

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN, CLEVELAND SECTION

HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Name of Interviewee	W. LOUIS COHN		
Name of Interviewer	Abraham Kay	Date	8/16/84
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NARRATIVE SUMMARY

W. Louis Cohn was born in Berlin in 1925. He had a younger sister, born in 1927, as well as an older brother. His father, Waldemar, was an attorney with the old German government, specializing in international law. From 1925 to 1931 his father worked in the German embassy in Nice, France. Louis's mother, Lottie Epstein, was born in Essen. Her parents, Alois and Amalie Epstein, were well to do since her father owned a locomotive factory in Wuppertal, near Dusseldorf.

In 1937, Louis and his family moved to the outskirts of Berlin. His father was a partner in a firm specializing in international law. They were part of the upper middle-class, assimilated into German life, and belonged to a Reform congregation. The services were conducted more in German than in Hebrew, and the religious school was like a community center.

Louis attended an elementary school from 1931 to 1935 without problems and then attended Gymnasium from 1935 to 1938. He was able to remain in school because his father was a decorated officer in WW I. However, in November 1938, Louis had to leave Gymnasium and enter an improvised Jewish school.

As anti-Semitism grew, Louis become more isolated and more aware of violence toward Jews. Police stood by when Jews were beaten in the streets on Yom Kippur of 1938. Able-bodied men were sent to concentration camps; most from Berlin went to Buchenwald.

In 1938 Louis's brother, Hans, a physician, emigrated to the U.S. His friend and mentor was Chester Bolton.

On December 10, 1938 his parents put Louis, his 11-year-old sister, and his ten-year-old cousin on a train to Holland where his cousin's grandmother lived. The children were searched at the border and missed the train. They were sent first to a refugee camp for two to three months, then to a children's home and then to another camp near Utrecht. His mother found the children in May 1939 and took them to Antwerp and then to Brussels.

The children went to school in Brussels for a year, but after the war started, all Jews became "stateless." In 1940, Louis was arrested by Belgian police because he was a German alien. He was sent to Paris and then was moved from camp to camp. When he was sent to Gurs, he met up with his father. At Gurs he worked in the censorship office and was able to smuggle news out, but finally he was caught smuggling letters. He continued to be moved; in August 1942 he learned that his father had been deported to Drancy and then to "points east." In a stopover at Marseilles, he saw his mother for the last time.

Louis was deported to Mauthausen in Germany, and he and some other young men planned an escape. They succeeded in August 1942 and went through France to Spain. There they were trained, along with escaped Americans, in return for promises to help fight the Germans.

In 1942 Louis was sent from Barcelona to Africa for basic training. Then he went to England where the OSS trained him in counter-espionage. The Americans and British commissioned him and assigned him to parachute into France and blow up wheels in a German motor pool there.

While in England, Louis tried to describe the camps to those he met. No one was interested in hearing about them.

After several months, Louis completed his tasks in France and began searching for his sister and parents. He found his sister who had been given the false name of Elise Carpentier and placed in a convent by a Jewish organization.

He then returned to England and received further training from the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division. He parachuted into France on D-Day, but was wounded on the beachhead and stayed in the hospital for three days. Then he fought with the allies in Northern France, Holland, and accompanied them into Berlin.

In Berlin he found his family's apartment building, which had been bombed. A neighbor, Miss Bartel, had hidden Jews, including his father. He told him about possessions buried in the yard, and he found his parents' keepsakes. All of his family were gone except his sister and his uncle's family in the U.S.

Louis went to Palestine where he worked on a kibbutz and helped train the Haganah. His uncle sent him non-quota immigration papers. He also had special status because he was a captain in the U.S. Army, and he became a citizen in the embassy.

In 1947 Louis came to Cleveland; he went to West Tech and to Fenn College and eventually became an engineer. He married Lottie Wolff in 1951. She had immigrated with her parents in 1940.

Louis felt that he survived because he worked hard and took care of himself. He gave credit to help from Quakers in Spain and counseling from Catholic chaplains. He missed his youth, but felt perhaps he learned something from the experience.

W. Louis Cohn

ABSTRACT

VIDEO 1 OF 2

PRESENT LIFE

Lives in Lyndhurst, Ohio. Married to Lottie P. Wolff, who works as office manager for American Jewish Committee. In U.S. since 1940. Has two daughters: Debby, 29, is married with one child; Terry, 24, lives in Cleveland. Works at TRW, previously worked for Otis Elevator.

FAMILY HISTORY

Father, Waldemar, was attorney with German government, specializing in international law. From 1925 to 1931 worked at German Embassy in Nice. Mother's family was wealthy - owned a locomotive factory in Wupperthal, near Dusseldorf. Grandfather, Ivan Cohn, was conductor of Hamburg Philharmonic in 1890s. Mother's parents were Alois and Amalie Epstein.

LOUIS BORN IN BERLIN, 1925

Sister was born in 1927. Now lives in Pepper Pike, Ohio. Married name is Krasny.

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY LIFE

In 1931, family lived in outskirts of Berlin. Father was a partner in international law firm. Uncle dealt in commodities trading with Russia. Louis remembers two people from father's firm: Beate Lowenthal and Georg Hamburger. Both emigrated to Australia, died there.

LOUIS'S PARENTS ARE ASSIMILATED JEWS

LOUIS'S EDUCATION

Went to elementary school from 1931-35 with no problems. Went to Gymnasium from 1935-38. Was allowed to attend only because father was decorated WW I veteran.

LOUIS BECOMES AWARE OF ANTI-SEMITISM

Sturmer Boxes in street with anti-Semitic, propoganda news. Changed for 1936 Olympics. Louis not allowed to belong to Hitler Youth. Louis became more isolated.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Synagogue services conducted mostly in German. Religious school became a community center, offering classes for children not able to attend school. Group Bar Mitzvah in Prinz Regenten Strasse Temple.

ANTI-SEMITIC VIOLENCE

Jews beaten in streets during Yom Kippur, while police did nothing. Temple in Prinz Regenten Strasse destroyed November 9, 1938. Vandalism on Kristallnacht.

MEN ARE SENT TO CONCENTRATION CAMPS. LOUIS'S FUTURE FATHER-IN-LAW SENT TO DACHAU

Most from Berlin were sent to Buchenwald.

MORE FAMILY HISTORY

Hans, oldest brother, emigrated to U.S. in 1938. Was a physician; friend and mentor was Chester Bolton. Berthold, a businessman, married a gentile. Tried to emigrate to Santa Domingo, but died in Marseilles in 1942. Uncle Ivan emigrated to Belgium in 1940. Hans's son is Dr. Peter Cohn, born 1933. Peter and his mother, also a physician, came to U.S. in 1940.

LOUIS'S SCHOOLING AFTER KRISTALLNACHT, 1938

Enrolled in improvised Jewish school. Planned to study medicine eventually.

LOUIS'S PARENTS SEND HIM AND TWO COUSINS TO HOLLAND. THEY ARE DETAINED AT THE BORDER, SENT TO REFUGEE CAMP.

Original destination was grandmother's house in Holland. Sent to refugee camp near Amsterdam. Then went to a children's home, next to another camp near Utrecht.

THEY ARE REUNITED WITH LOUIS'S PARENTS IN ANTWERP, MAY 1939

LOUIS TALKS ABOUT PROFESSOR PROBST IN BERLIN

MORE ON EARLY ANTI-SEMITISM

FAMILY MOVES FROM ANTWERP TO BRUSSELS IN MAY 1939

GERMANY DECLARES WAR ON POLAND. JEWS BECOME STATELESS.

LOUIS IS ARRESTED BY BELGIAN POLICE AS A GERMAN ALIEN, DEPORTED

TAKEN TO DRANCY, THEN MOVED TO VILLENEUVE DE BERG

Stayed 4-5 weeks, clearing fields.

NEXT IS SENT TO ST. CYPRIEN

Near Perpignon, in unoccupied France. Lived in old factory.

HE IS SENT TO GURS. REUNITED WITH HIS FATHER

Louis worked in censorship office. Able to smuggle news out. Caught smuggling letters.

LOUIS IS TRANSFERRED TO LES MILLES

LOUIS MEETS BRANDT IN GURS

ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE FROM LES MILLES

HE LEARNS THAT HIS FATHER WAS DEPORTED TO DRANCY, AUGUST 1942, THEN TO "POINTS EAST."

HE FINDS MOTHER AND SISTER DURING STOPOVER IN MARSEILLE

It was last time he saw his mother.

LOUIS IS DEPORTED TO MAUTHAUSEN

He was at a satellite camp in a stone quarry.

MORE ON THE ESCAPE ATTEMPT

Banded together with four other young men: Carpentier, Braverman, Hirshorn and Brandt.

DESCRIBES LIFE AT MAUTHAUSEN

PLANS ANOTHER ESCAPE IN MAY 1942

Couldn't go to Switzerland - Swiss would denounce them to Germans.

MORE ON MAUTHAUSEN

HE ESCAPES AUGUST 10, 1942

Escape route was Toulouse, Castres, Pau, Lourdes, Spain. Arrived in Laredo, Spain in October 1942.

ARRIVAL IN LOURDES

Received help from priests and nuns. First decent food and bed in years. Planned trip through Spain. Marquis (FFI) trained them, also Americans. Met Earl Agraves of Berea, Ohio. Had to promise to fight Germans if the escape was successful.

THEY LEAVE LOURDES IN OCTOBER

VIDEO 2 OF 2

GROUP OF 35 LEAVES LOURDES FOR SPAIN

Walked 10-15 days. Louis remained at Spanish border 5-6 weeks.

LOUIS HEARS FROM HIS UNCLE IN CLEVELAND

Earl Agraves contacted him. He sent Louis a letter and \$50.

LOUIS IS TRAINED TO FIGHT FOR FRENCH

Sent from Barcelona through Madrid and Cadiz to Africa for basic training, November 1942.

HE ALSO TRAINS WITH OSS IN ENGLAND

Commissioned to 2nd Lieutenant by Americans and to Lieutenant by British.

LOUIS PARACHUTES INTO FRANCE, APRIL 1943

Mission was to blow up wheels in a German motor pool.

NO ONE IN ENGLAND WANTS TO HEAR ABOUT CONCENTRATION CAMPS

LOUIS JUMPS INTO FRANCE AGAIN

Stayed on a farm calls "Au Bosque." False name was Roger Vendome.

HE SHOWS DOCUMENTS FROM THE ASSIGNMENT IN FRANCE

SEARCHES FOR SISTER AND PARENTS

FINDS SISTER IN A CONVENT

False name was Elise Carpentier. Placed there by Jewish organization.

LOUIS RETURNS TO ENGLAND

RECEIVES MORE TRAINING WITH U.S. ARMY 82ND AIRBORNE THEN
PARACHUTES INTO FRANCE ON JUNE 6

Wounded, stayed in hospital three days. Fought in French
campaign, in Holland and then occupied Berlin.

RETURNS TO THE FAMILY APARTMENT IN BERLIN

Building had been bombed.

LOUIS DISCUSSES A NEIGHBOR, MISS BARTEL, WHO HID JEWS

She hid Miss Danziger throughout war. Hid Louis's father on
Kristallnacht. Told Louis about family possessions buried in
yard.

FINDS PROFESSOR PROBST

Liberated him from Moabit prison in Russian sector.

COHN FAMILY IS GONE EXCEPT SISTER AND UNCLE IN U.S.

COHN DESCRIBES LIBERATION OF BERGEN-BELSEN

Was part of "moving army."

LOUIS IS STATIONED IN BERLIN AS PART OF 122ND MILITARY POLICE

RECEIVES NEWS OF SISTER IN 1945

She came to U.S. in 1944.

LOUIS GOES TO PALESTINE

Worked on a Kibbutz, trained Haganah.

IMMIGRATES TO U.S. IN 1947

Had special status because of war service, had non-quota
papers from uncle.

HE STUDIES ENGINEERING AT FENN COLLEGE

DRAFTED IN DECEMBER 1949

Received Croix de Guerre from French, Queen Victoria Cross
from British and Silver Star from U.S. Spent four months as
private at Fort Knox. Stationed in San Francisco for one year as
a captain.

MARRIES LOTTE WOLFF IN 1951

Her family lived in Cleveland. She came to U.S. in 1940.

LOUIS REFLECTS ON HIS EXPERIENCE

HAS NOT SHARED HIS STORY OFTEN

TALKS ABOUT REASONS FOR HIS SURVIVAL

Helped by many, including Catholic chaplain and Quakers in Spain.

EFFECT OF THE HOLOCAUST ON HIS LIFE

Missed his youth. Unique experience - perhaps he learned something from it. Only those with similar experience can understand.