

The following is an interview of Ludwig Jacob. It is taking place on May 23rd, 1996 in New York City. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Please give us your full name.

My name is Ludwig Jacob.

And where were you born?

I was born in Schmalkalden, in Germany, which was-- it was in the eastern section of Germany up till 1990.

And your date of birth.

My date of birth is May 5th, 1923.

Let's talk about your family life. Who were the members of your immediate family?

My father, my mother, and my brother.

And their names.

My father's name was Karl. My mother's name was Rosa. My brother's name Rudolph, called Rudy. He was 10 years older than I am. I am, yes.

Did you have an extended family? Did you have grandparents, aunts, and uncles living nearby?

I did not know any of my grandparents. They were deceased at the time. I had some uncles and aunts, which I saw very occasionally, maybe once a year, especially one uncle and aunt who lived in Bayern. And I went there, like on a vacation for a week.

And where did your father come from?

My father came from the same town where I was born in. He was born there too. He had a business. He had a cattle-- he was a cattle dealer. He bought, in other words, cows, and re-sold them to farmers or cows us to be slaughtered for butchers.

And were his clients Jewish and non-Jewish?

They were mostly non-Jewish. There was no body he sold to which were Jewish, as much as I remember.

Describe the town that you grew up in. How large was that it?

It was a town of about 11-12,000 inhabitants. But nowadays, I think it grew to about 17,000. I've been visiting last year for three days because the house my parents had was still there. And we finally were able to sell it now.

Did you live right in the town when you were growing--

Yes.

--in the center of town.

Yes, I lived in the center of town. I went to school there, to public school, first, for four years. And then I went to high school, which was gymnasium in Germany.

Right.

And there I was about three years till the situation got so uncomfortable for me, that I get out.

OK. Let's talk about the neighborhood that you lived in. Did you live in a house or an apartment?

In an apartment in a house. It was a three-story building. There were two apartments. One apartment above and then we were--

And what kind of neighborhood was it? Was it a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

Yes.

What percentage, or approximate what part of the city was Jewish? Was it a large percentage?

We had about 25 Jewish families there.

In the town?

Yeah.

Oh so it was just a very small part of the town. So when you said that you went to public school, this is obviously with a lot of non-Jewish children.

Yes, of course.

Yeah.

And all the way through your education?

There was really no Jewish child at my age. Either they'd be a year or three younger or three years older. I was really, in my age group, isolated.

Did your family have close contact with these other 24 families?

With most of them. The Jewish people have got together on the Shabbat. They went for walks. They went into the woods. They had been to a cafe with my mother and some of the friends. They're not all together, but there was a good relationship among the Jews in general.

Did the Jews all live within close proximity of each other?

It's a small town. You're not far apart. At that time, it was walking distance. And today, it's still walking distance, but people are more inclined to use cars for every step.

Was there a synagogue in the town?

Yes, we had a synagogue in town.

For the 25 families?

Yeah. The synagogue originally originated in 1600-- 1600 and-- I don't know the exact day-- in the 17th century. And it burned down by accident once and was rebuilt. And finally, it was modernized in the year 1930-- 1929-1930, it was reopened as a new, modern synagogue.

We didn't go to shul on Fridays and Shabbat. It was on high holidays there was services, of course. But the rest of the time, there was not much interest on the Jewish people on practicing Jewish religion, as much as I remember.

So how religious was your family then?

Well, they were, I would think, like we are reformed.

Equivalent.

But we had a kosher house till the time came that it was forbidden to eat cattle killed in a ritual way. And I remember as a child, at the time my mother did not tell us. I didn't know exactly what day it was, but she just bought a non-kosher meat and they served us.

If we would have known, we probably wouldn't have eaten it, because it was-- as tradition, it was ingrained into you not to eat it. But since we didn't know, my mother was smart enough not to tell us. We didn't know exactly they didn't. The next-- afterwards, she told us no kosher. We overheard her.

Did you go to Hebrew school?

Yes.

Have any kind of religious training?

Yes, we had Hebrew school. Not Hebrew school, we had a Hebrew teacher coming to town every other week from another area who taught the children. Since we were very few children, and very few in age group together, it was really not possible to have an individual Hebrew teacher.

Were the boys and girls taught together or separately?

Yeah.

Together. What language did you speak at home?

German.

German. Did you have a bar mitzvah?

Yes, I did. Can you describe that?

What's there to describe? It was a ceremony in shul. Like every other, it was really short, a little speech. The Hebrew teacher who assisted me came from another town, as I said before. And we had some of the families, and friends, and relatives all waited at home, a little banquet afterwards.

So there was no problems having a bar mitzvah in 1936?

No.

OK. Did you have any hobbies as a child.

No, not really. We liked to play football-- soccer in Germany.

Soccer.

Not football, like in football. But that's what is--

And did you go on hikes?

Yeah, we went on hikes. I went on Saturdays, on Shabbat with my mother. Or Sundays, we went to the neighborhood. We went on walks into the woods, and we met-- we reached a place where there was a coffee house or a little restaurant. We stayed through the afternoon, had coffee and cake. And this as I remember a young child.

I also took some skiing, little trips in the neighborhood. Because we were in a mountainous area and 15 minutes, half an hour from home there was a place where we could ski. And my parents usually sent me out with an instructor or somebody like that.

Were you a member of any youth group?

No, I was not.

Were your parents Zionist in any way?

No, I couldn't say that. As a matter of fact, my parents always were-- my brother, who was married in 1936 in Berlin, he worked for an international company, a trading company, called Hirsh Kupfer.

And they, at the time knew-- this was a partly Jewish firm-- sent the Jewish employees or workers out of Germany. And my brother was sent at the time to Amsterdam and worked for the company while there.

You were quite young, of course, when Hitler came into power. You were 10 years old.

Yeah.

Do you remember any of that? Do you have any recollections, even though you were quite young?

Yeah, I do have some recollections. I remember, for instance, there was an election in Germany in January of 1933. And one of my father's customers, who was non-Jewish, came up that morning after. And he said, "Well, you Jews were lucky once again. Hitler didn't get elected." And then about three or four weeks later, he went to Hindenburg. And Hindenburg gave him the power to run the government.

And did you notice any change in your daily life?

Not in the beginning. But later on, as soon as I went to school, and especially in gymnasium, I was very isolated.

The other students isolated you?

Yeah.

Were there any Jewish school teachers?

No.

No, all the teachers were non-Jews. What about-- we'll get to school in a minute. What about in your neighborhood, where the other non-Jewish children friendly to you? Did you have any kind of insight--

Yes, I had some, one or two friends, I was friendly with. But not a real great, strong relationship, I would say.

Were there any unpleasant incidents?

No. Not in the-- not after school. The unpleasant incidents were only in school.

What were they? Can you describe one or two?

Oh, for instance, we had a class in design-- I wouldn't say design, in painting-- not design, painting. And they went by and they would put the paint on me and smear my clothes and so on.

Put paint on your clothes?

Yeah.

Was this something you could talk over with your parents?

Yeah, they knew. And then they decided-- I didn't want to go back to school anymore because it was so difficult to be in school, so they decided I should learn something practical. And I went into the-- they got me a job, or an apprenticeship, I should say, with an auto mechanic.

Do you remember what year that was?

In 1938.

In '38, OK. So you stayed in school till you were 15.

Right.

And then you said things got very uncomfortable. Any other experiences at that point, besides that one that you described?

No, I wouldn't--

Were there verbal insults to you?

Yes, verbal insults, but you know, some things, they just run off on you, because what could I do about it? Not that I remember anything specific. But this was the last straw, when they painted-- put the paint on me, I didn't want to go back.

Right, right.

And then I started working for the auto mechanic-- or start working-- I learned, was an apprentice. And I was there only four weeks. And then came Kristallnacht.

OK. OK. What are your recollections of that?

Well, we didn't know anything was going to happen, and suddenly in the evening at 9 o'clock, they came in, the Nazis. And they arrested my father, my mother, and me. And they took us to the police station and put us in cells.

Were the three of you together?

No, no, no. My father was, and I was, and my mother was with the women. The day--

So this was three separate-- you were-- the three of you were separate from each other?

Right. And the next morning, they took the men out. They sent the women home. And the men went out into the street and they had to clean up all that-- the police, they made-- from the German, from the-- not from the German-- the

German-- the Nazis made all of the German businesses. They had this--

All the destruction.

The businesses, destruction and so on-- and so on. As a matter of fact, when I was in Germany last year, I got some pictures from this. Somebody secretly had the nerve to take them and preserved. That's what we had to do the next day-- here's my father, and that's me-- is to clean up the mess they made.

When you were arrested, when the Nazis came to your house, were you able to take anything with you?

No, nothing.

Or was it a very quick--

Very quick, very suddenly.

And the other Jewish families were also arrested?

All of them. All of them.

Now who-- you said you were separated from your father in the different cells. Were you with other children, other young people?

I don't know.

You were only 15.

No, there were no other children. Nobody in my age group I think was there, maybe some other men. I don't recall exactly who was with me in that cell. But the next day after that, we made this clean up. And they straightened out everything and put everything in order again, there came big trucks. And they put us in the trucks and they shipped us to Mauthausen.

Was your synagogue destroyed?

Yes, but I didn't see it. Because as I said, after this, I was straight into the truck, off to Buchenwald. Afterwards, the synagogue might have been partially destroyed, because there was a very solid rocks, granite kind of type of things, which probably couldn't-- everything couldn't be done over. And when I came back from Buchenwald, which was four weeks later--

OK, we want to go into more detail. What were your thoughts as a young-- you were so young. You were only 15 years old. Do you remember?

I don't remember many thoughts. But I took it, let's say, very lying down. As a matter of fact, that's what happens and that's it. There's nothing you can do about it. As long as I was there, I had to comply, follow suit, whatever was ordered by the Nazis, what we had to do or not to do.

And basically, I had no difficulties living that way, to this life. The only time it became very difficult, when I thought about how my mother-- otherwise, I accepted it.

You just kept going.

Yeah.

Yeah, you just kept going. All right, so the next morning after the cleanup, then what-- can you describe as much as you

remember?

We were all put it into a truck.

Children-- boys and adult men?

The whole group. How many were there, 25-- 25 men, maybe not even. Because some of them emigrated already-- emigrated already and were no longer in town.

Had your--

I just remembered something. No, it's not important.

Had your father ever considered leaving, the family leaving?

No. They had-- leaving, yes, but in the way, but in a very vague way. They thought, look, your children go out first. And when you are established somewhere, follow him. That was the story. I told you before, my brother already was in Amsterdam, in Holland.

Right.

And then they felt if I go out, and leave, and be a step, if we have an existence in a foreign country, they will follow us. Because they felt that to go out, to recreate, and restart something.

Right, now, before Kristallnacht, were there laws in your town, restrictive laws, gradually?

They were all the same for Germany. There was not any difference in our town. In that town--

OK, so what was the first restriction that you remember?

I really can't remember anything. But at this time, there was not many. The first restriction was the you could have no kosher meat anymore. Otherwise, I really don't remember.

What about your father's job, business?

Well, his business went down more and more every year, every day, every week, when it finally stopped.

Because people were not coming to him?

Now, people wouldn't buy from Jews anymore.

And so how did your father support the family?

Well, we had some money left. I don't know really the financial situation. Because I assume over the years, they had put some money aside. And it's what they lived off of.

And were there any curfews on the street? Were you limited to going out at night?

No, not that I remember.

OK. So you had freedom of movement?

Yeah.

Yeah.

There were people around, which officially might not want to be in contact with you, but basically they were friendly. I mean, the family lived in this area for generations.

Your family lived for gen--

Yeah.

--yes, right. Did you have a radio? Were you permitted to keep a radio?

We didn't have a radio.

Didn't have a radio. In other words, your family never had a radio, is that what you're--

I don't think we ever had one.

You never had a radio, OK.

As a matter of fact, yes-- as a matter of fact, I'm sure we didn't have a radio, because when something was to be listened to, I went to my relatives on the corner. They had a radio.

Yeah. What would--

[INAUDIBLE].

What was it like for a young boy to see a Nazi in uniform? What was your feeling when you looked at--

It was not comfortable to look at them. But as I said, we had to accept the facts of the way it is. Nothing I could do about it.

Did you talk about the situation with other young people?

No.

It wasn't something that--

No.

--the teenagers talked--

We had sometimes a meeting, a-- there was a special-- one of the member-- one of the congregants was a Zionist. And he organized some, some get together of some people, and we sang some Hebrew songs, some Jewish songs, Hatikvah and things like that.

This was a Zionist youth group?

That's not a youth--

Or general Zionists?

General-- generally a group of people getting together. I couldn't call it a youth group. The town was really very inactive in Jewish things, as much as I remember. Except I remember one man who was from way back a Zionist, and he tried to organize something.



OK, you said then the morning after the destruction, the men were taken away. And where were you taken to?

To Buchenwald.

To Buchenwald. And how long did that take?

Maybe two-three hours.

Did you know where you were going?

Not exactly.

Did they tell you?

Yeah, maybe they told us, but I can't remember who or what.

Were you with your father in the same truck.

It was one truck, yeah.

It was my truck for everybody?

Right.

And, again, you hadn't taken anything special with you.

Nothing.

You just had the clothes that you had on?

Exactly.

And you arrive at Buchenwald. What was that like, the arrival?

The arrival was unloaded from the trucks and put on a big place. And you had to stand there for a couple of hours. And they handed out a blanket to each person. I think it was a blanket to each person, because after that people told me I always walked around with my blanket. I never let it go. It was always on my--

And we were put in big barracks. And the barrack was not-- there were no beds, no nothing. It was like a shelving. Only three-foot high shelving.

Three-foot high shelving.

We have shelves we need to climb up. And in every shelving, there were as many people put in it as they could to lay there comfortable-- uncomfortably at night. Except there was no straw, no nothing to lie on. It was just plain wood.

And your blanket.

And the blanket.

Were you still with your father?

Yes.

Allowed to be with your father. What did he say to you?

I don't remember. I don't remember he talked about. He had a lot other friends and people with him.

What was his personality like? Was he a very strict father?

I really had no problem with my father, not as a strict person or non-strict person. I think my mother was more the educator or raising of the children than my father was involved. I remember that in Buchenwald, that on a given day everybody was marshaled out of barracks in the morning, put on a big parade place.

And they let us-- put us-- sit down on the ground. It was cold, in November. And let us still there all day. Couldn't get up. And they got up, they beat the people. And no food, nothing, all day.

Finally, in the evening, they gave some kind of a soup with a small piece of bread and put-- let you go back to your barracks where you were supposed to be. Build up five emergency barracks, because all those many people which came, who were all arrested in Germany during Kristallnacht, not just from our town, from all over.

| then they locked up the barracks. And evidently the soup they gave us gave everybody diarrhea. And people got crazy at night. They wouldn't let them out. Of course, there were no toilet facilities. They had a big latrine. It's an open ditch. There's a wooden bowl on it and that's it. Water, washing-- impossible, nothing.

One day, a guy came by, an SS guy, which knew me from my hometown. He was from the same town. He said, "Oh, you need water. There's no water. But I sell you a bottle of seltzer for a mark," which was two marks. I think I had some money in my pocket. And with this, I used a little to drink, a little bit to wash my face with. This was the only time.

What else-- what was a typical day like there? What did you do?

There was really no work.

No work.

They just let you stand or sit around all day.

Day after day?

Day after day. After-- my father was released after about 14 or 15 days because he was over 60 years of age. They let the old people go.

And he went back--

Back home.

--to the--

And I was let go about a month-- after four weeks-- from night of.., to December 8 or 10th-- I don't remember the date. I know you'll pick it up here. Anyhow, because my brother was in Amsterdam, were able to send me papers. I could emigrate to Holland with the Kindertransport. Have you heard the expression before?

A similar thing happened-- she went on the Kindertransport, Ruth Westheimer. I don't know if you read her biography. I just read it recently. And I saw she was sent out a day later. I left January 4th, also from Frankfurt. And she left January 5th. But she went to Switzerland, luckily.

So you left the camp and came back home?

Came back home.

How did you get back home?

Oh, I don't know, they must have driven us home or give us some kind of transportation.

What did you feel like when they told you, you were leaving the camp?

I guess people left before me, so everybody are expecting to leave. It's only a question when we could get out. It was, OK, my father went out at two weeks before me. Others went out-- I've seen people leaving. But if they got papers to emigrate, they let them go.

Was it very upsetting when your father left that you were left there?

Not too much. I don't think so.

You managed OK.

Yeah.

Yeah. Were you a very self-reliant young teenager? How would you describe yourself as a--

How can I describe--

--15-year-old?

I really can't. Evidently, I managed OK.

Yes, you did. Yeah. So you kept yourself together after your father left--

Yeah.

--and you were there.

Well, that's the main thing, to keep yourself together. You couldn't deteriorate morally.

What do you attribute that to at such a young age?

I don't know. It was in the genes.

Were you with other younger relatives of yours?

I was not with younger-- I knew some people there. I knew distant relatives there, which I later met in America, here in New York after the war. And he always told me the story about the blanket--

Oh, yes, yeah.

--which he remembered so well.

So now you come home, back to your home.

Home, yes.

What was it like to come home to see--

It was very nice.

--your mother and father? Yeah.

And I started prepare for my trip to Holland.

Because the papers had arrived already--

Yeah.

--from your brother.

And so I remember my-- we packed a camp trunk with my clothes and my things in it. But whatever he put in there, which was shipped to Holland, was under the eyes of the Nazis. They had to inspect what we were taking out. But one of the guys, evidently, at one moment or another didn't look when my father tucked in his gold watch and gold chain.

So they were there while you were packing your trunk?

Yeah.

They were watching?

Right.

On the papers that your brother got for you, was your name the same? He was--

Yeah.

--using the same name--

Yeah, sure.

--so they were true papers, yeah. What did you bring with you besides what your father put in? Did you bring anything personal to yourself?

Nothing--

Anything special?

--just clothes.

Just clothes.

That's all, nothing special.

Yeah.

And there, I--

And how long were you home for?

I was home about three weeks.

Did you want to leave? Was it hard for you to leave your family again?

No, it wasn't hard. There was no future in Germany to stay around. And my brother was in Holland, so I had somebody to go to.

Right, right.

And he was already established, was married.

So you left after three weeks.

Yeah, and went to Holland.

And how did you get to Holland?

In this Kindertransport, by train.

By yourself or with others?

No, no, in a whole group of people, a whole group of young people.

No, no, just getting to Holland, getting to Holland.

We assembled in Frankfurt.

Oh.

I had to go to Frankfurt.

You went to Frankfurt by yourself?

With my parents, they took me to Frankfurt.

They did.

And then, the next morning, the train was waiting there. And there were a lot of young Jewish kids, which came into the same transport to Holland.

This is tape one, side B. And we were talking about how you left your home, went to Frankfurt with your parents to get onto the Kindertransport. So now you're in Frankfurt. And how long did you stay there?

I stayed about a couple of days. Because the transport left on January 4th, 19--

'39.

'39, thank you. And this train took us to Eindhoven in Holland, spelled E-I-N-D-H-O-V-E-N.

What was it like to say goodbye to your parents?

It wasn't easy, I'm sure.

Yeah, yeah. Did your mother give you anything special? You said your father had.

No.

No. And now you're on the Kindertransport. How many-- do you know how many people, how many children were on?

I would assume at least two maybe 50, 60, 80. I really don't know the number. But in Holland, we went to a Kinderheim.

In what city?

In Eindhoven.

Oh, right, right.

And I stayed there a while.

Was the train ride one in which children talked to each other?

Yes, of course. We had no problem there. As much as-- there was nothing unusual about it. It just-- the Germans were glad to get rid of the Jews. This was the whole idea at the time.

Who were the leaders of this Kindertransport, do you know?

I don't remember.

Counselors, or-- you don't know. And the trip took how long?

Maybe six, eight hours. I don't remember the time.

And then you're in-- you're in Holland. And you stayed at this children's home you said? For how long were you there?

I was there about six, eight months. And there was opportunity to leave and go to a Hakhshara in Holland.

OK, let's talk about those six to eight months first. What did you do during those--

We had school. We had regular classes.

And what were your living conditions like?

Well, it was a heim. You know what a heim is? A home for children, for young adults. So living conditions were OK. Nothing to complain about. We had a lot of fun too.

And the kids played together. We played-- well, one guy was very much-- Monopoly. We played Monopoly. We played bridge already at the time. And all kind of those things we did-- activities, sporting things. And we were very well taken care of.

Who were the teachers?

The teacher were also Dutch people, who mostly spoke German too. Because Dutch is a very-- I know a lot of languages. I speak a lot of languages, but nobody speaks Dutch. So they are obliged to speak-- and it was really-- we were well taken care of.

And you have enough food?

Oh, yes, no problem.

Were the Dutch people Jews, Dutch Jews?

Some were Jewish. Some were non-Jewish.

And you had free time?

Yes.

To do sports?

We had free time. We would go out in the evening, and take walks, and meet some people.

So you didn't have to stay on the grounds of the home.

No.

You could-- you had freedom in the town.

Yeah, freedom in town.

And what kind of correspondence or connection did you have, communication with your parents?

We could write to each other.

So you received mail from them?

Yeah.

And did you communicate with your brother?

Yes, of course.

Did you--

As a matter of fact, I went up to Amsterdam. I got to there in January, maybe the 4th or the 5th-- 4th, I went. And end of February, I went to Amsterdam by train because my nephew was born. I went to his birth. But as the situation got more and more, how should I say-- in '39 the war broke out.

All right, so you stayed there till September, at least--

About. And I felt that the Germans would also come to invade Holland. And Eindhoven is very close to the German border. And I felt I don't want to stay there, but I want to get further away from the German border than I am now.

And the opportunity came that people could sign up for hachschara, or different kind of schools they went to. So I went to Wieringermeer. That's in the north of Holland. If you ask me how to spell it, I don't remember.

OK.

A W-- I-E-- R-- I-N-G-- and Meer is M-double-E-R.

So you had stayed, you said from January to September?

Approximately.

Approximately, yeah.

I can't give you exact dates anymore. And there I started to train for Israel in the hachschara. We did agricultural work.

Such as?

Such as plowing, and digging ditches, and there was-- the Dutch area was low, below sea level. So we had to make irrigation channels, canals, like, things like that.

How was your health at that point?

Oh, I had no problem.

You were strong, still strong?

I guess I was strong enough.

And just to backup, when you were in the camp for those four weeks, did your health hold up in the--

Yeah.

Yeah, you were OK.

Did you learn Hebrew?

Very little, no. I would say no.

They didn't--

They didn't teach us.

They didn't teach you Hebrew. It was more agricultural skills?

Yeah.

And how long were you there then for that arrangement?

I was there until the Germans invaded Holland. And one day, they decided to get rid of this Jewish camp. And they evacuated everybody. And they sent me to my brother in Amsterdam.

OK, who closed down the camp?

The Gestapo.

The Gestapo. OK, so you were at the camp at the-- there at the time. And how did they do that? How did you know that was happening?

We didn't know. It just happened suddenly. And that's it. They loaded us in trucks again, and they brought us to Amsterdam.

What did you take with you?

My clothes.



Could you take your trunk and everything?

I guess whatever I had.

They gave you time to get your stuff. What were your thoughts then? Here is another--

You ask me questions which I really don't remember. We [INAUDIBLE] Amsterdam. A nice city, a big city. I was comfortable at home in my brother's house.

You went directly to your brother's?

Yeah.

Did he know you were coming?

Yeah, I guess so. I'm not sure. They maybe were notified before or not. I don't remember.

Where did a lot of the other young people go to?

Also to relatives.

In Amsterdam?

Yeah, Amsterdam, wherever they had some relatives or connections in Holland.

Had you been physically maltreated at the four weeks in the camp, at this point?

Not-- no, nothing particular difference than everybody else. I was badly treated and everybody else was.

Such as-- when you say--

Like I say, you had to sit all day in one spot.

Right.

Or they make your stand up all day. Or you had on your knees or whatever.

Yeah, but you weren't-- yes, but there was no particular physical--

Nothing. I was not so--

--mistreatment of you?

No, I always tried to stay in the crowd, not to stand out in any way.

How did you know to do that? You were so young.

Instinct.

All right, now you're with your brother in Amsterdam.

Yeah.

And what did you--

Well, in Amsterdam I met a lot of other young people and friends. And unfortunately, shortly after I was there, maybe four months-- I don't remember the timeframe-- they picked up my brother. And my brother, with about 100-120 other people, were picked up and kept. They were arrested in Amsterdam. They checked him out for good health and for health reasons. And then finally they sent him to Mauthausen.

Were you home when he was arrested?

I don't-- no, I don't think I was home. Or maybe I was home. Yeah, I think I was home. I know they took my brother. And they send him to Mauthausen And a couple of-- or two or three months later, we got this. That's a death certificate, which they still sent at the time.

Meanwhile, I just find out three weeks ago from the man who helped-- he helped sell the house in Germany for my parents, he went to my Mauthausen. And he said they made a lot of medical experiments of the people.

So you are with your sister-in-law and your nephew--

Right.

--in Amsterdam. And while you were there, were you working or studying?

We were-- my sister-in-law started a little business for herself to have some kind of an income. And I helped her, was like her delivery boy.

What kind of business?

She used to do repairs on stockings. You know, the little machines, they pick out the runs. It was something during the wartime, there were no nylons available, no silk stockings. And people did this.

And then she got this notice about her husband?

Yeah.

Was she able to continue working?

Yes.

Even with this news?

Yeah. We had to do something. I mean--

Yeah. So you stayed living with her and the baby.

Yeah. The baby already was two. At that time, it was Feb-- 1941. He was already two and a half years old.

So how long did you live with her in Amsterdam?

I lived with her till the 15th of July 1942.

You stayed with her?

Because at that time they started deporting the Jews from Amsterdam, from Holland. And I was lucky they sent me this. They'd just come to arrest me. They sent me this thing. This is called an Aufruf, like you're called up to present yourself

at the railroad station at 1 o'clock at night on the 15th of July with a few things to bring along to go to work, to voluntary work in Germany.

So you received this document at your sister-in-law's house?

Yeah.

And what did you do when you received it?

Well, when I received it, I said, I have nothing to lose. My brother is dead. My parents were deported two months before. What can they do to me? I disappeared.

You went underground?

Underground, yeah.

You went underground.

The day before, I went out with my sister-in-law to buy a bicycle. And we were haggling about the price of the bicycle. Was a young man who said, "I have to go to my boss and find out if I can sell you at this." And he threw his wallet down.

In his wallet was his ID card in it. So we took the ID card. My sister-in-law left the ID card. And I waited for him to come back to buy the bicycle. And then I left. And meanwhile, I had this new ID. I took his ID for my own. His name was Wilhelm-- Wilhelm Poplar. And from there on, I was Wilhelm Poplar.

Did he purposely do that?

I don't think so.

To give you--

He was negligent, a young guy. He didn't do that on purpose.

Oh, he did not do--

No, no.

-- to give you papers.

No, no, no.

Now--

It was just a freak-- freak occurrence, a lucky stork for me.

You had said that you had-- your parents had been deported. When was that?

In May 1942.

And how did you hear about that?

They wrote me.

That they were going to.

Yeah.

And where would they taken to?

We don't know.

You don't know.

I couldn't find out yet. I'm still trying to inquire.

Yeah. Yeah.

My father wrote me a long letter. He said, at the 15th of May, we are leaving. We are-- you won't hear from us probably for six months or longer. And he wrote me about other relatives who were send away already. He hasn't heard from them either. And just finally-- I forgot to put bring it today-- I got a list of the people who were on the same transport.

To?

To where we don't know.

Oh, you don't know where the transport--

They just said it-- "to resettle else-where."

Right. Right.

The Jews from this area were resettled someplace else. Where to, they don't say.

From your hometown, yeah. They had stayed in your town--

Yeah.

--up to that point. OK, now, you are in Amsterdam. You have this false paper and this bicycle.

Yeah. And we had acquired some friendship with some non-Jewish people out in a really goyishe section on Amsterdam, who were very nice. Because my sister-in-law saw what was coming, she gave them her furniture. And she had took it out there. And they gave me like a home, a refuge there.

What were their names?

Their name-- I don't remember their name. They had also the same kind of business as my sister-in-law. That's why she somehow knew with.

Repairing the nylons?

Right.

Up to--

Their daughters were doing that.

Up to that point, what was it like living in Amsterdam? What were the restrictions?

There were restrictions. There were curfews for going out at night. We had to wear the yellow star.

So that was the first time you had to wear the yellow star--

Yeah.

--was in Amsterdam? How did you feel wearing a yellow star?

How did I feel? Marked. How do you feel? Marked like a branded animal.

What other-- you said you had nighttime-- was it nighttime curfews?

Yes.

Were you restricted to certain streets?

No.

And what about stores? Could you shop at all the stores?

Yeah, I think so. We went shopping. We had our money. I remember the next day when it was time to go there, on the 15th. In the morning, I left on the bicycle. Of course, I took off the yellow star. And I went to that very goyishe neighborhood, where these people lived.

And they were nice enough to take me in and feed me. My sister-in-law evidently provided them her furnishing and her household goods, which they were supposed to keep till after the war and if everything happened.

Anyhow, I was sitting there in their basement. And a friend of mine, who was also in that neighborhood and I decided-- with our forged papers, I have freedom of movement. I went around. Because after all, I have no more Jewish name. I have no Jewish identity card. I have a false identity card.

And we finally got a job working in a toy factory. The toy factory was owned by Jews. But the foreman and the guy who ran the factory for them was a German goy. But he left early Germany, right when Hitler came to power too.

So he was anti Hitler?

Yeah. And he knew, of course, it was false papers. But he didn't want to know from us. He let us work there.

He did let you work?

Yeah. And that was a lucky thing.

What was his name?

His name was Hirsch, I think. But he was not Jewish. And we tried to live a very normal life, just to disappear among people, not to stand out in any reason or another. But since my looks-- we went out at night, went to the movies. I went in town, walking around after work. But my looks somehow were still standing out in Holland because everybody's so blonde and tall.

And what was your coloring?

My coloring is as I was. I was brownish hair, but my whole look of face shows that I am Jewish born. And twice we were stopped and looked at the papers from the Nazis and the SR, Gestapo, whatever it was, or sometimes from the

Wehrmacht already. They want to see our ID papers.

And since my paper had the identity of a Dutch man with a Dutch name, and in addition I created a-- you had a card which says I am partially Jewish, that my mother was Jewish, married to a Dutchman, because I had also to give them some reason why I have such a German accent.

Two, three times, I got away with it, until they got me to the point that it doesn't make sense. One day, it's not going to work any longer. And we decided we go to France.

This is you and your friend?

Yeah.

Because in France, our appearance would blend in much better among the people. It's a more of a Mediterranean type person. That would be better. And sure enough, it worked out fine.

How was your Dutch language ability by that time?

I fear not great.

And your friend's name, who you were with?

His name was Heinz Goldschmidt. Today, he calls himself Henry. He has a fantastic memory. He writes things still today. And he wrote a lot of stories, what happened in our time. And to me, I don't know, I don't remember.

Yeah.

So you-- the two of you decided together--

Yeah.

--to go into France. And did you do that--

Yeah.

--soon after that decision?

We made a decision in 1943.

What month?

September.

September '43, for the two of you to go?

Yeah.

And how did that journey go? To get across the border and all that?

Well, we went to the train, to near the border. And we went over the border illegally. Met with somebody in the underground, who helped us across.

How did you have that connection?

Henry-- Heinz had a connection with somebody in the underground there.

OK, because at the moment, you weren't with the underground. You just had false papers. Is that correct?

Right, right.

Yeah, you weren't-- OK.

And he took us over the border. And he took us to Brussels. And we stayed in his house for a night. And he instructed us to get further out of Belgium into France. He helped-- he went with us part of the way.

And there again, we went over the border, the Dutch-- of the Belgium-French border. And wound up in Lille, in the northern part of France. And there we took trains and behaved like everybody else, being Dutch people.

Being Dutch people. Was this a very frightening journey for you?

Look, when you are young, nothing's as frightening. And I was 20 years old.

20 years old.

You take things in stride. And you do the best to survive. There was only one thing in my mind-- survive, survive, survive.

Did you still have your father's gold watch with you?

No.

Why?

I had to sell this in Amsterdam before I went into a illegality in order to have some money.

Who did you sell it to?

To an antique dealer. This what gave me my ability to live a while. Because after this, when I started working at the toy factory, I earned some money. I still have some left. And I care for this money all the time.

OK, now you're in France.

Now we're in France.

So you are able-- you speak German and you're able to speak a little Dutch. Did you know any French at this point?

Yeah, in the gymnasium, I see three years of French-- French. Not that I knew much. But my friend didn't know a word. So went to the-- all the second-hand bookstores in France had the-- on the Seine, on the left side, [SPEAKING FRENCH]. And I bought a book. I was reading it. This comes back very quickly. And since I didn't speak it-- I had to speak. I was all right. I could get by in a couple of-- within two or three weeks, I could--

You were able to converse?

Yeah.

So you got to Paris then, as soon as possible?

Yes, we got to Paris.

Paris, and where did you live? Or how did you know to find a place?

A furnished room, hotels, cheap hotels.

And were you in contact with the underground resistance?

Not yet. But eventually, we got to it.

So what did you do when you first got to Paris?

A little black market.

And what were you selling?

Cigarettes.

And you're still with your friend?

My friend, yeah, it was.

And then what was the condition like?

The France condition wasn't very good. I mean, really--

Right.

--we had a tough time feeding ourselves. Everything was rationed. You needed to buy something, so you need a ration card. And one ration card is nothing, because it is not enough to survive for a person. But through the underground, eventually we got two and three ration cards so we could manage.

How did you get in touch with the underground?

I don't know. They found us I think.

They found you.

Yeah.

You realize, they found us already from Belgium, from that guy in Belgium. He had good connections all over.

And so you were in Paris and then what happened?

We were hanging on. We were trying to get to Switzerland. And again, through the rumor mill, here and there, you go down to Marseilles. In Marseilles you can make contact. These people will take you to Switzerland. And we went to Marseilles.

So how long had you stayed in Paris?

Probably a couple of months.

A couple of months.

And the thing turned out to be a hoax. We couldn't find any connections at all.



In Marseilles.

In Marseilles to get us back, so we went back to Paris.

So you didn't-- how long did you stay in Marseilles then?

Oh, maybe a couple of days, a week.

A couple of days. And you still have these false papers.

The false papers I don't have anymore.

Oh, you don't. So are you back being your regular name at this point?

No, no, I still had my false papers in France. Today, I don't have them anymore.

Oh, no, no, I meant-- when I said you still, I meant at that point, you're still Wilhelm at that point?

Yeah, sure.

Right.

And did you have any direct contact with the underground people? How did you get their messages? How did you get their advice? Did they come to see you?

We got in touch with them. They met us in hotel rooms.

Were these Jews or non-Jews?

Some were Jews, some non-Jews. A lot of them were foreigners. Because the French resistance was very weak, even though they give themselves the big ado, like they did everything.

Like they just recently. There's a peace negotiation in Beirut with Israel. If you just read the French magazine, they did it all. They then talk about [INAUDIBLE] did the work. They did it.

Right.

And what was happening in the French resistance was because of mostly foreigners-- Polish people, people like me, Germans refugees, Austrian refugees. I know our leader was an Austrian refugee boy. And we somehow managed to get by and exist.

You are in Paris after coming back from Marseilles.

Yeah.

And working on the black market again.

Yeah.

And what then?

And then nothing happened till-- because beginning in July 1944, when things turned already bad with the German war, and American invasion came--

This was after D-Day.

June 6th, yeah.

Right.

Had you had-- had you had-- up to that point, did you have any close calls on the street or any--

Not in Paris at all.

In Paris?

No close calls. As a matter of fact, they sent me to a German organization since I spoke German.

The underground sent you.

Yeah. And I worked there for about a week.

What kind of organization was it?

The organization for the constructed defense work and things like that. What was it called. Right now, the name escapes me. Anyhow, in the--

Was this a--

In the way--

--resistance organization?

It was organisation-- organization.

Yeah, but organized by the resistance?

No, no, this was a German-- I was working for a German corp there. And there we are building things. We're building highways, or housing, or whatever it was, some kind of construction work, I think. I don't remember exactly.

I was there a very short time. And I'm sitting there. And all of a sudden, the radio goes on, the invasion is on, June 6th.

June 6th, 1944.

And I saw they had some weapons there. And I prepared to organize handguns from their closet for the Resistance. I fashioned a brick into the form of a handgun and exchanged it for the guns. And wrapped it like this. And I took off.

And I came back the next day-- I was really stupid to come back the next day, make believe it's not me. Because they could have had some kind of way to find me. And they just said, the guns are gone, what's going on here?

A day or two later, then I didn't got back anymore. I disappeared. And unfortunately, that friend of mine, that Henry-- Heinz Goldschmidt, befriended a German soldier in a cafe in Paris. And this guy told him, he was sick and tired, "We are losing the war, and it's ridiculous what we are doing, I want to desert. Can you help me in civilian clothes?"

And he said, "Oh, sure, I'll help you." He helped him. He took him to our organization, our group. And within five days, we were all denounced. In the middle of the night, I was arrested in the hotel. I woke up at 4 o'clock in the morning, the guns sticking in my face, the Gestapo there-- arrested.

And that night-- again they were looking for-- of course, they thought I had the weapons there for me, because this guy knew about it. And we were taken to rue des Saussaies, the headquarters of the Gestapo, and interrogated. And there, they saw my papers-- Poplar and so on-- this false name.