

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
Interview with Fred A. Kahn
September 17, 1996
Margaret Garrett, Interviewer

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TAPE 1 SIDE A
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Fred A. Kahn, born December 19, 1932, Wiesbaden, Germany.
Born 6 weeks before Hitler Chancellor of Germany.
In early 1933 his father went to Belgium. Mr. Kahn was reared from 1 1/2 years to almost 6 years by childless aunt, sister of his father, and her husband who lived in Wehen, about 7 miles from Wiesbaden. His five years older brother, Walter, remained with their mother. He had lots of affection, called his aunt Mama, thought she was his mother. He did not think he was any different. Had a Christian friend, Walter Kaltwasser, who protected him against little Nazis. Aunt and uncle were religious. Took care of synagogue next door. Only a few attended. The only Hebrew he knows is from those days. Parents were not religious. His father youngest of six. He youngest of his cousins. The mother of his father was named Adelheid Kahn; maiden name, Roos, died in 1938, born in Frucht bei Ems.

Immediately after Munich Agreement his father called his Uncle Siegfried Nassauer. Aunt was Rosa Nassauer. Told him to take Mr. Kahn to Aachen and turn him over to Maria Goar. Saturday, lots of traffic. He and the lady took a streetcar to the border. He walked alone to the border. His mother, father, brother and grandmother, had settled in Vervier. They yelled, "C'est mon fils." Father well established in Belgium. Champion bridge player. Mr. Kahn had no papers--admitted as political refugee. Aunt and uncle were sent to Lodz.

Two ~~was~~ days later his mother took him to the Board of Education to register as a student. Used name of Freddy. Had had no schooling in Germany. Started in kindergarten. Friend in class named Yvan Kerckx.

Tape 1 of 3 side B

October 1, 1938. Arrived in Belgium.

Lived with:

mother of mother, Katchen Grunebaum, born Katharina Scheuer

brother, called Jean Jaques, German name Hans Jacob

himself, Fred, Friedrich Adolf at birth

Father, Max

Mother, Selma, maiden name Grenebaum

parents were married August 1924.

Lived in apartment rented from Mr. Varenkamp who owned the large villa located at 190, Chaussee de Heusy in Verviers.

Nearby was brother of father, Herman Kahn, who lived in Eupen, Belgium, then during WWII moved to Brussels

Uncle's business was providing agricultural products to farmers in southern Belgium, area near Malmedy, Eupen, Spa, and Belgian border towns near the German border city of Aachen.

May 1940 all piled into car set out for Liege and Brussels. Father taken into custody by Belgians. After let go started out for Flanders. German Stukas came down and killed people on the road. Slept in a barn.

After few days decided to go back to Verviers.

Car broke down. German ambulance took them to Brussels and German Red Cross. Friendly. Hitched way home. Six weeks later father came back to Verviers. He had gone to Boulogne-sur-le-mer.

Commander of German Military Forces in Verviers lived next door. At first nothing against Jews. First few months friendly.

October 1940-Jews over certain age ordered to register. Small growing right wing party called Rexiste. Eventually they became collaborators.

Person named Mr. Vielvoye broke in middle of the night before the list was turned over to the Germans and took names off the list.

Had to turn in radios.

1940-1941 interrogated his father. He had same name as a German Communist. He yelled back. Decorated veteran of World War I.

1941 Germans invaded Russia. Head of German Army in Verviers told father as long as he head nothing would happen to his family but he could not guarantee after that. Someone who played bridge had a brother working at city hall and he would be able to get false identity papers.

Matched with people who had passed away.

Father-Maurice Lejeune

Tape 1 of 3, side B cont.

Fred Kahn--Freddy Lejeune

Long before actual underground was taught Catholic prayers by daughter of landlady to help him hide.

Spring 1942 got scarlet fever. By time supposed to go back to school, edict Jews wear Yellow star. At school intermission he played sheriff. Father was reform or agnostic. One kid called him dirty Jew. Freddy boxed him. Knocked his eyeglasses off. Called to attention of principal.

Tape 2 of 3 side A

Kid he boxed was son of optician. Freddy's mother to the principal, named Mr. Raymond Godefroid. Principal said beware. Apologize to the father. Take the boy out of school. It was then the law that Jewish children could not go to school. Principal had son in England, in the Belgian Air Force. Principal said he would help them.

The brother of his father, Herman, had moved to Brussels, was in custody. October 5, 1942, his father said they had to go into hiding. He spent one night in the attic of the principal. There were 26 Jewish families in Verviers. The principal found his family places to hide. The next day they moved to Polleur, then Heusy, then Oneux-Theux. He was trained to say what to say if arrested--he was sick, they were bombed out by the Americans. Told to avoid young people. Say had scarlet fever, contagious. He was assigned to keep an eye on his grandmother. Listened to the BBC, Had maps.

Hardest on him was that he was by himself. Read a lot. The principal brought books. Invented games for himself. Played in the creek, pretended prospecting for gold. Entertained self. Pretended playing soccer. Invented game with dice. Whole family played backgammon. Kept an eye on his grandmother. Humor an important factor in survival. Food in black market. Father's money deposited in the name of the Director of the Bank.

Went into town. Grabbed by Belgian policeman. Asked where he lived. BBC had told them they were looking for them. They knew. Police said never come back again.

Tape 2 of 3, Side B

Didn't tell parents was arrested at the time.

1943 worst year of war. Moved every 6 to 9 months to a different village several miles away. Had a cover story. Father did not work. Belgian collaborators would get people off street car and check identity card. Father was Maurice Lejeune.

1944 had a little job carrying fresh milk at night. Belgian underground active. Lived in beautiful rural area. Knew a lot of farmers. Mr. Cluyten, a farmer, always came and moved them with horses. Other Jewish families in Verviers destroyed.

September 9, 1944 liberation by American Army.

Lived in a barn the first months of hiding. Then rented houses. First house a bungalow. They the only family. For one year.

When the Germans were retreating, dangerous. Saw Germans beating three people to death, one a priest.

Remembered through the war the Torah, little boyfriend Walter. When the Americans came silver paper all over. Thought it was code but was to confuse the German radar. Ate a lot of potatoes. Bread like cement. Plenty of milk. Father had stored a lot of cod liver oil. Plenty of vegetables. Meat hard to get--on black market--very expensive. Children came first. Couldn't go to a dentist. No sugar so no tooth problems. Very limited contact with youth.

Survived because no one knew who we were, planning, luck. American soldiers gave chewing gum-- coming out of my ears. Wanted to arrest my father for being a German. Mother arrested for being German spy. Only words I knew in English--I am a Jew. I have an uncle in New York.

Tape 3 of 3, side A

Battle of Bulge--blackout on radio. Heard cannon. Knew Germans nearby. He saw trucks of black American soldiers with fixed bayonets going toward front. Snowy day, dirty. They hit the road. Walked from Verviers to Liege, 15 miles through the snow. Grandmother 68 years old. She fell in ditches. Trucks of American soldiers blown up by V2's.

Close call. They had reassumed their identity. He doesn't think they would have made it again. SS killed many women and children and American POW's. Killed outside Malmédy.

After that back to Verviers. Friendship with the principal. His wife had died and he went to live with his son so rented them his house where they lived from 1945 to 1949. He slept in bedroom of son where he had slept in 1942 when went into hiding.

Farmers that helped them were very religious. His uncle Herman who had lived in Brussels was in 1942 on transport to Auschwitz that was attacked by Jewish underground.

Descriptions of events he heard of involving underground.

Factors that helped to survive: close to rural areas and limited German SS, father had arrived in Belgium so well established by the time went underground--conspiracy of the heart. Didn't have a normal childhood. After the war, left alone by parents and very independent. Developed a sense of humor--nothing could compare with it. Ambitious because of that. Consider self Belgian, not German, Verviers his home town.

End of summary

November 2, 1996

Fred A. Kahn--Correction/Addendum

Mr. Kahn called me on the phone and gave me the following information:

Tape 3, Side A. His Uncle Herman was arrested in Belgium in 1942. In April 1943 he was deported on the train that was attacked by the Jewish underground.

Tape 1, Side A. Another Uncle, Siegfried, who had been living in Germany, was arrested and deported with his Aunt Rosa to Lodz in June 1942.

Margaret Garrett