

**Fred Kahn**

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### **Abstract**

Fred Kahn relates his experiences during the War and liberation. His principal helped the family move from place to place in Belgium. Fred missed the company of children his age but made up games and helped his grandmother. He felt the family survived as people accepted their cover story of being bombed out of their house and Fred being too sick to attend school. The people did not realize the family was Jewish but at time, they were suspicious that the father was a spy as he was German. It was amazing that the Germans did not look for them and the family succeeded in remaining together throughout the war. After liberation, Fred returned to school and later published his experiences.

### **Summary**

00:00 Tape 2, **Side A** Fred explains that a turning point in his life was when the son of the optician called him, "dirty Jew" and he broke his glasses and was brought to the principal's office. His mother was called to see the principal who informed her to beware and apologize to the father and pay for the glasses. She was told to take Fred out of the school as he was Jewish. Now Fred thinks that the optician was probably a collaborator and dangerous. The principal's son had escaped to England and was in the Air Force. The principal offered to help Fred and his family. Fred's Uncle Herman, his father's brother, had moved to Brussels and told Fred's father to move to the Ardennes. On May 1, 1942, the Gestapo placed the uncle in custody. Fred's father went to Liege and saw a woman crying because her Jewish husband was arrested so he returned home.

05:00 On October 5, 1942, a week after the eyeglass incident, Fred and his grandmother moved to the principal's attic for the night. His parents moved their belongings to non-Jewish people's basements in Verviers. In the 40,000 population of Verviers, there were only 26 Jewish families. He knew of only one family where the husband was Jewish and wife was not. They did not know many Jews in the area nor did the neighborhood know that his family was Jewish. After World War II, Fred was considered Belgian. Fred moved in with a Catholic family as their supposed nephew and his brother as their supposed cousin. His brother did not get along with the children so left and joined the underground. The principal helped them hide for a short time in several places. Fred's family gave a story that they were bombed out of their home by the Americans and Fred was too sick to attend school. In October 1942 Fred was almost ten and not concerned with morality. He went overnight from childhood to adulthood.

- 10:00 Fred was trained to stay away from youths his age because he was contagious due to scarlet fever. His duty was to take care of his grandmother. He still has a scar from when he had an accident cutting wood with an ax and his grandmother gave him first aid. They returned to a spa town close to Verviers and stayed in a bungalow far from the street which was a good hiding place. His father labored for the Germans from 1940 to 1942 digging in river erosion work. The mayor who was also a doctor was helpful to his father although the mayor was a collaborator (and later got killed). If one German got killed, they would shoot 10 people. His father had graduated from a German Junior College and his mother received a cultural education in literature and music at a Swiss boarding school.
- 15:00 His father knew politics from reading newspapers but he did not participate in politics. The family listened to the BBC and had maps to follow the war. When the Germans felt they succeeded, they would play loud music. His brother rejoined the family. Fred watched his grandmother as she spoke German. They lived in a rural area and Fred would sit and wonder when the war would end. He read a lot as the principal brought him books though some were difficult reading. Fred invented games to fill up his time. He would sit near the creek in the forest and pretend he was prospecting for diamonds and gold. Sometimes he pretended he was playing soccer as he had been a soccer fan. He also made up a game with dice. His entire family played backgammon. He always went with his grandmother when she went out. One day they were on a train and she pretended that she was reading the (French) newspaper. She held it upside down and, luckily, no one noticed that.
- 20:00 When they arrived home, Fred told the family and they all laughed. Humor was important in their situation. They had to buy food on the black market. Before the war, the family gave their money to the director of a bank who kept it in his own name for safekeeping. When their money ran out, his father borrowed money from the farmers who traded on the black market. Once his father had to go to court to speak up for the farmers. One day Fred went to town to get soup bones from the butcher and a Belgian policeman grabbed him and took him in. He was asked his name and he gave a false name but when the policeman asked where he lived, he did not respond as he knew the Germans were looking for them. The policeman left and when he returned, Fred told him the truth and the policeman called City Hall but there was no one registered with his name.
- 25:00 The policeman left again and when he returned asked Fred if his mother was blonde. Fred replied that she was because she had dyed her black hair blond. He was asked if his mother hung around the neighborhood and Fred replied that she did. Then the policeman told him to leave and not return to that town again. He was afraid to tell his experience to his parents as they might spank him. After the war, Fred participated in pacifist activities and returned to the police station to secure sponsorship of the Queen Mother. His mother

did not understand how the police already knew him and Fred finally told his parents of his wartime adventure. **Tape 2, Side 2**

- 30:00 His brother still does not know of this adventure. One policeman in Verviers told him to forget his pacifist activities and stick to his studies. 1943 was the worse year of the war for the allies as the Germans had successes and the Holocaust was in effect. The family moved about every six months. As a bridge player, his father knew not to take risks. His father was not working at the time but played bridge. The villagers did not know why the family kept moving. One day the Germans removed everyone from a streetcar and asked for their ID cards. His father said he was a German salesman and the collaborator said he was OK as he knew him. That was a close call. The Germans retreated in 1944. In the evening Fred carried milk for a rich person who lived near the town. The Belgium underground was active and killed people. The family lived in a hilly, beautiful area, the highest point in Belgium. The Kleuton (ph) family helped them move from place to place using a horse and carriage. Many families helped them during the war but the families did not know each other.
- 35:00 Of the 26 Jewish families, only one Hungarian lady survived. The landlady reported that no one had looked for them. A German lady was able to hide her husband and obtain a special ration card due to her ethnicity. Fred felt that they survived because the Belgium people were neutral and did not want to denounce their family. Also, their family made an effort to indicate that they were not Jews. On September 9, 1944 when they were liberated by the American Army, the landlady said that no one had looked for them and they did not know that the family was Jewish. The landlady was suspicious that the father might be a British spy as he knew Russian and sometimes he got out of bed late at night. One night during the war they slept in a barn but usually they would rent a house. One year the family lived in a bungalow. No one knew they were Jewish until Fred wrote an article that was published in the Belgium newspaper after his mother's death. Someone read his article and wrote to him that they knew he was Jewish and thought he was killed.
- 40:00 Fred received a fee for his article and gave the money to the Belgium school that he had attended. It was reported on the radio about his career in the US. Friends and the people who had kept his belongings in their basement wrote to him. Life was dangerous when the Germans were retreating. Eisenhower was told to attack. The SS burned down villages and a barn filled with civilians. The underground took four or five prisoners and the Germans killed three people including a priest and a neighbor's son. The battle went on all day. Everyone was a patriot. When the Germans retreated, they threw down bridges, motorcycles zoomed by and one German killed another German. His father saw shrapnel flying and Fred hid with his grandmother. It was an exciting moment for Fred. He saw an orange flag on a German tank and greeted the Americans upon their arrival.

- 45:00 Fred mentions that his grandson lives nearby in Bethesda. He remembers the torah and his friend Walter and wondering when will the war end. He saw silver paper on the ground that was dropped by American planes to confuse the German radar. His greatest hardship during the war was his limited contact with other children. During the war, he helped his grandmother in the kitchen. They had lots of potatoes which they used for pancakes, bread and cake but had no chocolate or white bread. The bread was like cement and milk was plentiful. His father stored cod liver oil to bring to the farmers who refined it and gave it to children. They went to the butcher for bones and bought meat on the black market so it was expensive. Parents sacrificed themselves for their children. He wore his brother's clothes as they could not shop.
- 50:00 He could not go to the dentist until after the war. There was no sugar so they did not get cavities. Fred knew a person who was in Auschwitz and had no problem with his teeth. They had a newspaper to read during the war. Fred spoke German with his mother and French with his father and other adults. He was unaware that nearby were a convent and a school for blind children. About 3,000 to 4,000 Jewish children had been hidden by the underground in convents and orphanages. They were run by Jews and funded by the Belgium government in London. Some of the children put in the orphanage for the blind were not blind. A memorial was built for the 300 children who were saved. A lady was recognized as being a righteous gentile. Fred's family survived as no one knew who they were. It was amazing that they were able to remain together.
- 55:00 At liberation, Fred felt total relief and he returned to school the next day. He saw a military warehouse nearby and got chewing gum for all the children. They lived about five or six miles out of Verviers. The Belgium police wanted to arrest his father as he was German so thought he was a spy. He talked to the American captain and saved his wife and himself. The next morning, Fred spoke to his first American infantryman and found out that he's from New York. He told him that he is Jewish and has an uncle there and the American knew him. Fred wrote in the World Report that he visited his elementary school. After the war, they moved closer to town and he went to school there. The first time he ever saw a black person was an American soldier.

### **File 3 of 3**

#### **Abstract**

Fred Kahn relates his experience after liberation to 1951 when he arrived in the US. Immediately after liberation the family returned to their actual name, "Kahn." They had thought the war was over but the Battle of the Bulge was fought nearby from December 1944 to January 1945. The battle had heavy losses of Belgium citizens and American soldiers. The family walked the 15 miles from Verviers to Liege where they stayed for the duration of the battle.

Upon their return to Verviers they rented the empty principal's house until the principal died in 1949. There were many people in the underground who were helpful and others who collaborated with the Gestapo. Fred believes the family survived partly due to true friendship like he experienced when he served in the US Army. Now, Fred does not feel German but is proud to be a Belgium.

### Summary

- 00:00 Tape 3, **Side 1** Fred explains that after liberation the family was known as Kahn once again. The Battle of the Bulge started in the Ardennes and he remembers that on his birthday, December 17, 1944, they were shocked to hear the Germans nearby. He saw trucks of American soldiers going to the front which he described in his article. It was a snowy day and the family, including his 68-year-old grandmother walked the 15 miles from Verviers to Liege. He recalls his grandmother falling into ditches. He saw a truck full of American soldiers blown up by V2 rockets. His high school was used as a hospital and was full of the wounded. The Germans (some dressed as Americans) had penetrated the American mines. The worse battle was in June and the Germans wanted them to surrender. They were very concerned as had thought the war had ended. The SS killed many Belgium civilians and American POWs.
- 05:00 About 100 people were killed at Malmedy. The killer was put on trial but was not sentenced. One pilot got killed later when vacationing in France. During the battle, the family lived in Liege, a town of 200,000 people near Hitler's plants. There was hand-to-hand combat and some cities were retaken. The battle lasted from December 16<sup>th</sup> into January. The turning point came at Christmas when the clouds lifted and the American planes could fly again. The family returned to Verviers and rented the principal's house until 1949. The principal's wife had died and he went to live with his son in Brussels. When he died in 1949, the house was sold. While in the house, Fred slept in the same bedroom that he had used in 1942. It was the bedroom of the son, an anglophile, with a picture of King Edward on the wall. Some people had helped Fred's family as they were patriotic and the farmers helped as they were religious. His Uncle Herman who lived in Brussels was taken by the Gestapo in May 1942 and put on a transport to Auschwitz. Three people from the Jewish underground attacked the cattle car by opening the door as the train slowed down. The uncle survived as had new shoes and jumped out.
- 10:00 The Germans started shooting and some prisoners escaped but Dr. Lipschitz (ph) from the underground was executed. This was the only time that a group of people attempted to attack a transport going to Auschwitz. Fred mentions various underground groups that were active during the war. One rescued children. A German rescue group raided headquarters and destroyed documents but another time killed a Jew thought to be a collaborator but was not. Fred mentions a man named Jacque who worked with the Gestapo and turned in Jews and that other collaborators worked with the Germans. They

tried to kill Jacque but did not succeed. There was a Belgium female underground worker who worked for the Gestapo. Some Belgium workers sabotaged cattle cars.

15:00 Some Catholic priests including Cardinal Von Roy (ph) were helpful and other priests were pro-Nazi. Fred says he denies being German and might say that he is from Strasbourg. He considers himself Belgium. He learned French at age six and English at age 13. He arrived in the US at age 19 after finishing his fundamental education in Belgium. No one greeted him when he arrived alone in Hoboken, New Jersey but, luckily, he knew some English. He felt that his family survived as there were few SS in their rural area and because his father was part of the community having arrived in Verviers on September 15, 1933. The family's survival might have been a result of true friendship. Fred served in the American Army where he developed such true friendship. In Belgium everyone suffered the same danger from the bombs which brought the people together.

20:00 It was like a miracle that the family remained together. He feels the experience strengthened him but he did not experience a normal childhood. His family permitted him to be independent and he would hitchhike around Belgium. Fred feels his sense of humor and ambition came out of his wartime experience. He is proud of being Belgium and proud that he played soccer for Verviers.