorry. French spa, and visited by hundred of thousands of visitors all over Europe because of the natural beauty. We had no eye for beauty in those days. We just wanted to be safe.

Besides, it was dark.

Dark. Pitch dark.

We couldn't see any beauty.

There was-- it was a clear night. We followed him. And then we reached the river. We had to cross it. And it came down with such a force that you could hear the sound of that stream a mile away.

When we got to it, we saw that the bridge consisted of a tree that had been--

A plank.

--a plank that crossed that river. And that was all. Dottie has.

I'm going to have a nightmare.

So please continue. What happened then?

No, I don't even want to think about it. That plank was that wide.

One foot wide. She refused to cross it, because she had--

[CROSS TALK] just knew it was way down. You heard a loud stream. And--

And she has a fear of heights.

You couldn't even see the other side. You just knew that there was another side at the end of the plank. And I have fear of heights.

The guide, Max, Echo, James-- that was his name. They all had crossed. I was the only one still waiting for my fianc e to decide to cross, but she couldn't. She was too afraid.

So the guide called back, [FRENCH], quick, quick, quick. Come on.

And Max came back.

But no. Then Max returned. I said to him, Dottie can't make it. She can't make it.

So finally we convinced her to-- Max would go first, then she followed him, and I came behind her. And then, slowly,

sidewise, we--

Holding on to each other.

--holding on-- holding on to each other, we sidewise moved over to the other side. And that's how she reached the other side of the Tech. That was quite some doing. Then our climb.

I still don't--

I beg your pardon?

I still don't know why I did it.

You don't know why you did it, but unfortunately, you did it.

Then began our climb. We followed the man. It became bitter cold. It was a clear night. And we were shivering. We walked, or climbed, and fell for maybe four hours. It must have been well over-- later than midnight when he finally stopped and said, let's rest here for a short while, because we cannot stay too long. You will freeze to death. You are not dressed.

And you're not allowed to sleep, because it's too dangerous.

You will die.

Because of the cold.

But he--

And it's all we really needed to do, close our eyes and sleep. But we weren't allowed to.

There was still some vegetation there, trees. We got together some wood, and he lit a fire. We ask him, isn't that dangerous? He said, if the Germans try to reach this place from where they are now in Perpignan, it will take them at least a day. So don't worry. By the time they come up here, you are long in Spain.

After a couple of hours, we continued, and we climbed the whole night through. The next morning, the mountains became less forbidding, and we had-- we could, for some time, we could walk almost, instead of climbing. But slowly, vegetation stopped, and there were only rocks, and some kind of grass or whatever, alpine grass or whatever you call that, which made our shoes very slippery.

Very often, one or the other was falling. But mostly our friend, [NON-ENGLISH], he was plump, and had never done any sports, and was really the most unsporty type one can imagine.

At a given moment, after we had again walked and climbed for maybe six hours, he fell again for the umptieth time. He was so exhausted that he said, let me lie here. I cannot. I am unable to continue. This is the end.

They kicked him in his behind and said no. We won't leave you here to die. You come with us. So Max and James and I, in turn, and very often Dottie, helped him to continue.

I cannot explain how, but somehow we made it into the second night. We were not only exhausted. We were now completely numb, talking had practically ceased, because we didn't have the strength anymore to talk.

It got dark. And then we found someplace, that the guide found somewhere a place that was protected from the sharp-- from the sharp wind. And we rested there for another hour or two. Again, we fell asleep, but he wouldn't let us sleep.

And he said, look, have courage, because we are not far from the Spanish border anymore. We have about three more mountains to cross, and then you will be in Spain. That gave us some-- a little more courage and strength. We continued.

The sun went up. It was again day. And after walking and climbing maybe for another two hours, he stopped and called us. Come here. He said, you see that smoke coming up from that little house there? That is already Spain. Here runs the Spanish border. You have reached Spain.

Now I wish you good luck and goodbye. You'll pay me the money. We gave him the money. You cannot miss it. You just walk towards that house, and there is Spain. And he left us.

We made it up to that farm, that mountain farm. They saw us coming. A man came out and looked at us in surprise. I spoke to him in Spanish, and he didn't know what to hear, because no one had spoken Spanish to him for so far.

I told him what has happened, that we want to stay in Spain, that I have a friend in Figueres, and gave the name. He knew it because he was well known.

I said to him, let us stay in your house. He consented, although he said, the Guardia Civil, the Spanish police, they are checking here. But I keep you hidden.

He got in touch by sending his son down to phone Mr. Delfo, came back with the message. We should the next day, go down to the next-- to the first village and present ourself to the police.

That we did. The policeman knew, because Mr. Delfo had contacted them.

Did you tell them about the sleeping arrangement?

No, that's too details. We have no time for this.

And we thought that we would then be sent to Barcelona and see the Dutch consul. Not so. We were all arrested for crossing the Spanish border without legal papers.

We went to the police, a prison, jail, in Figueres. Then Dottie was separated from us and sent to Girona, the capital of Catalonia, to a prison for women. And we men stayed for four weeks, three or four weeks, and were sent to a concentration camp in Miranda, which is in the northwestern part of Spain, and the concentration camp formerly held the anti-Francoist prisoners. But they were only now foreigners, men in military age, terribly overcrowded.

Dottie remained in this prison.

The prison was mostly for prostitutes who were illegal in Spain, but they were in separate departments. And we were-- there were some other refugee women who were all together, crammed together like sardines at night. And the door couldn't open anymore. There was 30 or more lying close together with all the bright lights on, burning all night.

And I once received a visit from Mr. Delfo, who came with a great gift of two handkerchiefs and a few almonds, I think. Well. [INAUDIBLE].

A list of all the Dutch subjects in the prison was sent to the consulate in Barcelona. And eventually, she was let out of the prison after, I think, two weeks or so. And to send to a little spa in Catalonia.

Well, originally it had been a hotel. It was used as a residential stay.

Forced residents.

Residents who were refugees. You had to go to the police every day and show that you were still there, sign in. And we

stayed there for about six weeks, I think, until one day-- we all had written to our consulates, all different nationalities. Some were stateless and had really no consulate right.

But the few women in the group who were from Holland, were one day picked up by a representative of the Dutch consulate in Barcelona and taken out of prison. They had worked us behind the stage, so to speak. We knew that we were busy for us, but we had no idea how long it was going to take.

So they took us to Barcelona. From there, we were shipped to Madrid, just the Dutch women.

And then they remained there under the protection of the Dutch embassy and consulate, and got money, were fed, were put up in a nice hotel, enclosed, et cetera.

And meanwhile, the men were sent to Miranda de Ebro. And it appeared that Mr. Delfo, who could have helped us if he wanted to, didn't do a darn thing, because I had been so dumb to tell him that we wanted to get to England. That is my conclusion. He never told me that.

Anyway, Miranda de Ebro was overcrowded. Instead of room for 500, there were 2,400, where the conditions were terrible. But there was no mistreatment of any kind.

Finally, Dottie, as soon as she had found her feet on the ground, she somehow became friendly with the wife of the ambassador, and wrote a letter to her. And the lady was so impressed by the letter that she received that she invited Dottie to come for tea. She told her what-- everything, how we had reached Spain, and asked the lady whether she could not do-- [INAUDIBLE] she could do something for me to get out.

Actually, I asked for the three.

Yes, well, I leave this--

The three women who were in one room together in the hotel.

I concentrate on--

And I wrote a letter also in the name of all three of us.

I concentrate only now on us.

Yeah, yeah.

She said, the only thing I can do is that your husband can be sent to a military hospital in Vitoria, where he will be examined, and maybe that he will be declared unfit for military service, in which case they would release him.

She did this. And one day I received a call to come to the office of the camp. I was told I would go to Vitoria. And next day, I was sent there.

And it was a military hospital.

I just said that. Because I understood Spanish, I didn't want to let on that I understood Spanish. I was examined, and I faked an injury in my left leg, which had been injured years before. So I could limp a little bit. I understood their conversations, and I reacted accordingly. In short, I could-- and do some tricks, and they declared me unfit for military service.

By that time, the ambassador had been asked by Queen Wilhelmina in London to visit the Dutch subjects in Miranda to see how they were doing. And Dottie, who had heard from his wife that he was going with the first secretary to the concentration camp, she said, I just heard that my husband is going to be liberated. Could his excellency take him

along? She said, I will tell him.

That's what happened. They came to the camp. I was liberated that very same day, got into the beautiful limousine in my only suit that--

In fact, he had a shaven head still.

I had a shaven head, yes. I got into the limousine. And on the way back to Madrid, I was sitting next to the first secretary. I told him the whole story.

He said, we need people badly in the embassy who know Spanish, and you are the first one to come here. Could you help? I said, gladly.

I became employed by the Dutch embassy to liberate Dutch subjects. And I was doing that and became employed. We got a very good salary, diplomatic status, until after the liberation of France. Then the stream of refugees ended, and the Dutch government in London was badly in need, had wanted us a year before to come over, but the embassy delayed our departure because I was needed in there.

We were asked to come over. By that time, it was December 1944. We got to Lisbon. And in Lisbon, we had to wait for an airplane, KLM airplane, because the week before Mr. Israel and Leslie Howard were shot down. So no planes were.

So the first plane after that, we were put on with the two sons of the new Dutch ambassador in Paris, small children, and the diplomatic pouch, and we were flown to London. Almost crashed because of ice on the wings. It was a very dangerous flight. But we landed in England.

We were separated again, because we had to go through the so-called patriotic school, which was a screening place for--

We didn't expect it. At the airport, all of a sudden we were whisked away to different places.

After four or five days we were set free. We were both put to work at the Dutch foreign office, worked at the Dutch foreign office until the end of the war, until the Germans capitulated. The foreign office moved back to Holland in August, beginning of August 1945. And we were taken back to Holland, to Hoek van Holland.

Unfortunately, we had heard that Dottie's whole family had perished, because Eddie had gone back to Amsterdam in 1943 to fetch his parents and brother, and on their way back to Switzerland, helped by certain people, they were caught by the Germans, sent to Drancy, and from Drancy to Auschwitz, Eddie to [NON-ENGLISH], a Polish coal mine. They were all killed.

I heard from my brother, who was a captain in the British army, as soon as he got to Amsterdam, while I was still in London, that my father, who had been hidden by Mr. Feits and Mrs. Feits, had died of starvation four weeks before the liberation. That my mother was still alive, barely alive, but was getting better. And we rejoined my mother after the war, who had found an apartment, where we lived until we decided to leave Holland for the United States in 1949.

I made it.

We left out a lot of things, though

Oh, yes. [LAUGHS] Oh yes, but--