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This is a recording for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum with Mr Fritz Schonbach. The interviewer is Margaret Garrett, July 23, 1996, in Arlington, Virginia. Tape one, side A. Mr. Schonbach, would you tell me where you were born and when. And your name at birth?

My name at birth-- I'm not quite sure. When you mentioned my name is Fritz Schonbach, I'm not sure whether it was Fritz or Friedrich. I'd have to look at my documents. In any case, I was born Fritz or Friedrich Schonbach. Since then, I have dropped the umlaut and I call myself Schonbach. And my place of birth was Vienna, Austria, and the year was 1920, July 1, 1920.

About my childhood, if you want to know about that, it was a comfortable-- our circumstances were comfortable. My father was a partner in a manufacturing and wholesale business which he had started a year before my birth, one year after he got out of the Austrian army, and it had been very successful. So by the time I can remember, we were quite well off.

Like a lot of middle class families, the relative wealth was played down. We did things very modestly because everybody, of course, tried to save money and not provoke fate or the Internal Revenue. And we lived modestly, but very well.

And the place where I grew up was a suburb, almost suburb, of Vienna, very close in, actually. You could walk anywhere. Well, Vienna is a small city. And it was an apartment where I lived with my parents-- I'm the only child-- and my grandmother and a domestic, a young woman from the country who did our cooking and cleaning and so on.

We lived in that same house from the time I was four. Before that, we had lived a little bit closer into town, in a smaller apartment. And actually, it was not a house. We lived in an apartment, too, in the suburb. And I never left it until 18, what was it four or five months after the takeover of Austria by Hitler and the German troops.

During all my high school years, I went to one and the same school. It was a private school, again, in the suburbs, a little bit further out. In fact, it was in a district which is well known, or fairly well known, to people abroad because it's the place where they had a lot of wine restaurants. It's called Grinzing, and that's was where my school was.

And it was a lot of outdoor d soccer, handball, and tennis. And that's where I spent eight years very pleasantly, again, until March 1938, the Nazis took over. At that time, we were all told to go home.

Incidentally, my school was approximately 50% Jewish. Being a private school and reasonably expensive, a lot of the fairly well-to-do Jewish families sent their children there, in particular, children like myself who were only children who had no brothers or sisters for company, and some others who had marital problems, separated and so on. We had a pleasant-- again, it was a pleasant school. It was small and quite enjoyable.

Was it a day school?

It was a day school with a small provision for full-- what would you say-- children who stayed there for a week or for a month whose parents were in the provinces. I don't know what you would call it. In German, it's called [GERMAN]. And our part was called [GERMAN], it was half intern, which meant that we went there in the morning and came home in the evening. We were assisted in our homework, those who needed it, by teachers.

Were any of the teachers Jewish?

Yes. In fact, that is a very interesting thing. My-- what would you call it-- homeroom teacher, [GERMAN]-- that's pretty much the equivalent homeroom teacher-- was Jewish. He was teaching German, history, and geography. He, of course, emigrated. He was able to emigrate when we did, and he ended up in Iowa at Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, where he became the head of the history department.

He died, oh, must be at least 20 years ago, and we were very friendly with him. He was a family friend. So was his wife,

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even his father, who knew my father from their profession. They were both traveling the country as salesmen for their firms. In any case, we are still in touch with his widow, who is just a wonderful person, and we sometimes visit her.

So he was Jewish. I cannot think of any other Jew teaching there, and that is quite significant. The other teachers were, well, just average high school teachers.

And were the Jewish children treated differently from the other children?

Not at all. I mean, obviously, it was a school that depended 50% on Jewish students. And although the directorship of the school, the management of the school, was non-Jewish, the Jewish children were completely on a par. In fact, I would say it was a very good example of complete integration, as you might call it now. And we formed quite good friendships with our non-Jewish colleagues.

Of course, this whole thing changed. What happened after the Anschluss was interesting. They sent us home, kept us away from the school for, I don't remember, three, four, or five weeks, something like that. And we reconvened in the school, which was actually rare because most public schools-- all public schools in Vienna, as far as I know, excluded their Jewish pupils, who then went to special schools, which were formed, for a while at least, until all the Jews had disappeared from Vienna.

But our school being a private school and under some kind of dispensation, probably in order not to be financially ruined, kept the Jewish students on. We went back. And as a matter of fact, since I was in eighth grade, which is the final grade in our high schools, I actually passed the final exams.

Can we back up?

Sure .

You said, they sent you home. Who made the decision?

Oh. All right. The management of the school was-- all right, the school system was, of course, different from here. It was not a regional school system, it was a state system. All schools were regulated, and I think that's a typical European situation.

Including the private schools?

Including the private schools. They are all regulated by the state, by the country. And so the decisions were probably-- and of course, I'm not I'm not privy to that, but they were most probably made by the new regime, the new administrators of the school system. And those people, those bureaucrats, apparently decided that, in the majority of cases, the Jews had to go to another school. They had to start their own school. And in our case, an exception was made for some reason or another.

Was the school closed down for three weeks?

Yes.

Or only the Jewish students were excluded for three weeks?

No, no, it was closed down. Of course, the only concession that was made to the new regime-- and that was rather humorous in a way, I mean, tragic comic, I would say-- was the fact that our classrooms were then divided, not visibly, but it was like a movie theater. You had a left side and a right side, and you had an aisle in the middle. And the Jews were on one side, and the Aryans, so to speak, were on the other side.

And what do you remember about how you felt at the time?

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Well, we had been through a period of extreme political turmoil. You have to remember, those who know that history will remember that Austria had been-- well, it's hard to describe. Austria had been in turmoil practically since the First World War, since the end of the First World War, when the monarchy was overthrown. And Austria was formed, what they called a rump state, with a huge capital, Vienna, which had two million inhabitants, and the rest of the country consisted of another four million. So you had a 4 million inhabitant-- a country with 4 million people, with 2 million concentrated in the capital. And that in itself was a very, very difficult situation.

In any case, we had a socialist government. We had a Christian democrat government, which was the which was headed by Dollfuss, who was murdered in 1934 by a group of Nazis who had come over from Germany, tried to take over Vienna, or Austria, and were unsuccessful. But they were successful in murdering the chancellor of Austria, and then they went back.

By that time, of course, Hitler was in power. It was 1934. He'd been in power for one year, and there was tremendous pressure on Austria by the powerful northern neighbor. But obviously, the time was not ripe to take over, and there are rumors that the Italians were trying to prevent-- Mussolini was trying to prevent Hitler from taking over Austria, et cetera, et cetera. It's a long story. As I said before, Austria was in political turmoil. And the Christian socialist government, which was then headed by Schuschnigg, tried to maintain itself against growing pressure from Nazi Germany.

And it was only a matter of time. We didn't know that. But in retrospect, it was only a matter of time before the country was actually invaded and taken over.

As a child, what were you aware of regarding the turmoil?

Lots. I mean, you couldn't not be aware of it if you are reasonably intelligent, if you read the daily papers.

Did you read the paper as a child?

Oh, yes. Yes, yes. I mean, it was all over the place. And especially being Jewish, you felt it. You felt it all around you. Even if my school was, as I said, well integrated, but the antisemitism-- first of all, the antisemitism in Austria is something that is, it's a given. I always maintain that it's probably more of-- how can I say-- it's probably more ingrown or innate in Austria, being a Catholic country, than Germany, than in the whole of Germany. It's somewhat-- probably not quite as bad as Poland, parts of Eastern Europe. Austria was always anti-Semitic.

But of course, the educated people associated with Jews, with educated Jews. And there was a, let's say, a live and let live atmosphere in Austria.

And how did it affect you personally? You said that in your school there was not a big discrimination against Jews.

There was no discrimination. And no, I mean, I was very good friends with one boy who was very bright and who was good at mathematics, and I was good at languages, Latin and so on. We sat next to each other, we helped each other out. And we formed friendships.

Of course, there was always a barrier. People didn't visit each other's homes as they do here, but that is a typical European thing.

Was it less so for Jews and non-Jews?

Probably yes. I would say almost somewhat comparable to Blacks and whites in this country. There was a sort of invisible social barrier. But it's hard to say. There was integration.

So they might have been superficially civil, but there was something.

Exactly. antisemitism is something that runs very deep in Austria, probably still does. It's hard to say.

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Did you have any activities outside of school?

Oh, yes, of course. I was 18 when I left. And between around 16 and 18, I was able to-- if you're talking about cultural activities--

Yes.

I was able to enjoy a lot of the cultural amenities of Vienna, partly through my teacher, the teacher I mentioned. Our history teacher was a personal friend who sponsored a lot of theater visits. We also went to the opera. My parents had a season ticket for the Vienna Opera. I went to concerts, yes.

With your family, with the teacher?

Not-- well, when you say "family," my father was not an educated person. In fact, he was a typical self-made man who didn't get-- he came from Poland. He didn't get much beyond the first few grades and had to earn a living since he was quite young, and he was not educated. He did take part in a lot of things. I understand that he and my mother used to go to the opera a lot before I was born, and he still did. But he was not taking part actively in the intellectual life of Vienna.

But my mother was quite ambitious in that respect, and she tried to take part in things. So other than that, I was also involved in sports, which now shows its good results because I still swim.

And were the sports sponsored by the school?

There were sports in school. There were sports in school, which, of course, we all took part in. But mainly, I joined-- at the age of 16, I joined the Hakoah, which was the Jewish sports club and which had a particularly strong swimming team. In fact, they were almost on a par with the non-Jewish team, not quite as good. And I joined that, and I became a competitive swimmer, at least for a while. So I was quite heavily engaged in that activity.

And did your team compete against other Jewish teams?

No, there was no other Jewish team. I think all the Jews that were swimmers were in that organization, or most of them. And the only ones we competed against were other clubs. They were in the club, competitive competitions.

However, 1936 was the year of the Berlin Olympics, and we had at least three swimmers in our club who would have been qualified to take part. And they refused to go. They didn't go to the Olympics. They did not represent Austria in the Olympics. So that was the effect the Nazi regime in Germany had on our club.

What other effects did the Nazi regime have on you and your friends?

The fact that there was a Nazi regime in Germany? Well, there was a time of-- you could almost call it terror when the illegal Nazi organization in Austria became ever stronger. And you had, at least from the year 1935, '36 onward. And you had-- actually, the worst excesses were attempts on Jewish lives by-- I don't know what to call them. They were not proper bombs, but they were explosive charges, one of which killed a Jewish jeweler in the center of Vienna.

And they were all deliberately-- it was a kind of a terror campaign waged by illegal Nazis in Austria, Austrians who were Nazis, against Jews. So it was a gradual tightening of the screws even before the Nazis took over.

In winter, we used to go to a winter sport place once a year. Our whole class, our form went to winter sport places. And a couple of times, we went under the leadership of this teacher of mine, this Dr. [? Kallman, ?] who was the only Jewish teacher. And there was hardly a time-- we went by train. There was hardly a time that I remember when we had not at least one incident of a verbal assaults on us by groups of people on the train or individuals on the train who saw those of us who look Jewish. Dr. [? Kallman, ?] this teacher man, looked very Jewish. And there were verbal assaults, insults, go back to Palestine and so on.

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I mean, this kind of thing was gradually, gradually taking a hold. And they became more and more brazen, those members of the Nazi party. And when the Nazis finally took over, those former members, illegal members, were beginning to-- were showing it. They wore special badges to say that they had been members of the Nazi party for years, and a lot of unexpected people turned up with their badges.

So you were surprised to see some of them?

Yes. Some of them were. In fact, a couple of people turned up in SS uniform, and that did surprise me, one in SR, which was the similar Stormtrooper uniform, and two of them in this. And they were-- in fact, that same winter, I had a sort of friendly competition with one of them who was a good skier, and so was I, and as I said, we were friends. I had no idea that he was a member of the SS, but there you are.

Backing up a bit, what was the role of religion in your family?

It was a minor role. To go back to my grandparents, my mother's family came from Moravia, a part of Czechoslovakia where the Jews were, but were more emancipated. They were about one-- if you think of a kind of progression from religious orthodox to completely liberal, they were one step ahead of the Jews of Poland and Russia, where my father came from.

My father came from Lemberg, of Lwow, which is now-- well, which is a part of the Ukraine and at the time was, when he was born, it was part of the Austrian empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire. And after the First World War, it became part of Poland. And then it became German. The Germans invaded, then it became Russian. It was Soviet. It was a Soviet city, and so on and so forth, like a lot of places in Europe.

But in his own-- my father's upbringing was orthodox, was very decidedly Jewish. And his own father was, as I said to the previous interviewer, a Tevye-like figure, a man who was very religious and produced a number of children, I don't know how many, of whom my father was one, and who was better at praying at the synagogue than making a living. So his wife, my father's mother, had to help out. And she went to market with all kinds of-- I don't know, whatever it was he sold. She sold it from a little cart, and my father helped her with that.

But he was, to come back to the question, he was originally quite religious, my mother not so. And together they tried to, well, halfheartedly, to I don't know, give me a religious education. But it didn't. I was brought up liberally in reality. We had religious instruction in school, but that was about all.

I was bar mitzvahed, incidentally. So I mean, we went that far. But after that, I only went to synagogue sometimes on Yom Kippur. I mean, I'm aware of the Jewishness and the Jewish heritage, but there was no real-- it didn't take. Religion didn't take with me.

I don't know if there's anything else that I can tell you about religion in my family. It wasn't a very strong factor. Obviously, it was a strong factor the moment the Nazis came to power because they didn't look at religion as much as race, as they called it.

Well, let's stop on this tape. We have to turn the tape over.

This is a recording for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum with Mr. Fritz Schonbach by the interviewer is Margaret Garrett, on July 23, 1996, in Arlington, Virginia, tape number 1, side B. Mr. Schonbach, you were talking about some-- a few of non-Austrians of Austrian history.

Yes. First of all, I think in this country there is probably not a very full knowledge of Austrian history and the things that led up to the takeover of Austria and the fact that Austria took such a prominent part in the persecution of Jews. And in fact, I understand that the people who were involved in the Holocaust were maybe to an even greater extent Austrian than the proportion between Austrians and Germans as a whole.

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So that's not quite clear, but I do believe that the Austrian-- once the Nazis had taken over, the remaining Austrians, and most Austrians, of course, stayed behind. It was only the Jews and some very strong political opponents who left the country after the takeover. Those who remained were committed-- a lot of them were committed Nazis.

Now, as far as the view of this country or people, the average person in this country is concerned, it is very often influenced by external impressions. People go to Austria because it's a beautiful country. It's a nice place to spend a summer or a winter or whatever, and to enjoy the opera and concerts. And the impression is often superficial of friendly people, good food, and nice landscape. But when-- and it often has to do with an ignorance of the language. If you speak the language, if you understand that is still in some cases, and of course, particularly with the older people, my contemporaries, there is still an undertone, a residue of antisemitism that is hidden under the friendly exterior.

Let's go back to when you decided to leave Austria.

Well, obviously, I would say we knew enough of what had happened in Germany to Jews and political opponents to want to leave immediately.

What did you know?

We knew of the existence of concentration camps. Dachau was a well-known, almost a generic term for a concentration camp.

And when did you know this?

It's hard to put an exact date on it, but I would say Hitler took over in '33, and by '34 the concentration camps had-- I don't know how many there were, frankly. There was more than one, but Dachau was the prominent one. And by 1934, they had been formed. And I believe that '34 or '35, we were aware of the existence of such camps.

You were four years old?

No, no, no, no. I was 14.

You were 14.

I was born in 1920.

So you were 14 years old.

14, 15, right. And of course, I read the paper and we talked about it. And we were aware of the menace of Germany to our north. And so when the Nazis finally took over, the immediate, let's say, sentiment was, why did we get out while there was time?

And as a matter of fact, my father was quite provident. He had established a not very large bank account in Switzerland. And by 1937, in the summer of 1937, so approximately one year before the takeover, he took me and my mother to Switzerland to introduce me to the manager of that particular branch of a Swiss bank, and told him who I was because it was one of those cases of a numbered account that you hear about.

And we had that, except it wasn't all that much money because he did-- cash was not something that he used to have in large amounts. But what he could spare-- in other words, he took precautions. So you can imagine-- it shows you that there was a strong feeling of, we might have to get out in a hurry.

So when the Anschluss came, and that was a terribly traumatic time because it was not known-- it was not determined until the last moment that the German troops were actually marching in, and they took a lot of Austrian Nazis by surprise. And I heard people comment afterwards, on a park bench, in the street, hey, they've taken over. We didn't mean it that way. We wanted to be an equal partner.

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You will find that-- or you can't find it now because most of those people are dead by now. But there was a very strong sentiment that Hitler had done something which they had never expected him to do, and that is to not only take over Austria, but make it into a province of Germany.

Now, how did you make the decision to leave?

Well, the decision was right there. It was just a matter of how, not whether.

And you decided-- you made the decision.

Immediately, my parents said, we have to get Fritz out. He's the most important--

Immediately after the Nazis took over.

Absolutely. And as I said, preparations were made even before, when my father took the precaution of establishing an account in Switzerland. So then it was just a matter of where do you go, and that was another terrible tragedy. And that is something that I don't know whether people are aware of it, but we, the Jews of Vienna, and especially those who could afford to leave-- and I guess everybody could afford to leave in a way, could get together the money to leave the country. A lot of people decided not to because they thought it would pass or things would get better. But everybody tried to get into a foreign country.

And the only comparison I can make, and a lot of people have made that, was like little animals being trapped, being cornered, mice being driven into a corner. You saw people in front of every foreign consulate forming lines and trying to get a visa. And of course, everybody immediately shut their borders to Jews.

And what did you do? How did your family try to get you out?

Well, we at first-- and I'm not clear on that. At first, we considered the United States, which was the place, of course. And a lot of people who suddenly discovered relatives in the States, and once they had relatives, they could write to them and say-- what they needed was an affidavit to get a US visa. And a lot of people got affidavits.

An affidavit meant that somebody guarantees your living and you will not be a burden on the state. So a lot of people came to the States on affidavits who had relatives or friends here. And of course, a lot of people didn't. We didn't.

And then it was a matter of choosing. Where do you go? And we started collecting information. What's a good-- what is a country where we can go? And we found out that the borders were closed immediately. And I still remember one country that we considered, and that was Australia. And no, you have to have a certain amount of money to go to Australia, so forget it. And so it was with a lot of other countries.

Finally, somebody had the bright idea to tell my father, why don't you send your son to a Swiss School? If you can afford it, if you have a little bit of money, you can send him to the school. So that was my escape.

We got in touch with a representative of the school, and they had already established-- the school was right just across the border, in Saint Gall, Saint Gallen, across the border from Austria. And they had already established a little pipeline, a man who used to go across the border and take Jews across, with or without a visa, and people who had-- and I don't remember the technicalities, but people who had enrollment in that school. And he was able to take a lot of people across the border, and I was one of them.

I did not have a proper visa because my father was partner in a fairly big business, and what the authorities then required was a certificate of-- I don't know. I only know the German term for it, [GERMAN], which meant that there was no reason why this person should be held back. In other words, he had paid all his taxes and whatever other liabilities there were.

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Well, now, in the case of a businessman, to pay all his taxes, outstanding taxes in cash, was a bit like here. I think any businessman who's got his capital involved in a business will not be able to liquidate his business in a hurry. So we did not get this. And my passport-- I had a passport, but my passport was somewhat flawed.

However, this representative, to make it short, came across the border, took me under his wing and took me across on a spur line, a tiny little narrow gauge line into Switzerland. And I suspect that the border guard was a very, very harmless Austrian official who didn't want to have anything to do with the Nazis. And he just looked at my passport and he looked at my luggage, and he said, go. And I was in Switzerland. It was like arriving in heaven. It was an incredible feeling.

So it was not a decision on where to go. It was a decision on where would they let you in, where can you possibly flee to. And of course, my parents stayed behind and a lot of my relatives in Vienna stayed behind. And they finally got out to Italy, of all places, because the Italians did not prevent Jews from coming in, although that was a fascist country. And even during the war, as you probably have heard, the Italians were very lenient and very, let's say, sloppy. But they did not-- I mean, the persecution of Jews was a very minor item on Mussolini's agenda.

So you were in the school for a school year.

I was there for a full year. And then, of course, the question arose, what do you do in school? I had just passed my Austrian leaving exam, and it was decided that, of course, the subject should be anything connected with English. And I enrolled in a course for the preparation to pass the Oxford school certificate, which is an international exam, which is-- apparently, I understand it's comparable to the Regents exam here in the States-- which is taken at the same time the world over, with a person supervising it. And then the papers are collected and graded by someone, presumably at Oxford. And I passed that exam about six months later.

And I stayed on in the school because there was nowhere else to go until, finally, my parents were able to go to Italy. And I joined them in Italy. By that time, a friend of ours had obtained a visa for England, and I eventually ended up in London about one month before the outbreak of war. In other words, in August 1939, I ended up in London.

Were you by yourself?

I was by myself, and the idea was that I would-- I had a recommendation. I'd become quite friendly with the British consulate in Trieste, where my parents were, because this consulate's son went to school with me in Switzerland, and he gave me a letter of recommendation to the home office in London. But of course, I had no idea how to go about it. And before I knew it, somebody had taken the letter from me and I never saw anybody at the home office.

And it turned out that my parents would never, ever have been allowed into Britain. They were middle aged people who had no-- Britain took a number of youngsters, such as myself, but my parents had no chance at all. So they stayed in Italy and eventually ended up in Argentina.

And what happened to you in London?

Well, in London I was supposed to be a trainee for a Jewish tailor. And that was rather funny because when I met the man, he didn't realize I spoke English. I had learned English in Switzerland and spoke it quite well, and he addressed me in Yiddish. And I knew some Yiddish from my father. So we had this labored conversation in Yiddish for about, I don't know, 20 minutes or so.

Finally, I was desperate. I couldn't really say what I wanted to say. And I said, don't you speak any English? And he said, sure I do. And I said, well, good. Let's speak English, then.

So anyway, I did not take the job because my father thought I might still help him to get across, and I should try and work something to get my parents to England.

I don't understand. If you took the job--

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The job of trainee.

Yeah. You wouldn't be able to help your parents come to England?

I don't know. It was not-- my father didn't think I should take the job. I mean, we corresponded from Italy.

And what did you think about taking the job? Did you think you should take it or not?

I didn't particularly want to be an apprentice to a tailor. I'd been wanting to be an artist ever since I was a small kid, and it was not an ideal thing. And I thought it was temporary, anyway. So I decided it was fine. I didn't--

And you didn't need the money from the apprenticeship.

I didn't think I did. We had some money. I mean, we have transferred some money there, and I felt that I should be able to help my parents come over or do something a little bit more, let's say, a little bit more lucrative than be an apprentice to a tailor. In retrospect, it was probably a mistake, but it ended up the same way anyway.

As it turned out, I didn't do anything. I teamed up with another group of refugees who eventually rented a house in the suburbs because a lot of Londoners left the city to go to the country and rented their houses for relatively little money. So we rented a house in Willesden, a suburb of London, and that's where we lived. And I enrolled in art school at the beginning of 1940. I enrolled in Willesden Technical College as an art student.

And this is what you always wanted.

Always. My father had simply decided early on that art is something I could do in my spare time, but I had to become-- I had to have a title to be an engineer, a doctor, a lawyer, to be a well-paid professional. And art was not a profession that appealed. And I think he was not alone. I mean, he was he was one of-- he was probably typical of the middle class, Jewish middle class, whatever, who felt that their children should not be artists. An artist is a person who doesn't make a living.

So I was very lucky in that respect. Ever since I got away from home, I worked towards that one aim, and that was to be an artist. Anyway, I enrolled in art school, and I was in art school for, I don't know, one or two months before I was interned by the British.

Now, how did that happen?

That's another chapter. I went before a tribunal at the end of '39.

Now, how did that occur? Did they find you? Did you hear that they wanted you?

Well, all refugees of Austrian and German origin were invited or hauled before a tribunal.

They sent you a letter?

That's a good question. I don't really know how it happened. They must have sent me a letter, yes. I know that everybody went before it, as far as I know. Everybody went before a tribunal to decide whether the person should belong to one of three categories-- A, immediate internment B, free, they say free until further notice, to be interned if the need arises; C, friendly alien, not to be interned.

That was the preliminary classification, and that took place in-- very shortly after the outbreak of war. War broke out on the third of September, 39. And the tribunal started in October, November of that same year.

So I was called before a tribunal, and I don't know the exact procedure. I assume I got a letter because we were under-- I

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believe we were all under surveillance by the police. Obviously, we were recent arrivals, and everybody was suspected of being a potential spy or German sympathizer.

The British did not understand, really, the general public did not understand, and that probably went right to the top. Some members of Parliament did not understand what the Nazi policy towards Jews really meant. In fact, few people understood that Jews eventually were to be eliminated. I mean, even Jews didn't understand it.

But in Britain, the attitude was in many cases, you speak German, you are German or Austrian. What are you doing here? And that, of course, was particularly-- this feeling was particularly pronounced once the war broke out. Why aren't you in your country? It was still called our country. It was not understood that we had become nonpersons, non-Germans, non-Austrians.

And what was that like for you to be so misunderstood?

That was very painful, very painful. I did not associate with a lot of people in London. I was very lonely. A cousin of mine who was the same age as I had also gone to London, a girl cousin, and she was working as a domestic. I associated with her. I saw her quite frequently.

And the only other person at the beginning that I associated with was a friend of mine from Switzerland who was English and who did understand the situation, I assume. I don't know. We didn't get into this. But I know that right at the outbreak of war, when we expected heavy German bombardment of London, of course-- everybody expected it. Not only that, but we expected poison gas. That's why everybody had a gas mask. Everybody was issued a gas mask.

And kids were evacuated to the country. And a lot of people evacuated themselves to the country. In any case, this friend of mine, who was sort of upper class, invited me to stay at his apartment because his mother had evacuated herself to the country and he stayed behind in London. And I spent about a week with him. So he was a friend.

And I can't think of anybody else. I was lonely altogether. And I did a lot of reading and just occupied myself. And of course, the moment war broke out, there was no question about taking any jobs. That was out because that was the moment when we were under suspicion and under surveillance.

And we remained in that-- incidentally, I was classified B, exempt from internment until further notice, because I had a landlady who heard me speak German to a man in a neighboring apartment who himself was Jewish refugee from Czechoslovakia. And she heard us speak German she was a very-- well, a suspicious person, and she had denounced me to the police just before the tribunal, saying that she heard me speak German. She thought I was a spy.

So I had a very harrowing time. Most people were dismissed by the tribunal within half an hour. The tribunal, incidentally, was conducted by a local magistrate, which is-- well, magistrate, like here. And I went with a group of people waiting outside, and I saw a number of people that I met on the spot, who came out after 20, 30 minutes of interrogation.

I was called before the magistrate, and he started asking me some very strange questions. Are you a Nazi sympathizer? And I bridled. I didn't say much because I was so completely flabbergasted. And after he had taken some details, the tribunal was adjourned until the following week. And I lived through hell because I realized something had happened that was not foreseen.

And that week I actually considered suicide because the outlook of being interned-- and I knew that a lot of Germans, or some Germans who had lived in England had been interned. And I don't know how I knew, but I knew people who had been classified A and had been interned immediately. So I would be thrown into a camp with Nazi sympathizers. And the fact that I would be interned, the internment itself was such a horrible thought to me that I felt absolutely desperate.

So anyway, I came before the-- and another thing that contributed to my depression was the fact that I called this friend of mine, Alec, who had previously invited me to stay at his apartment. And I got his mother on the phone, and she knew something was up because she'd read about the tribunals. Or maybe I told her that I needed him as a advocate, because I

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think that was part of the, if I remember rightly, the letter or whatever information sheet they sent us, that they said, if you have any English friends, bring them along, if you have anybody to speak for you.

So I thought, well, he's a natural. And I called, his mother said, oh, Alec, what do you want? Oh, you want him to go before the tribunal. Oh, Alec has a heavy cold. And he must have heard something, and he came to the phone and he pretended to have a cold and being sick and so on. To me, it was betrayal. And that was one of the things that contributed to my depression.

So in any case, at the adjourned tribunal, the judge-- I think my landlady appeared or something, and she made a bad impression. She was a nasty piece of work, and the judge asked me some questions. And I began to speak to him. And he said, but you speak English.

First of all, he's saying, how come you're so-- you're so articulate now. You didn't say much last time. I said, well, I didn't say much because I was stunned by the accusation. And he said, and how come you speak English so well? That was a definite thing against me, a strike against me. And I explained that I had lived in Switzerland and I'd passed the Oxford school certificate.

So he was apparently a reasonable man. He adjourned it once more and dismissed me with a-- I became a B case, which meant exempt from internment until further notice. And of course, that whole situation changed in the moment the Germans broke through the Allied lines in the spring of 1940, marched through France, et cetera, et cetera. The whole situation for the refugees changed because Britain needed-- that's the way we saw it and I still see it-- Britain needed a scapegoat, and we were the perfect scapegoat.

So the newspapers started writing, intern the lot, intern the lot. These people are suspect and they may help the enemy, et cetera, et cetera. And the British took everybody from A, B, C, and into the lot. And that's how I was interned in Britain. In the end, almost everybody was interned.

We'll have to stop here and resume the recording.

[INAUDIBLE] to stop.

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