

My name is Harry Berger. And I'm a survivor of the Holocaust. I was born in Vienna, Austria on the 10th of May, 1924 to a middle class, rather affluent family. My father was a businessman in textiles. And I was supposed to follow in his footsteps. Basically, that's what it amounted to.

I will describe in this videotape the events between 1938 and 1945, the Hitler era, a time that very deeply affected my whole life and future. I will begin in the beginning of 1938. I was not quite 14 years old. And we had indication of Nazi infiltration in Vienna at the time. Now remember that Austria was a small country of only 7.5 million population. We had a democratic government, which was mirrored after the United States government. It was identical. It had the same structure.

But it was on shaky, shaky legs. Obviously, they hadn't overcome labor problems. People were poor. They were malcontented. And they tried for a change. So the Nazism which was already established in Germany since 1933 was a terrific idea.

I recall the troubles at night, when Nazi mobs came up from the underground and in their brown uniforms attacked citizens in the street, usually people that went to concerts, operas, and so on, and came out at late at night. And they beat up on people. And there was a lot of blood in the streets.

The Nazi technique at the time and always was create terror and people will agree with your methods. Well Austria was divided at the time. And in order to be fair about this, our chancellor Schuschnigg, Kurt Schuschnigg, decided he will call for a plebiscite. He will let the people decide if they would like to be annexed by Nazi Germany or stay Austria. The plebiscite was set for March the 15th, 1938.

Well, Hitler put under pressure. He asked Schuschnigg to abdicate, to step down, and let Seyss-Inquart take over the government. Seyss-Inquart was a hand-picked Nazi by Adolf Hitler. Schuschnigg didn't go along. But the pressure became immense because Hitler said the Wehrmacht will have to walk in. The Wehrmacht will have to fight your army, which was actually not a terrific army. Austria had a small army. And there will be brotherly bloodshed. And he didn't think that Schuschnigg wanted that for his people.

But nobody really thought in Austria that the Nazis would be victorious. My father was very optimistic. He was running around with a little Austrian flag in his lapel, like so many others. The city of Vienna was full of red, white, and red flags, very patriotic. The police was running around with armbands red, white, and red. And what struck me at the time as a 14-year-old who wasn't very bright politically and not really interested, was that nobody that I knew, the kids and so on, were really involved in this.

They ran to rallies and stuff. But they didn't know what it was all about. Well, the night of March the 12th came. And unknown to me and so many others, the Austrian government fell. Seyss-Inquart took over the government. And the Nazi troops marched in.

And I recall this. This was the real distinctive recollection that on the 12th, that night when I went to sleep, the whole city was full of patriotic red, white, and red flags-- the windows, the flagpoles, everywhere. The morning of the 13th when I woke up, I saw nothing but flags represented the swastika, the Nazi German flags.

Everybody was jubilated. The whole town was singing and chanting. Now Austria, ceased to exist at that particular moment and became the Ostmark. That was a part of Nazi Germany. And it was ruled by Mr. Seyss-Inquart who was one of the fiercest Nazis that Hitler could possibly send.

At that point the new Germans, the Austrians, the non-Jews used to tell the so-called selected Jewish people, the ones like my dad who was totally integrated and didn't look for trouble to begin with, and they told us you have nothing to fear. We are not after you short of a small adjustment to make downwards, like from a first class citizen to a second class citizen, you really have no fear. What we are after are the Orthodox Jews, the ones that live in the second district, which was almost like a ghetto. They claimed that these were dirty people. They were filthy, smelled of garlic.

They were imports from Poland and Russia after World War I. And they should be taken out of the country. Clean it up. And at that point the Jewish people in Vienna agreed with that. And that was the biggest mistake that could ever have been made. Once you become selective, and what's good for one is not good for the other, it doesn't work.

You see, once it was totally presented to the Jewish people that one part of the Jewish people will be eliminated or taken out of the country, the other should have known better. And they didn't. They believed the Nazi propaganda.

Well, the first day was a drastic day in Vienna. 70,000 people were arrested and sent to concentration camps. This was not even a secret because the new Nazi paper, Der Sturmer, the next day had all the information about what was happening. There were a lot of suicides daily of Jewish people. There were a lot of beatings in the street, so that the hospitals actually filled up and there was no more room, the Jewish hospital. The others wouldn't take Jews.

Here's what happened to me. I went to school that next Monday like I was supposed to. And I went to a middle school in Schottengasse in the first district. And when I arrived there, I was told that I no longer belonged to that school because of the fact that I was Jewish. And I have to go to a public school in a different area, register, and go to class. So I did that.

And when I got into class, there were maybe three or four other Jewish kids in the same boat. The first thing that happened to me and to the others was we were actually assaulted and beaten immediately. And the reason was given we were beaten because we were Jews, dirty Jews, pig Jews, [NON-ENGLISH].

Well, I got home. And when my father came from work that night, I told him about it. He says that it will pass not to worry. Everything will settle down and be OK. Well, it wasn't OK. It was that way every day for the next three or four days. And eventually, we got a notice. I got a notice that I no longer are to go to school at all because Jews are not to be educated anymore. It's all over.

Well, as a 13-year-old, that was pretty good news. Who wants to go to school anyhow? I didn't want to be tortured with that. I'd much rather stay home, or play games, or do whatever young kids do. I didn't realize what was really attached to this.

The Nazis went on a brutal tear in Austria, very anti-Semitic. At first, it was like a joke. People were caught in the streets when they went to work in their business suits. And they were given a pail, and water, and a brush. And they were kneel down in the streets and brush off anti-Nazi slogans that the Hitlerjugend was painting overnight, so that the Jews can scrub it up. And they were told, it was you Jews that did it. You were responsible for that.

Well, that was a big joke. Who was caught doing this? Who was caught brushing? Who was caught scrubbing? And the Jewish people were ignorant to the fact that this was only a prelude. This was just entertainment for the Hitler Youth. But the pictures were in Der Sturmer every morning showing Jewish bastards, as they call them, the under race, doing this, putting dirty slogans against their fuhrer.

One incident that happened to me is one of my ex-school friends, pardon the expression, and I walked in the street. It was not yet that he wouldn't talk to me. And every store in every window had a picture of Adolf Hitler. And he pointed to one and says, isn't he gorgeous? And I like an idiot said, well I think he's an ugly man. Well, my buddy turned away and walked away from me. And that afternoon a big rock fell through one of our windows and that was his retaliation for saying that Hitler was ugly.

The Nazis not only pointed at Jews. I recall a monastery in the center of town. I think it was four stories high, the building. It was invaded one morning by the SS. And every priest and nun were chased to the top floor to the roof and thrown off and killed that way. And next morning, Der Sturmer announced with great pride that they had gotten rid of the center of the Catholic mission. And this was the way they were doing it.

Well, my dad was doing a gangbuster business and he thought that he was in good shape with Nazis. See being in textiles and representing a French firm with factories in Czechoslovakia, there was an unlimited flow of great materials, textiles for men's suits coming into the country. Germans were starved for that kind of thing. So they kept coming to

Vienna and buying, and buying, and buying. And my old man made a lot of money. And the Nazis let him do it because eventually they knew they were going to get it back anyhow.

Well, my dad was faithful. He went to work every day. And he came home every day and he was doing any more, no more sporting events, no more theaters, no more operas. All the stuff my dad liked was gone. But he was optimistic. Nevertheless, he made an application at the American consulate just in case to emigrate to the United States. We had Cousins in Detroit that wrote us an affidavit. And we made an application for a visa. Of course, we were told the waiting period was enormous, at least two, three, or four years, which was immaterial. My dad thought this was OK. We can make it.

Well, we made it till the 9th day of November, 1938. On November the 7th, in Paris, a young Jew, a 19-year-old Jew by the name of Grynszpan who was extremely upset with the Nazis because his parents, originally from Poland, were corralled and re-deported into Poland without being able to take any of their effects. And they were just thrown out of the country over the border.

And he was upset. And he picked up a gun, went to the German embassy, and one of the Germans, high-ranking Germans came down the steps. And this guy shot him. And the German fell down. I recall big yell in the Vienna radio about Jewish murderers and what have you. Well, it took this German two days to die, until November the 9th, 1938.

And what happened at that point, at least, I'm still not sure how the chain of command came down on this thing. But at 6 o'clock at night on the 9th, what happened at that point was in Germany, all of Germany, on the night of November 9th, total war was declared on the Jewish people. 267 synagogues were desecrated and set afire. More than 7,500 Jewish shops were vandalized. 29,756 Jews were sent to Dachau and Buchenwald, two notorious concentration camps.

Over 250 Jews were killed, which now we know meant nothing. But it was an incredible amount for that time. Thousands were brutally beaten throughout every city and police station. This program was the beginning of the Holocaust. The Nazis called it Kristallnacht, the night of the broken glass. It lasted exactly 24 hours.

Now the Jews started to pay attention. It became frantic in our town, in Vienna. Everybody had to run and try to get a visa. It was imperative to get out of the country. It was so proven now. The articles in the papers, and the radio, and the propaganda said now we want to get rid of the Jews. We don't care how it happens. Hitler, as a matter of fact, made a big speech at the time to the world and says, you better get rid of the Jews for us, or we will have to find a different solution.

Today, of course, we know what that solution was. But at the time there were talks that they were going to send all the Jews to the Island of Madagascar, and this, and that. Everything was rumors and nothing made sense.

Well, the end of December of 1938, when my dad got to work that day, the SS was waiting for him. And he was arrested and taken to a local jail in [NON-ENGLISH], in Vienna, where he was sitting for six weeks. And finally was called for interrogation. And he was getting the news. Either you sign your business over to Nazi caretakers, or you will be sent to Dachau. Well the choice was very easy for my dad. He signed and he was released with the understanding that he will get out of the country as rapidly as possible.

Well, now that the business was gone, they got to the apartment. We lived in an absolutely gorgeous apartment, which at one time belonged to the-- I wouldn't say royal family, to the empress. And this was like a summer little place. It had three stories. The first floor was very lavish. That was our apartment. And there were two smaller apartments on top of that belonged to the help.

Well, that apartment, of course, we weren't supposed to keep anymore. And the Nazis set up an auction for all the furniture and belongings that we couldn't have anymore as Jews. The auction of Jewish property was a very simple matter. It was put in the local newspaper that an auction will take place of Jewish property at such a day, such a time. And the people used to come with their trucks, and buy, load it up, and they were gone.

Of course, the price that was requested was so small that anybody could afford anything. Now, we had a very, very

beautiful three bedroom apartment with beautiful furniture. And the total price that was gotten for all of that was about approximately an American money \$2.50, which we didn't get. My father had to sign that it was donated to a Nazi charity which usually was the Nazi party.

Well, now we had nothing left, and we were put into a small apartment with other families awaiting immigration. There was no way that we could get to the United States in a big hurry. It was just impossible. So my father was looking for all kinds of ways to get out. And one of the ways that looked like a good idea was temporarily to get to another country which was not Nazi dominated, where you can get to fairly easily and await either immigration or the Nazis falling down, which was improbable, of course.

So my dad was thinking in terms of getting to Italy, which was an ally of Germany, and where you didn't need a visa to get to, and then possibly get into France illegally, which means without a visa. Now my sister and her husband at that point already lived in Nice, in France. They suggested we should get to Sanremo, and then they will arrange for us to get over the border, and then arrange for residence in Nice.

Well the first step in this, of course, was to get yourself a passport. You can't travel without papers. And that's the first thing we had to do. I recall that very clearly. We had to go to the Gestapo with all kinds of documents proving first of all that you were a full blooded Jew, that your four grandparents were all Jewish. Because at that time, already the Nazis would not give a passport to a non-Jew, an Aryan, because they already knew there was going to be war. And they're going to need soldiers. They didn't want to lose one man, not even one.

So I recall, we had a paper from the [NON-ENGLISH] that proved that we were full blooded Jews. We had another paper from the local police, and from the government that we didn't owe any back taxes. And we paraded ourselves-- my mother, father, and myself into the Gestapo in Vienna to obtain a passport. That was a very, very, very difficult day. There was a lot of people lined up, a lot of Nazis in uniform, brown shirts, SS, walking by you and abusing, nudging, spitting, beating down. Because we were, after all, only Jews.

And at the end of the day, we were given a German passport. This, my friends, was a Nazi passport. You see the brown color, the swastika. The only difference here was this was a Nazi passport issued to a Jew. This was the Jewish passport with the red J inside, so that the whole world should know this was a marked animal, this was a dirty Jew.

By April, we were ready for immigration. I recall we boarded a train, and we were allowed to take 20 Reichsmarks per person, which was approximately \$5 each, out of the country. Now it is quite clear that a man like my dad who had capabilities was able to get money, and gold, and what have you out of the country before we even got there. It was, of course, at a great price. But it was possible.

Now I recall my dad had a lot of gold pieces made from gold coins that were given to myself and my sister at the time by an uncle of mine who was a jeweler. And every holiday we got a gold piece. Well my dad had it all melted down and had made cigarette cases, watch chains, and all kinds of good stuff that was brought out by non-Jewish people for a good fee. So that awaited us on the other side.

We also had-- he bought a lot of good cameras like Leicas and Contacts, I think a total of about 10 or so. Which also were already on the other side. They were valued at a lot of money at the time. And my dad thought this will carry us over. Well, we got to the train and we were out. We went to Italy. The border was no problem. All you had to do is flash your passport, and the German border people let you right through, no arguments. And the Italians couldn't care less who you were. As long as you had some papers they let you in.

So now we got into Italy. We went through Milan, changed trains we went to Sanremo, which was a paradise on Earth. And there we awaited my sister to come in and make the arrangements. And that was what happened. She was there. And I recall that night we were supposed to get over the border. And they hired a cab driver to take us up to the mountains, and through, and all kinds of good stuff. And of course, this guy never knew where he was going, and nothing really happened.

So it did not work, you see? And had we not known what my sister knew at the time, we would have probably paid the

money and never got to France. Well we got back to Sanremo. And new arrangements were being made. Something happened that day that remained in my brain. As I was walking on the boardwalk, and it was a beautiful day, and of course, it was different. There were palm trees. It was the Mediterranean and it was gorgeous weather.

And as we were walking one way, down the other way came a small group of people in very familiar uniforms. They were Nazis. And as they came closer, and they were laughing and chatting. It was Field Marshal Goering and his entourage, fat Mr. Goering walking down and just crossing by these Jews, and never even knowing it.

But it was an impressive thing to see such a big dignitary from Nazi Germany right in front of you. Well that night, we finally got out of it. It was arranged that we should enter a piece of property, which was on the border. As a matter of fact, half of the property was in Italy and half was in France. It was owned by a Russian scientist. I don't recall his name. But he wasn't living there. He was just using this area as a lab.

He was working on a youth serum with a bunch of monkeys. I recall that. And that's all we heard at night when we got in there. Well, the plan was we should enter that property on the Italian side, walk through it, and get out on the French side. A cab would be waiting for us and take us to Nice.

Well, most of it was true. We got in there at night all right. We were very scared because we didn't know what we was going into. And we just walked and walked, and now we were looking for the exit on the French side. And there wasn't any. All there was a gate which was climbable, and a lamppost which had to be climbed down, which we did, all of us even my mom. And when we got down on the ground there was no cab. There was a small street, of course.

And then right away there was the Mediterranean, the water. So we walked that little street up. Came into a small town which we then knew was called Menton, a border town. And we saw a bus that had the name Nice on it. And we figured what can happen. We better take the bus and go to Nice, and see if we can wake up my brother-in-law, so we can get out of this. Because we were not used to democracies that people didn't bother anybody. That this was glorious country. This was the Monte Carlo country, where people came to vacation, to gamble, and have lots of fun, the rich.

Well, we took the bus and we were scared to even open our mouth, because we couldn't speak French. But nobody cared because there were so many foreigners there anyhow. We didn't know. We had a little money. We paid for the fare. We got to Nice. And we didn't know where we were going, of course, when we got there. And we finally realized that we couldn't find anybody at night. We had no way of doing it. So we decided we're going to go to a hotel, after walking a little bit in the middle of the night.

It was scary. And when we got to the hotel, again, nobody asked you for papers. All you had to do is like we do here. Sign a card, and they gave you a room. Well, next morning when it was daylight, we finally got to my brother-in-law. And he immediately took us to the local police station to make arrangements for residence. It was a very easy way to get the first piece of paper.

The French had a policy. They did not issue immigration visas to anybody. But if you managed to get into the country one way or the other, they would issue you a temporary permit, usually for one month. It was a green piece of paper like a green card here. And it was good for one month, renewable. All you had to be able to do is support yourself without having to work.

And of course, that was easy enough. Everybody had a little money. And the ones that didn't have any would borrow from other people to show them that they had enough. That's all the French wanted. And we were now really seriously waiting for our American immigration visa, which was very slow to come by, only because there were so many applicants throughout all of the German owned and occupied territories. Everybody wanted to come to the US, and rightfully so.

We were in no hurry really because we were now in a free country. It was absolutely gorgeous. I got myself a little job in a photo place, even though I wasn't supposed to work. But nobody really cared. Didn't make any money, but I learned myself a trade. Well, everything was moving along pretty nicely until we got into a situation which got very dangerous with war. As we all know, Hitler was negotiating with the French and the British about peace. And they were appeasing

it, and everybody was believing Hitler which was a big mistake.

And finally, we are talking about September the 1st, I believe it was, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. And that was a very serious thing. Because the French and the British had a non-aggression pact with the Polish people. And therefore on September the 3rd, the French and the British declared war on Hitler Germany.

What that meant to us was that immediately we Austrian or ex-Austrian Jews, now became pretty much undesirable. Because we were not French and we were living on the French border with Italy. And therefore we weren't supposed to be there because we were foreigners. So we were told to get ourselves out of there into the interior somewhere, where we are not dangerous to the country. And they put us on the train in Nice, in a train that went to Biarritz, which was on the Spanish border.

And there again, they said, well, you can't stay here because you're foreigners. So by the time we got through with this thing, they sent us to a small town close to Paris. And I recall the first day we were there, there was an aerial alert. The sirens went off in the middle of the night, because one small plane crossed the border. I believe it was really nothing at that point. But the whole country was alerted because of that. And we had to get into the woods.

We hardly had time to put our pants on. And we stayed three hours until the alert was over. Then that went on for about three nights. And then finally my dad, and my brother-in-law, and my sister were there. And we said, that's no good. Let's go somewhere where it's normal. And we decided to go to Vichy.

Now Vichy was a nice tourist town with baths and spas, and it was quite nice-- and the French were involved in World War II, and they were claiming that they would be in Germany within five or six weeks, no problem at all. They were so superior. And they will finally get them. And that will be the end of everything. And we believed that. We believed the French propaganda that they would have an offensive and go into Germany and terminate this whole nonsense.

Well, nothing happened. The French were sitting in their Line Maginot, a defense line they built right after World War I, so that the disaster shouldn't happen anymore. The Germans had built a defense line right across from them which they called the Line Siegfried. And they set in that one supposedly.

Well, everybody was sitting contented. This was another one of those trench warfares where nobody's going to do anything. And finally somebody is going to quit. Well, I'll tell you what really happened. The Nazis were preparing for the Western invasion. And on May the 10th, on my birthday, they decided to invade France. But instead of coming straight on against their really tough defense Line, the Line Maginot, they went by North. They invaded Holland and Belgium, beat both of these countries into total submission and entered France through the northern border, where there were no fortifications.

And to make a very, very difficult story very short, the Nazi troops marched in the Champs-Elysees in Paris 41 days later. June 21, France capitulated without any reservations. Marshal Petain became their president, shook hands with Adolf Hitler. And France was now a beaten country. The armistice that was given to them was brutal.

They had to pay for their own occupation. They had to furnish Nazi Germany with labor that every able-bodied French man had to serve two months of work in Nazi Germany for the war effort. Well on September the 13th, in the same country Pierre Laval took over the French government. And he was one of the radical brutal Nazi followers that they could possibly find. And he made a speech on that September 13.

And he said that he wanted total German victory, that he believes in the German super race. And if the French people do not understand what it's all about and who to follow, he will have to pay dearly. Well, this was the country we were living in now. It was a free unoccupied zone we were living in. Because the Germans did not find it necessary to occupy the whole country, because the French were so collaborating.

So even though we were not German occupied in Nice, we were still under German domination. Because every month when we had to go to our permit renewal, they could have picked us up and sent us away.

Now, I don't mind telling you that Jewish people in this were totally unaware of the deportations. They were totally unaware of ghettos and death camps for that matter. So once in a while, some Jewish people went to renew their permit and didn't come back. So we said, well they sent them to work. Big deal. They'll come back. We never really believed that this was final.

1941 came, and my father was arrested by the French. And the reason for his arrest was that he was so desperate to get his American visa and it didn't come, that he tried to purchase a counterfeit Cuban visa for the family.

I recall, there was a lot of money involved in that. And he went to get it. And came home with the piece of paper. And it was done so badly that a kid could have done it with a stamp set. And he realized that when he showed it to me at the time. And he realized that he was being taken. And he was very angry. And he was going to go back and get his money back.

Well, he got back there already and they were already the French police was there to arrest the so-called counterfeiters. And he and seven other Jews were in the same boat. And they were asked if they would like to testify against these terrible counterfeiters. And of course, my dad, he wanted his money back. He said, sure.

Well they took him into the police station and they booked him. And they put him in the local jail in Nice where they kept him for six months, awaiting trial, a trial for what nobody knew. But it was a trial. We had a very, very good attorney from Paris that was brought in. He defended all the Jews for that matter and won an annulment. It wasn't even a case. It was an annulment.

I recall he left before the verdict even came up. Well my dad was brought back to prison. And I expected him to be liberated that night. And he didn't come out. I went to wait for him the next day and he didn't come out, and the next day he didn't come out. And finally I was told by the local prefecture that he will not be liberated because being Jewish, he would have to be put into what they called at the time a holding camp, probably in Gurs.

And I recall my dad was taken by a streetcar to the railroad station in handcuffs with the other seven guys. And he was taken away. And that's the last I ever saw of him. We'll come back to him just a little bit later.

At this point, of course, all immigration to the West had stopped. There was no more transportation. There was absolutely no way anybody can go to the West. And what Hitler really wanted was the immigration of the Jews only to the East. And only the Nazis knew what was awaiting them in the East.

Well on December the 11th, Hitler did probably the most stupid thing that he ever could have done. A couple of days after Pearl Harbor, he decided it was time to ally himself with the Japanese. And he declared war all the United States of America. That wasn't the best move.

Well, after my father was deported, there was really no more chance to get out of the country. And it was a question of going underground every time that the permit renewal came about. I had a little contact in the police station where they told me, if it was safe to go this time, or if I should go underground the next time.

And we knew a family, my mom and I, they were French Nazis, S-O-L. He was walking around in a uniform all the time. And he decided to hide us. Was it something he knew or what it was? We were taken care of in their apartment in Nice. And of course, this went on until November of 1942. And then something drastic happened.

The Nazis were very unhappy with the performance of the non-occupied zone in France. And there was not enough labor coming forth to them, not enough contribution to the war effort. So they decided to occupy the rest of the country. And they sent the second SS Panzer division to do the job. Of course, there was no resistance. So there was no big deal. But what happened at that point was that the French fleet which was anchored in Toulon, was supposed to join the German fleet in the war against the Allies.

They decided to scuttle that fleet. And what happened is they knocked off 89 craft. They sank them, battleships from big to small, even u-boats. The whole thing went down the drain. And that really made the Germans extremely angry. Now,

I was bracing myself in Nice for the arrival of the SS. And sudden disaster, of course, and to my surprise instead of the SS, I saw Italian soldiers arriving in my town.

Now, the Italians were given a small part of France to occupy because after all they were Allies of Hitler. And they were helping in the war in Russia and so on. So what happened at that point was a total miracle. We realized all of a sudden that the so-called fascist Italians were total pussycats. They didn't care if you were a Jew or not a Jew. They didn't want to really make war. They just did their thing.

So they came into Nice and they established a headquarters. And they let the synagogue reopen. I recall the headquarters, the Italian headquarters was right next door to the synagogue, which was closed forever. And all of a sudden it was reopened. Jewish people were put in charge to protect other Jewish people. And of course, this area now the South East of France became a haven for people that were wandering, trying to escape the Nazis. And whoever could get in the Jewish synagogue would issue papers with the Italian benediction, so that the French police couldn't touch them.

And the next thing that they did, they set up the Italians set up some forced residence areas throughout the area. By that we mean that they put Jews into good hotels in the Alps, anywhere, resort areas. And gave them the lodging and the food and protected them, so that the Nazis couldn't touch them. This was incredible.

But we were still in Nice. And we still had a problem. The problem was the renewal of the permit, it still went on. And by January of 1943, finally came the time where I was told by my contact this is it. If you come now, even though the Italians are here, you're going to Germany. And in a desperation move, I went to the Italian headquarters and I begged them to help me. I found myself in good company, and about 40 other Jewish people were in the same boat. And what the Italians decided at the time was to just arrest us.

And they would send us to a prisoner of war camp, a civilian prisoner of war camp in the area, hold us there for a few days for processing, and then send us to Italy to a small town next to Rome into one of their famous forced residences. I had no idea what they were talking about. But it was a good idea. And I went for it.

Well, we were put on a truck. And we were traveling to a town called Sospel. There was a French army installation which was converted to a civilian prisoner of war camp. What that meant, that's where they kept the British and American citizens that lived in that rich French area. They had their villas and their money, and they were, of course, taken prisoner. But they wanted to treat them well because they wanted reciprocity. They wanted the Italians in this country being treated well, too.

So we got put into that camp. And the first thing they did, they fed us. They opened up the kitchen and they gave us a good Italian solid food, Italian meatballs and spaghetti, and a piece of white bread, stuff we hadn't seen in ages because we were starvation bound in France. There was no food stamps for Jewish people. Therefore, we had nothing to eat. Well, we got in there and it was a festivity. And they assigned us to a big room with cots in it. And that everybody got a bed to sleep in. It was clean.

And the next morning when we got up they called us for breakfast. And while we were at breakfast in the mess hall, the Italian soldiers were making our beds. And this was some kind of prison. Let me tell you. This was unbelievable. Three beautiful meals a day, the Italian soldiers were congenial. They had an infirmary that treated people. Even a couple of Orthodox Jews that did not want to eat non-kosher foods were given their own raw food to cook for themselves.

So I recall they set up a kitchen outside, like a barbecue type thing. And they were cooking their kosher food and they were allowed to eat it. But Passover came. They had a Seder. And the commanding officer came in to participate and see what was going on. So it was quite incredible that the Italians were so nonchalant about the Jews, even though they were fascists, and Mussolini always ordered stern measures against the Jews, just to please Hitler anyhow.

The only problem with the Italians was they had a very slow memory. For the three or four days we were supposed to stay in that camp, we stayed four months. They forgot about us. Something happened about two months into our stay. I will never forget that one.

That morning, several trucks of Nazis arrived in front of the gate. I recall they were SS. They were Totenkopf SS, the ones that were created exclusively by Adolf Hitler to eliminate and kill Jews. Well, they arrived with quite an armament-- cannons, something that resembled bazookas, whatever. And they set themselves up and their main man came into the camp and negotiated with our commanding officer to surrender all the Jews in the camp, not just us 40, but all the American and British Jews, the same.

And the refusal was total. He was led out of the camp. Our nice Italian commander ordered his troops to set up the armament against the Germans. And there was a standoff. And finally, the Germans left. They took the hint. And we were saved again. That was an incredible situation that this should even happen. That two Allies were fighting over a bunch of Jews. But it did happen.

Well, after two months later, we were finally all of a sudden called into the office, and we were told that we are now liberated. We are free to go. Not really free, they assigned us to a forced residence in a town called Saint-Martin-VÃ©subie. Same thing here, there was a town with about 1,000 Jews. I didn't even know it existed.

We were given a room, my mother and I, and food. And the only thing we had to do in order to be in good graces was twice a day to sign in with the Italian commander. There was a small little hut in the middle of town, a small town, with a couple of soldiers in there. And all you had to do is give them your name, and they marked you down that you were here. You didn't escape, like we wanted to.

Well, this was incredible. This was beautiful, what a way to wait out the end of the war. We were very hopeful that maybe eventually somebody is going to be victorious against the Nazis, and maybe we can escape this nonsense. And even if the Nazis win when the war is over, finally go somewhere and even as second class citizen, survive. We had made up our minds we didn't really want to die.

And it got clearer and clearer that this was really the objective, death. But while we were with the Italians, it was a safe situation. It was safe all right. But on September the 8th of 1943, the Italians decided they had enough of the war and they surrendered to the Allies. Mussolini was arrested. And on the 23rd of September, Maresciallo Badoglio signed an armistice with Eisenhower in Malta. What that meant now is that the Italian troops decided the war was over for them and they were going to go home.

Of course, you can imagine how ticked off the Nazis were at the fact that their Allies broke up the axis. And they were now coming up the valley with their armament to take over the area, to take over all the Italian occupied territory. Now, we had about out of the 1,000 Jewish people in this town, 700 decided they were going to follow the Italians wherever they went. And the only way the Italians could get out of there now is by foot. They had to leave all their stuff behind. And they took to the mountains to get into Italy. They wanted to go home. They didn't want to become prisoners of war.

So as they prepared to leave, so did 700 or so Jewish people of all ages. Because of the fact that I spoke at that point fluent Italian, I was declared the leader of the Jews, which was neither here nor there at the point. But what developed out of this was very important. As we went into these mountains, the Alps of course, nobody knew what we were going into. What we did, we went into an elevation of 16,000 feet of altitude.

It took us two days and one night to achieve that climb. And the amazing part was that even though it became very rugged and difficult, everybody made it. We finally got the last 500 feet which was the toughest, and we got over. And now we were in Italy. And we realized that we were in Italy. Everything got smooth, and nice, and easy. And as we descended from that crest, that mountain crest, there were no roads there-- we got into an old Italian Fort, a fortification, which was built during World War I against the French.

And we heard a lot of singing going on and celebrating. And what it was, was the Italian soldiers were celebrating their newfound peace, their armistice was signed. They were going to go home, discharged from the army. It was all over. Well, we were received by an officer, a first lieutenant, who was in charge. And he asked me at the point what we had here. And I explained to them there were about 700 Jewish refugees [NON-ENGLISH].

And they were very hungry and tired. And could he help us. He gave orders to set up cots. He gave orders to set up the kitchens. They were cooking meals. They were feeding the people. They were laying them down to rest. And he went to this office with me and he made a phone call to Cuneo, which was the nearest city. And he was questioning his commanding officer what he should do with the 700 or so Jewish refugees that had come from France. He was put on hold.

And after a couple of minutes, whoever came on the phone told him to stay put, to keep them there, that they will be taken care of. And at that point, we both knew we were not talking to Americans and British. We were talking to Nazis. We did not want to get anybody upset or into a panic. So by early morning, everybody was awakened. And we marched them down the mountain on a side path, not the main road now. There was a main road getting to that fort. And we didn't take it because in the middle of the night I thought I heard a Nazi patrol come in. They didn't enter the fort. But they just checked it out.

Well, we got down the mountain and we arrived at a small town. The town was called Valdieri. It was in the [NON-ENGLISH]. It was a gorgeous September day. And the 700 Jewish people were very, very happy with what they had accomplished. They were all assembling in the center of that little town. And they were singing. And they were having good fun. And there were a couple of little grocery stores, and they were able to buy some salami and bread and feed themselves. And they were jubilant that they were now free. And the British are going to come, and the Americans are going to come, and they're just going to wait for them.

Well, I had a hunch this wasn't that simple. Because I knew there were Nazis in the area. And I had a bunch of friends. My mom and myself, and about 10 of our friends decided we had a little powwow that this didn't look too good. And we should get on the side of this little town, maybe in the little woods, and see what's going to happen. I presume maybe others did the same. But I don't know of it. But what we did at that point was a wise move.

Because around 4 o'clock in the afternoon it happened. 40 trucks of the Wehrmacht arrived, encircled the town, set up a loudspeaker system and surrounded it with soldiers, with weapons drawn. The announcement over the loudspeakers was in German that all the Jews are to surrender on the spot, and march peacefully into the trucks or they will be machine gunned.

Well, there wasn't much of a choice. There were all kinds of Jewish people of all ages, unarmed. And out of despair, they marched into the trucks. The Nazis wrapped it up and left. Well, I knew later what happened to them. They were taken to Cuneo, and given to the Italian army to guard. And that was a terrible thing that really happened, because even so the Italians were very good to the Jews and they didn't torture them or nothing, they gave them food and lodging in that camp. And they gave them even passes to go to the movies.

It wasn't long lived, of course. But what happened in the meantime to us 12 was we went up a little mountain and down the next one. We now found ourselves in a big valley, a valley that had two roads, a main road. It had a military road on the side, and it had a river. It was the Valle Stura. The river was called the Stura, and it looked like there were on the side of the one mountain a lot of barns and little peasant houses. And we decided to cross the road, and got to one of those farmers who immediately offered one of his barns as a shelter, brought food, never accepted payment.

And he just helped, which was again an incredible story. But we were under German occupation, and there was no question about it. And as safe as this might have been, I didn't think it was safe enough. And I was very lucky at the time. Because at the age of 19, you are bait. And there were a group of people coming through in uniform, and they were all lieutenants, Italians. They called themselves deserters.

And their purpose in life was to wait it out in the mountains for another week or two until the Allies come, and then go home. And this is just a little group they created to be able to feed themselves, and not surrender to the Nazis. And I begged them to accept me, and they did. They gave me a rifle, and said you're in the army now. And we went up higher and higher and higher. And it was gorgeous. I recall it was in the Alps. There was a little mountain lake, and we were fishing for trout with hand grenades, German hand grenades. They took seven seconds to explode.

So when they went into the lake and then exploded all these fish came up and we ate and we shot deer and it was

terrific. But one day, one of the lieutenants came up to me. And he says, I would like you to do us a favor. We don't know what's going on in town, maybe we are already liberated. Let me have your civilian clothes and I'll give you my uniform, and I'll investigate. And when I come back we'll change clothes again. And like an idiot I gave it to him. And of course this man never showed up again.

He now gave me his uniform and his identification papers. And overnight, I had now become a first lieutenant in what is to become the Italian underground. As I was told, this was the beginning of the first Alpine division. Us 30 would be the nucleus of the military police, and we would accept deserters, and new members from wherever we could. This was a resistance group, and it was going on all over northern Italy. Well, I found myself to be a partisan. And good so, it was a good thing. Because I was given the chance to fight back.

In 1944, the Allies landed in Anzio and Nettuno in Southern Italy. It was slow to Monte Cassino. But by May, our division was 20,000 men strong. And now we were doing little raids. We were attacking German positions. We were attacking electrical plants, whatever we could with a limited amount of armament.

And this went on till June 6th which was D-day, of course. And now the Germans had to attack our valley. They had to attack it because it was one of the main routes into France and our job now was to hold them back. This was throughout all of Northern Italy, our partisan groups now were fighting the Nazis. And it wasn't a fair fight, because they had tanks. We had rifles. But even so, the terrain lent itself to delay them, and delay them with the minimum amount of losses.

And it took them, at least, I would say two weeks. It's hard to remember now exactly the time limit but about two weeks to get to the border. And by that time the Allies were implanted firmly. They had already had a secondary department in the South of France. They were on the borders and the Germans were trapped in Italy.

Now, we were attacked by the Wehrmacht, of course. And there were soldiers from the Afrika Korps, Rommel's Afrika Korps was stuck in there. And then we had the Waffen-SS. They were stuck in there. And there was no breakthrough over the borders. We now got a tremendous amount of deserters. They were coming freely because the Germans were here. They had created a tremendous climate of brutality. There were executions of civilians, hostages, torture, all kinds of Nazi stuff that the Italians never really knew. And that got them to us.

And the more they came, the more we took them. And now we got our orders now from the Allies. You see, now that France was being liberated and it was liberated, and the Allies were implanted firmly and they were going for their last push into Germany, they told us what they wanted from us. And what they wanted from us was very simple, attack their supply lines. Knock off power plants. And the reason was simple. All the trains in northern Italy were running on electric power. And if you knocked off the power plants, there were no trains.

They wanted us to destroy all the little bridges. As they rebuilt them, we blew them up. So they couldn't get into the valleys freely. One of the main jobs we had to do was to salvage B-17 crews that were shot down. In those days, the Allies especially the Americans, did carpet bombing, mass bombings of the northern Italian industrial areas. And by that, I mean they came in with 800, 900, 1,000 planes at one time. It was an awesome sight to see the sun disappear under airplanes. It was an incredible thing that they could fly so close together and not kill each other.

And they went in and they bombed Milano, Torino where the industry was, the help for the Nazis. And then on the way back, anybody that was hit by flak or it was very little airplane left, airplane power, the Nazis had nothing left. But they had anti-aircraft fire. And some of the planes were hurt and shot down. And the flyers were told to parachute over our occupied lands, which they usually did. And our job was to get these guys. Pick them up so they don't fall into German hands, and bring them back into France.

The paradox of the whole thing was that the war in France was over. And I was still sitting in a war. Had I picked myself up at that point and go into France and stay there, I would have been liberated a year earlier. But it never occurred to me. And also my mother was in Italy, hiding from one little barn to the other, and amazingly enough, making it.

Well by April 30 of 1945, our division was 60,000 men strong. And we were told to come down from the mountains. At

that point, April 30 was a due day. We were ready for the final attack. We had one major problem. 90% of our boys were in green uniforms. They were deserters. They had fascist uniforms. And how are you going to go attack green uniforms when your guys have green uniforms? So the main project was how do you get clothes for them. Of course, that was impossible. But the farmers' wives found a solution.

They all used to be very good in dyeing clothes. And I recall they brought out the big kettles. And they set up, fires outside. And all these uniforms were dyed into multi colors. We were red soldiers, and blue soldiers, and brown soldiers, and anything but green. And it was a real funny look to them. But it was an important thing. We laughed a lot at the time because I think we knew already we had won the war. And we were ready to go.

Well, we came down from the mountain. And we found nothing. The Germans had retreated. They had blown up the main bridge. And we occupied Cuneo without any shooting really. I traded my mule for a Fiat ambulance. The only problem with that car was that it didn't have a reverse, but otherwise it was quite a new thing for me, and quite pleasurable.

We took over the government of Cuneo. The military police was put into action. Now our jobs were very distinct. We had to clean up the area before the Allies arrived. And everything would come back to normal. We had a lot of collaborators in our hands, what we called spies, women that slept with Nazis, all kinds of terrific stuff. And these people had to go and be judged. Now our 30 guys were not only tribunal, but they were executioners.

Most people that came through us were really guilty people and they had created quite a hardship, death among our people. And they were condemned to die. And when we had 30 of them condemned to die, which took about 60 minutes to do, they would be lined up against the prison wall and shot. That was the only way to try to get some kind of reasoning to this thing, and clean it so that when the Allies come in we can proceed to go home.

One of the main jobs we had, of course, was at this point take care of the SS. The SS were to be executed without a trial, reason for it being the Ardennes. The last German push trying to win the war against the Allies was in the Ardennes in France. Even though it failed, the Nazis executed without even blinking an eye a lot of American soldiers that they captured. They put them into an open field, pulled up some trucks, and machine gunned them.

And because of that brutal situation, the Allies executed an order that any SS that is being captured is to be shot on the spot. Well, there was nothing wrong with that, except the SS ran into the mountains where we just came from. And we weren't about to go back there and being shot by them. So we just decided we going to wait for them to get good and hungry and come down one by one, which eventually they did.

You will probably want to know how can we recognize and SS in civilian clothes. Well this was such an elite group that Adolf Hitler decided that they had priority in being helped in case of a problem in the war or being wounded and so on. So they had their blood type tattooed under the right armpit. And that was a dead giveaway. The SS were being captured one by one. The SS were being shot one by one. The SS were being made to dig their own graves one by one. And then one or two were kept behind to just cover the graves. It was one of the finer moments of my life.

The German troops refused to surrender to the partisans because according to their propaganda, we were total animals. We were cutting off ears, torturing to death, and doing all kinds of wonderful things that they did, and they really taught us. I'm sure that some of it was true. But in order not to be submitted to that kind of problem, they decided to march towards a prisoner of war camp that the Americans had established for them close to the city of Milan.

Now the German army was totally defeated. We had taken care of all their wheels for the last year of the war. We had orders to destroy everything that rolled from baby carriages, to fire engines, to tanks, to trucks and so on. And that was done. And that once proud German army retreated by foot to Milan. And what we finally found out was like a death march. Even though they looked like hell. They were dirty, filthy, without shoes, without transportation, on their way to a prisoner of war camp and to being finally repatriated to their home. And they had lost the war and they knew it.

They burned every house and barn, they found on the way. They took every inhabitant out, lined them up against the wall and shot them, except for the smallest infant. They let that lay there and cry. Why they did this I'll never know. All

I know it was a brutal Nazi operation that was totally unnecessary because the war was over. The armistice was signed. They unconditionally surrendered to the Allies. And they all knew it, but they still did it.

Well, I had to stay as I said, another month in Italy. We took care of our little SS problems and so on, and arranged for a re transportation to France. I realized now that I was a very lucky guy. I was alive. I was never captured by the Nazis. And I'm going to go home now. And the fact was I won the war. So it was arranged with the American commander to transport my mother and myself back to Nice. Because we did not know that there was such a thing as death camps the Nazis had created. And I figured that my dad's going to come back from his workplace in Germany, and the only way he knew how to come back is where they took him from.

So we decided we were going to go back to Nice, and then we're going to see what's going to happen. Well we were repatriated. My mother was picked up. I was riding a lead Jeep of that transport column. I was in the uniform of the 101 airborne at the time, which we had about 200 of those guys parachuted with us. And the military police was given their uniforms. And we were kind of part of them, not really officially but they adopted us.

Well, we got into Nice. We were brought to a hotel on Boulevard Victor Hugo, where they did the screening. And this was an important thing because they never knew who infiltrated the country. It could have been some long lost SS that came back and they were just going to go and hide and go underground. So I was interviewed by a French lieutenant. Mind you I was speaking perfect French, of course. And we had a good chat. I was a lieutenant. He was a lieutenant.

And we were happy the war was over, and so on. It was quite a chat. And the only thing was when it came down to the nitty gritty, my name, birthplace, and so on, when he wrote all that down and he wrote down Vienna, Austria. He did not write Vienna, Austria. He wrote Vienna, Germany. He still thought that Austria was Germany. He couldn't put it in his head that it separated again.

So he said to me, I have some very bad news for you, young man. See, you are a German. And I have to put you in a small area. I have to detain you, until we find out exactly who you are. And I had no choice in the matter. I was put in a car with my mother. And we were driven to a place which I knew well was called the Hotel Suisse. It was very scenic. It was right on the Mediterranean. But when I got in there, I realized this wasn't the hotel I knew at one time. This was like a prison.

That's where they kept all the people they were unsure about. And it was a stay of three weeks. I was liberated. And I was in prison. And the most terrible part about it, of course, these rooms these was nothing in there but a bit of hay to sleep on. And the French fed you so-so food, because they couldn't care less about you to begin with. And finally, I broke through that barrier. And I got a hold of an officer. And I explained to him, where he could go to find out who I really was, that my papers were in the French police. That my attorney was Monsieur Augier. And please contact him. Here's his address.

And within two days, I was given my freedom. This officer did it for me. My mother and I were liberated. We were set free. We had really nowhere to go. We had very, very little money, only a little bit was given to me at my discharge. I didn't know what to do. So I went back to the people that rented us the apartment at one time. And they took us in without asking for money at that point. They knew it would come. And they gave us our old apartment, a furnished apartment back.

At that point, I saw things that I never knew existed. I was waiting for my dad and he didn't show up I saw people walking the streets. They looked like walking dead, skeletons with numbers tattooed on their arm, shaved heads with the women in Russian, old Russian peasant shoes and clothes. And when I asked, questions nobody would speak. Nobody would say anything.

It took about a few weeks for them to open up. And now the news came out, the news about death camps, Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen. All these names appeared, the millions of people that were gassed, burned, or shot, put into mass graves, Babi Yar-- all the stuff that happened that nobody knew. I presume they knew it in this country. But we didn't in Europe. It was such a well-kept secret.

Well while this was going on and I was trying to resettle, it occurred to me I should go by the last place, the last known address I had in Nice that my sister knew. And I went by there to tell these people who were also Nazis at one time that I was alive, and the woman who was in a wheelchair told me that her husband had left her. But there was a telegram for me. And it was from my sister from Cuba. And she wanted to know if anybody was alive.

But you see she sent the telegram as soon as France was liberated in 1944. And for one year, I did not respond. Of course, I wasn't there. But that telegram had a prepaid response. And I set up a telegram and sent it to her after the war was over. And I presume she almost fell over realizing that after one year of not knowing two people of her family were still alive.

She immediately sent us a \$100 bill, which was a heck of a lot of money at the time, and started us back on the road of recovery. I'm going to resume this by giving you some details. We're going to summarize this whole thing. Excuse me.

The 700 that were taken by the Nazis in Italy were finally deported by the SS and wound up in Auschwitz, and all of them were executed. I do not know of any survivor from that area. Out of the 12 that went in the mountains with me, 11 really, only two were lost. One was shot by a German who was picking strawberries at the time. And when the man saw the two Germans in the side of the mountain, and he ran, they just shot him.

And the other one, a fellow by the name of Siegfried Schwartz, very, very bright guy, a little weird but bright very bright. He was taken by the fascists. And he was taken to Cuneo to jail. And when we got to jail to liberate the jail, I was trying to get to him. They had just shot him that morning. They executed him. So these were the two people we lost out of 12. And that was a very good percentage.

My dad was deported to Auschwitz. The French had issued me a paper where they gave me the itinerary and dates. He was taken to a camp in the non-occupied zone. He was then taken to Drancy, which was the occupied zone, which was a holding camp for deportations. It was one of the most horrible holding places-- filthy, dirty, rat infested. It was just as bad as a ghetto really. And he was taken from there to Auschwitz.

He met a kapo who fortunately my dad used to help in Vienna when he was in good shape. And this man was pretty poor. And my dad used to help him out. And he remembered. And he took my dad under his wing. So my father lasted a long time. But I met that kapo, after the war and he finally under threat of his life gave me the information what I wanted to know. My dad was executed during a moment of Nazi testing.

They were experimenting with how they can get rid of the Jews without spending the gas. And what they did is they starved the people to death. And when they were in such shape, where they just went into a coma they just put them into the crematorium and they burned them. And that's what happened to my dad. He was executed without gas.

I have this to good authority. I have the Red Cross right now investigating the exact date. Maybe I can put this to rest. I have an aunt that survived Bergen-Belsen. The last day before liberation, all the women in that camp were hurtled into the center of the camp itself. And they were all machine gunned. My aunt fell under whole bunch of bodies and didn't dare to breathe for three days and three nights.

And when the Allies finally came in with the bulldozers to take the bodies away, she had to get up. She was in shock. But she was alive. She was taken back to Vienna where she later died. Because she forgot to give herself a shot for diabetes. Well, I can see why.

My grandmother was almost 90 years old in Vienna. And she was taken down from where she lived. I recall it was in the fourth floor apartment in the second district. She was taken down to be marched to the train station for deportation to Auschwitz in Vienna. And when they started walking these people, she was in ill health and old and she fell. And I understand that a 19-year-old soldier went up to her, pulled his gun out of his holster and shot her in the head. And that was the end of my grandma.

I don't know how my grandfather died who was left behind, probably the same way. We were faced, of course, with mass shootings all over the Eastern areas, mass graves. 85% of my family died in the Holocaust. A total of 30 million

people perished during World War II. 6 million Jews died in death camps, and 6 million non-Jews died in death camps too.

Can you imagine 30 million people dying because of one mad man? But just remember one thing. Hitler didn't do this by himself. He had to have a lot of help. My mother and I emigrated to the United States on February the 11th, 1950. And my life turned around and became just beautiful. I became a citizen five years later. And it's only been up. I enjoy every minute of it. I'm proud to be alive. And I'm glad that I can tell this story so that nobody should ever forget that it ever happened. Thank you for listening.