

And so it was [INAUDIBLE] with the Gestapo, I was interrogated. And like a stroke of luck in this special second of-- some events where you had like a split second, I admitted I'm Jewish. Well, my friend insists that he is non-Jewish and stayed with his false name. After the interrogation, we were sent to prison in Fresnes, in Paris. Prison, it's a well-known prison in Paris

What is it called?

Fresnes, F-R-E-S-N-E-S. And there, I was put into-- first of all, I was met there when I got there in the morning in the main hall where we were lined up a guy which I knew from the resistance, I knew from Holland, a friend, an acquaintance. And he said, look, they're going to-- of course, when you're belongings in your clothes, and you have anything, be careful.

And I had some money in me, in the money belt. And so I said, OK, here's some money. Throw it down. I'm sweeping, I sweep it away. And sure enough, I did. I saved some money at least for if I come out again.

Then we were put into different cells. And I went into a cell there were two French guys in there for some minor crimes. One, he worked for the railroads. And he was stealing some food from the railroad car. Another one, some minor infractions, little small criminals.

And, of course, when they saw me and so they heard my accent, my German accent, they didn't believe me that I am the prisoner. They thought I'm a spy on them. And they ignored me and treated me poorly also, but it wasn't important. Till about a week or so later, then--

What do you mean they treated you poorly?

Well, they ignored me. They had a lot of food and get packages from home. They never shared. I didn't get anything from them. But it wasn't important really to me.

Then a week later, I was pulled out of that cell in the morning at 6 o'clock and walked back to the [PLACE NAME] of the Gestapo for interrogation. And there they interrogated me all day long from morning 7:00 till late afternoon, 5:00, 6 o'clock. And I was handcuffed. And I had to break down on my knees on a metal bar. And they were beating me.

And I fainted. So a bucket of water on my head to get me back up again. And I was going all day long. Finally, when they sent me back to the prison that night and these guys saw what I looked like, then they became nice to me. They saw that I'm not a spy. They knew I was very beaten up. They paced me. They helped me with my wounds.

And as the American armies advanced and [INAUDIBLE] came towards Paris, they evacuated the prison and took the prisoners to Germany with the exception of those who were Jewish. Among them was I. And they took me to Drancy, the Jewish camp north of Paris where all the Jewish you have heard?

This is the transit camp?

But there was not regular camp. I was in a special cellular prison because I was a so-called dangerous person to the Third Reich.

You were a dangerous person?

Yeah. And--

Why were you a dangerous?

Yeah, because, you know, they knew I stole the weapons from them and was involved with the resistance. We were about 20, 30 people down there maybe. And finally, as Americans advanced more, came towards Paris-- [COUGHING]

excuse me. They decided to let the Jewish go which were left in the camp, with the exception of those who were criminal or dangerous to the Third Reich, among them I. And we were transported in the last cattle car [INAUDIBLE] France [? and ?] [PLACE NAME] back to Germany to Buchenwald.

How many were in your group?

49, 50 people.

50 men?

No, there were men, women. There was a mixture. According to the book, there would have been 51. They were undocumented 49. Anyhow, my first thought was always to escape, escape, escape. I had to been to Buchenwald and didn't want to see it again. And many of the railroad places were bombarded. The train moved very slowly.

Many times, it was parked during the day in tunnels. Because they don't want the train so the Allied fighters could see it and bombard it. Because most of the train was German weapons they took back in German troops. Only the one wagon was this Jewish dangerous people to the--

Did you know--

[INTERRUPTION]

--did you know any of these other prisoners?

Yes, some of them I knew. [INAUDIBLE], that one. His name is mentioned here too who picked up my money in prison. And then when we were in the train, he gave it back to me.

What was his name?

[? Reilinger. ?] His name is listed here too. His name was [? Reilinger, ?] [Kurt] [? Reilinger. ?]

Kurt, huh?

So we were sitting in this car. It's standing still or moved maybe 20, 30 miles at night. During the day, I didn't dare to run the train because Allied planes could attack it, and destroy their weapons and their soldiers. They didn't care about us.

What kind-- what kind of car was it? Was it--

A cattle car.

A cattle car.

And we were {? much ?} in front locomotive, but they had really arranged sometime and, finally, we bring the last car off the train. And then I thought, we have a chance of breaking out through the back wall to try to [INAUDIBLE] and jump out this way, but it didn't work. Train stopped again. So we were ready to do something, the train stopped.

How did you-- how did you intend to jump out?

Through the-- through the back wall. You know, a car, it's a cattle car. There's a wall here. These are some doors here. There are some windows up there. And these are solid walls. I figured, we are the last car, we could break out one or two of these things and jump out. [COUGH] Now the train, it's a big one.

Yes.

The train moved slowly and very seldom was it moving, not just standing still train you could really not jump out. You're always surrounded with [INAUDIBLE] the polizei, the police, the Germans. So, finally, on the fourth night, the train was moving. We were able to break out. But instead of what I had planned, since we were not the last wagon anymore. We were somewhere in the middle of the train, we forced one of the metal bars of the window. And we jumped out from there.

How did you do that? How did you force the bar?

Forced, a couple of guys, you know, they were strong. We ripped them loose. You pushed them out. You couldn't pull in. They pushed them out. And evidently they didn't realize.

Just with your bare strength?

Yeah. And then one bar was left. And I jumped-- we climbed up like this and slipped my feet out first and then jumped off the train, off the running train.

While you were doing this, what were the other people in the car saying?

Oh, a lot of them were very much afraid, don't do it, don't do it, don't jump out. They're going to shoot us all when they find out. You know, the normal reaction of people.

Was there a wide age range of people in the car?

Pardon me?

A wide range of ages of people in the car?

A wide range of, yes, I think the oldest were maybe in their 50s. And, of course, the young ones like me, but I was determined to get out of and so were many others had the opportunity, they don't take a chance. Go back to Buchenwald, you don't know what happens tomorrow.

So how many people jumped out?

No, quite a few. I'd say about 23 which came out.

So about half stayed and half jumped down?

Yeah, maybe a little less than half according to this [INAUDIBLE]. Escaped.

20 people escaped.

20 escaped, but it is not quite correct because one of these guys was very close to him. And he escaped too. Right here, his destiny is unknown.

So it was just one after the other jumping out?

Yeah.

Were you one of the first?

No, I was probably maybe one or two a little later. I don't know which one I was. It was dark [INAUDIBLE]. I didn't look around. The opportunity was there and I went. And later on, and I jumped--

Where did you jump-- yeah. You jumped--

And we were in the northern of France, near St. Quentin. That's with an S-T-Q-U-E-N-T-I-N.

When you jumped out, what was it like to jump out of the train?

I jumped out. I try to push myself away from the train on the jump and landed in the ditch next to the tracks. And I kept low because I'm afraid [INAUDIBLE] a gun shooting either way. But evidently, they were not aware of it till maybe an hour or two later. And the train stopped in St. Quentin at the station. It couldn't go any further. And they came to inspect the prisoners. And half were gone, 20 were gone. We were in the fields [INAUDIBLE].

Did you hook up with the other--

I hooked up with some other people. I said, shalom--

--to the others who jumped?

--that's a password. Yeah, that they know which was [BOTH TALKING].

Oh, that was your password?

Yeah, so I met one guy and a brother and a sister. And we stayed together that night and the next day.

So some women escaped too?

Yeah.

And then we decided, there's too many to be four together. We split up into the boy and sister went together and I went together with the other guy. His name is Joseph Bleiberg. And he lived in France. And he spoke pretty good French. He was from Polish origin. But he had no accent, at least not the accent like I had. So as we went along--

Had these other people all worked for the resistance?

I don't know too much about it. I know some of these people which were close with the resistance, like some of these names I can give you. But it's Cohen, they're sister and brother, Philip and Rosemary Cohen, I don't know what was their connection or how they got on this train. I didn't ask them any questions. Look, you don't want to know which is not your concern because next on the occasion, they can squeeze anything out of you with the treatments you get. If you don't know, you can't answer.

What kind-- what did you talk about in the cattle car before you escaped?

Very little. Escape, that was all my entire idea. Otherwise, you couldn't talk. You were afraid to talk. The Gestapo is outside. You couldn't [INAUDIBLE] what could-- they can listen to you. Nobody talked.

Anyhow, we were in field there during the night and the next day. And then we split up. I went with Joseph Bleiberg and brother and sister went together. From there on, I more or less told Bleiberg when we met people what to tell them.

What was your version?

My version was we are parachutists, English. Our plane was shot down.

You're English?

We're English and our plane was shot down. And we [INAUDIBLE] escaping the German to be detected. Most of the

days, we went through the woods. We lived off an apple here or there. And one night, we came to a farm. And Bleiberg told them story, but I explained to him to say.

Did you speak English at that time?

No, but I spoke to him in my French, which was heavy accent with German. But his French was pretty good.

Right.

So--

How did you intend to say you were English if you didn't speak English?

Well, the French didn't know. They think it's some kind of a story why what we want and what we are. Anyhow, this happened to be extremely nice people. They saw our condition. They gave us [FRENCH] for one night. And they fed us well. They treated us well. They went on the next day.

So then finally, after about four days walking back from the sun south, the only orientation we had, going after the sun which way to travel. Because there were no street signs or road signs or anything. During wartime, all the signs are disturbed. They never write. The enemy shouldn't find its way. So we finally got to an area about 60 kilometers north of Paris in Creil, spelled C-R-E-I-L. And there we found a resistance group in the woods.

How did you find them?

We were going through the woods. And we found these people there. And they stopped us. They interrogated us. And they found out what we are and what we are coming from. And then, OK, you're going to come in our group. And there I found out a real French resistance, that they were 95% foreigners-- Polish, Italian, refugees like me.

When you met up with this resistance group and they asked you your story, what story did you give them?

The real story.

You gave them the real story?

Yeah, of course.

Because you knew they were resistance?

Yeah. [COUGH]

How do you know that a resistance group is truly a resistance group?

You could see. Look, what choice do I have? We were alone. We had nothing. There was a group. There was some organization there. They had some weapons there. So our job was to take up positions the next day against the Germans. The Germans were on the retreat. And that was also-- they were very careful who we are because they wanted to protect themselves. When they found out that we are for real and determined that we are escapees, then they were satisfied.

And they knew you were Jewish?

Yeah.

Did this resistance group have a particular name? Was there a leader that you knew of?

Yeah, but I don't remember them.

OK.

How big a group was it?

About 25, 30 people. They were a few French guys in there, but they were really not serious because they came there during the day. [INAUDIBLE] every night, they went home to mother. That was what shocked me the most. The so-called resistance and they go home at night. From there on, once the Germans were gone from there, we went back to Paris.

So what did you do for the resistance? What was your job?

[INAUDIBLE] nothing much. [INAUDIBLE]. I had a gun. They took some positions on the side of the road protect against Germans in case the Germans come. But there was really no action anymore.

So you didn't have to use the gun?

No, we were finished.

Things didn't--

No no more actions any more because it was already the end.

Right.

And in Paris again I met up with some--

How long did you stay with the resistance group?

A couple of days, maybe a week.

A couple of days.

And it was cleared clean of Germans and Paris was free August 25. So I escaped August 21. So it took us about three or four days to get down here to Paris because we had to walk. We had no transportation. We walked every day 50, 60 kilometers, 40 kilometers. Forever it took. Wherever we felt safe to go, most of the times, we were in the woods, sometimes on the road when we felt it's safe to go on the road.

And food?

I told you, apples from trees.

Oh, right.

That's basically the story.

Now, well, now you're back. Now you're in Paris.

We're back in Paris.

And what did you do when you got to Paris?

Well, I was-- again, I met up with people from the group from resistance. And then they gave me a job as interpreter. From there were a lot of French prisoners in German prison camps. And many had to write the letters in German to their

family so the Germans could read it. I know how. And I would translate the letters for the families. Not too much work, but I got paid some money so I could exist.

Who paid you? The resistance?

It was from a newspaper, [FRENCH].

They paid you to do the translation?

Yeah, but it was really a lousy job because many times, I had nothing. I was just sitting there. It just wasn't for me. Then I found an advertisement in the paper, said the American army is looking for a chauffeur interpreter.

Chauffeur and interpreter?

--and interpreter, so three words of English. And I got a job with the American army in Le Havre. I didn't know how to drive, didn't know much English. So the first three days, I didn't meet my captain, whom I was supposed to drive. I was just trying out a Jeep and learned to drive. And from there on, I was working for them.

With the American army?

Mm-hm.

And for how long did you work for the American army?

Oh, almost a year. I have dates here. I have papers here maybe. And now she can pick me up. My voice is already giving out.

OK.

The dates are really not that important, are they?

Yeah, I just-- no, not at this point. OK, just generally then, what happened?

After this--

So you stayed for a year with the army?

That same body, so I worked for them. And my, I shouldn't say father-in-law, it's really not a father-in-law. It's my sister's father-in-law was in Paris--

You had a sister?

My sister-in-law's brother.

Your sister-in-law's brother?

In-law.

In-law.

OK.

It makes me I don't know.

Right, right.

OK, he started to work in handbags in Paris. And he went back to Holland. And in Holland, he started up a little factory. And then I was repatriated to Holland since I was a refugee out of Holland, not of Germany anymore. Because in 1943, I went out of Holland to France.

Right.

When I went back to Holland, I worked for him for about a year and a half, a little over a year. And I thought there's no future for me because it's all his family. And [INAUDIBLE] on your own. I couldn't very well look at his face to be a competitor to him. And I had some family and cousins here in the United States. And I decided I want to come here. Lots of the family was very helpful when I came.

So you came to the United States when?

1947.

What month?

In June.

And where did you settle?

New York.

New York City, and what did you do when you got to New York City?

Well, I knew something about handbag manufacturing. And one of my cousins said, oh, I have some connections. I work-- I'm a maid or a housekeeper to these people manage a handbag factory because you get a job. So I went and I got a job.

And you were single?

I was single.

And then what happened?

I worked at a factory. Then I got paid \$26 a week. In 1947, that wasn't big money. But it was a job. I stayed with my aunt. So my living expenses were very little. Then the union guy comes along, says, look, kind of work you do, you shouldn't work for this money. So I'll be here for you, and we'll get you a better job. And they got me a better job for my abilities.

And then I started to make \$57, which I was also underpaid by \$8, \$10 a week. But it was a lot more money. So I stayed with them till one day he said to me, we're closing the factory now 'till our fall season starts in July. That was in March. So I asked him, what am I going to do?

There's no income, nothing. Said, oh, no, pop, you go to the unemployment, you get-- you get paid. So I said unemployment? Fine, I go to the unemployment. And I come to the unemployment and sat down. They said Jacob, you're here a short time. You're not vested. You're not entitled to anything. That was my story, so.

I read The New York Times. And I saw an ad in The Times that Alexander's department-- store-- does the name mean something to you-- looking for jewelry and handbag repairman. That's my story.

And then when did you get married?

1950.

1950.

And I stayed with Alexander for a while. And they treated me pretty well. Comparatively, I was well-paid compared to all the other workers because that time, somebody got \$40 or \$35 a week was a lot of money. And they paid me \$55. And then I took off for-- after we got married, we went back to France. My in-laws lived in France, my wife's parents. We stayed with them.

And when I came back, I took a job in the belt factory. And Alexander's bothered me, I should come back and they paid me \$80 a week instead of \$55. But it was only a temporary thing. Because they were still looking for somebody cheaper. And one day they said, goodbye Mr. Jacob. That's it. So I went into business for myself.

And do you have any children?

Well, I have two children, two sons. One name is Peter. The other one is Philip.

Can we talk just before we close a little bit about some of your thoughts about what you went through? Did it change your feelings about being Jewish, going through what you did because you were Jewish?

Not at all, not at all, I'm not a religious person. I'm not really much into going to the temple and praying. But I have 100,000% Jewish feeling. There's something, I mean, I see many people, they converted to Judaism, they can never, never feel what a real Jew feels. It's something that's un...

Do you get reparations?

Yes, I do.

And how do you feel about getting reparations?

It's an income. It helps.

Did you talk about your experiences over the years?

No, I didn't, very little, very seldom. Because when I came here, I never felt it's important to talk about. Because I feel people don't want to know what has happened in the past. They were not interested. Nobody asked any questions. And I always felt, it's the past, I have to live for tomorrow, for the day tomorrow to look for my future. 'Till recently when I found out that it's now very up-to-date and very fashionable to talk about Holocaust. And the last 10 years, it came out, a lot of literature came out, a lot of books.

Again, what do you think kept you going through such terrible, terrible times?

Self-preservation, what else? I was young, hopeful, optimistic. I'm still optimistic today, but I'm not young anymore.

Is there any message you would want to leave for your granddaughter? Any thoughts before we end? Anything that you would want to say?

I hope she grows up to be a good Jewish woman. Even though I find it very difficult. Because her mother is not Jewish. She converted. But her conversion didn't mean a thing. I'm going to send for the rabbi who converted her because he really didn't do anything. They went there. He gave her, read this book and read this book.

And once, twice he talked to her. And then he made a little speech at the conversion ceremony. And that was it. Some rabbis do a very good job. We used to be affiliated with another temple in New York. And this rabbi really is-- when he

converts people, he does a good, good job. He asked the people, come every Friday night and Shabbos synagogue. And he makes them aware of what's going on in Jewish life.

Anything else you'd like to say before we close about your experience that--

No, not really.

Well, thank you very much for doing the interview.

You're welcome.

We do appreciate it. This concludes the interview of Ludwig Jacob. It took place on May 23, 1996 in New York City. And it was conducted by Gail Schwartz on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.