Interview with Alfred Munzer
August 4, 2002

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Munzer,** t -- conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on August 4th, 2002 in **Washington, D.C.**. This is tape number one, side **A**. What is your full name?

Answer: My full name is **Alfred Munzer** and that's spelled **M-u-n-z-e-r**. The name has undergone some changes, so when I was born it was actually **Minzer, M-i-n-z-e-r**, because of a slight spelling error that had been made in my father's birth certificate. Someone forgot the upstroke on the -- on the **U** actually, which had a little umlaut on it. And officially also, when we came to the **United States** the name was changed back to **Munzer**, **M-u-e-n-z-e-r**. So we have all three spellings, but commonly I use **M-u-n-z-e-r.**

Q: Do you have a middle name?

A: I don't have a middle name.

Q: And where were you born and when were you born?

A: I was born in **The Hague**, in the **Netherlands**, November 23rd, 1941.

Q: And your parents' names and where they were from?

A: My father's name was **Simcha** or **Siegfried Munzer,** or **Minzer**. And he was born in a town in **Galicia** called **Kanczuga**. And he was born in 1904. My mother

was born in a town in the same general area, called **Rymanow**, and she was born May 20th, we th -- 1905 officially, but it could have been, it probably was more likely 1907.

Q: And when did they come to the nether -- **Netherlands,** and what brought them to that location?

A: My father came to the **Netherlands** in the late 20's, and my mother came to the **Netherlands** in 1932. And my father came there to -- to start a -- a business, obviously. Conditions for Jews in **Poland** were not ideal. He came from a large family of tailors and he decided to start his own tailoring business in **The Hague**. And then my mother joined him there about four years later. She was also -- they were actually cousins, so they shared the same last name. And she initially left **Rymanow** in the impr -- the end of the 20's probably, maybe beginning 30's and went to **Berlin** to join a sister and a brother who were -- already lived in **Berlin.** And she worked in their tailoring business, and then came to join my father, and they were married in the **Netherlands** in 1930 --

Q: Two.

A: -- Two. 1932.

Q: December 16th, 1932.

A: Right, December 16th, 1932.

Interview with Alfred Munzer
August 4, 2002

Q: And then when did they begin a family?

A: They -- I had -- they had two children before I was born. My oldest sister **Eva** was born in 1936, and my younger sister **Leana** was born in 1938 and then I followed in 1941.

Q: Were your parents very religious, do you know?

A: They both came from very re-religious backgrounds, very typical eastern European, but they were also part of the -- the enlightenment, if you will, and so they -- they experimented, when they came to **Holland**. And some of their closest friends in **Holland** were actually not Jewish. They -- they observed, you know, the Jewish holidays, certainly, but they -- they did make a break with the very rigid, and what they considered, I think, constraining and confining religion of their bankr -- background in **Poland**.

Q: All right. Now obviously I know what you're telling me is what your mother told you, cause you haven't been born yet. How much education did they have?

A: I'm not entirely sure, my -- they -- they both, I think, had a high school education, essentially. Neither one of them went to the university. And to a large extent also were self educated. My mother read a tremendous amount, was a voracious reader throughout her life. And my father was also a fairly educated man, apparently very interested in world affairs.

Interview with Alfred Munzer
August 4, 2002

Q: Was there an extended family in the **Netherlands**?

A: In the **Netherlands** there was -- my father had a brother by the name of **Emil, Emil Munzer.** And I think that that's -- that's really an -- all we had in **Holland**. There were some close friends. There was another **Emil**, an **Emil Landau** who I subsequently met because he happened -- he lived in the **United States** and you know, he happened to -- to marry, actually, someone who became a part of our life much, much later on. And so we became very close friends with him. But he was very close with -- with both my father and with my Uncle **Emil**.

Q: But -- but he was not a blood relative?

A: My uncle --

Q: No, no, **Emil Landau**.

A: **Emil Landau** was not a blood bra -- blood relative. The only blood relatives that I know of in **Holland** was my Uncle **Emil,** my father's side. All of the others were either -- either remained in **Poland** or **Czechoslovakia**, whatever. The location of -- of the towns actually was changed quite frequently throughout history. And the **[indecipherable]** some of them were in **Berlin.**

Q: And on your mother's side there was no rela -- there were no relatives?

A: On my mother's side, as far as I know, there were no relatives in **Holland.**

Q: And wh-what do you know of the conditions in **Holland** before you were born? Did your mother tell you about any tightening restrictions or any sense of danger?

A: Certainly the -- you know, she did tell me about the -- the -- the -- the gradual tightening of the screws after the invasion of **Holland** by the Germans.

Q: Which was May 1940.

A: That's right, May 1940 and the confiscation of -- of Jewish property, the banning of Jews from -- from various positions in the arts, or in -- in -- in business. Just a very -- I think actually the first thing that happened was the banning of **shechitah**, ritual slaughter and then just things got tighter and tighter. And I think they try -- my -- my perception is that they really tried to go on with their lives as -- as normally as possible in **Holland**, and I'm not sure how directly threatened they felt in **Holland**, actually. My feeling is that for a long time they somehow felt safe. As far as I know, my father never made any attempt to -- to emigrate, for example, to the **United States** or anywhere else. I think they -- they -- they really felt very secure in **Holland**.

Q: Mm-hm. And then your mother became pregnant with you.

A: Certainly by the time my mother became pregnant with me, conditions in **Holland** had really deteriorated a great deal. By then the -- the occupation was in full swing, and this was an unplanned pregnancy. And my mother was advised in

very strong terms by her obstetrician to have an abortion. He told her that it would be immoral to -- to bring another Jewish child into the world. And my mother, this is one of the times when she did turn to the Bible, and she read the story of **Hannah,** who desperately wanted to have a child, and it was in reading that story, my mother told me, that she decided that she could not possibly have an abortion. As a result of that, her obstetrician refa -- refused to have anything further to do with her, and so I was -- I was born not in a hospital, but I was born at home actually, with th -- with the help of -- of a nurse, rather than attended by an obstetrician. And I was born actually one month prematurely, November, as I said, November 23rd, 1941. And this led to another dilemma at the time, actually, and that's whether to have a -- a bris or a circumcision. Again my -- my parents friends advised very strongly against it because that would identify me as being Jewish and then the pediatrician who examined me after my birth came out and told my father that I -- that I would need a circumcision, that there was a medical need for it, and my father at that point of course made the decision that we would have a regular bris. And I have some wonderful photographs of -- of that bris. They're very remarkable photographs, they're very, very tiny, they're only about one by one and a half inch in size, but my mother was to keep them hidden on her body for the year -- subsequent years when she was in the concentration camps.

Interview with Alfred Munzer
August 4, 2002

Q: So you were born, you were circumcised and then the next development?

A: Well the next development, I -- I was born, as I said, in November, and by the following May is -- is when it became apparent that the family would have to go into hiding. That's when Jews began -- were deported openly in **Holland** and the -- the first person who was actually called up by the -- by the Germans was my father, to -- to go to a so-called work camp. What he initially did was he -- he scheduled a hernia operation, which he had postponed previously, went into the hospital, had the operation and that delayed his -- his going to the concentration camps for awhile. And then the next thing that happened was that he had a mock suicide attempt, which gained him admission, like many other Jews apparently, to a psychiatric ho- hospital near **The Hague**, called The **Remarkkliniek**. And that's -- so he entered there, basically under the pretext of being a patient. My mother, in the meantime, began to look for hiding places for my sisters and for myself. The f -- my father -- my parents decided that we should not go be hidden together, but that we should -- should hide in -- in different places, so that if -- if one person were killed or found out, at least someone would survive, one person in the family would survive or the others would survive. My sisters were placed -- we have very close friends among our neighbors. The **Van Luhrmann** sisters, they were two sisters, **Jo, J-o** and **Ko, K-o** were their first names, **Jo** and **Ko Van Luhrmann**. They were very, very close

to us, very religious Catholic and they were instrumental in several things. First they -- they had my sisters -- facilitated the enrollment of my sisters in a Catholic school, and that was sort of the first attempt, really, at hiding their identity. And then through their church in **The Hague**, a church which I have visited since then, on the street called **Alonstraat**, and through the intervention also of two priests, a father by the name of -- one father was **Schulling, S-c-h-u-l-l-i-n-g**, and I right now can't remember the name of the other one, but anyway, these two priests were instrumental in finding a Catholic family that was willing to take my sisters. The woman in that family was also very religious, very devout Catholic. She had had a vision telling her -- where the Virgin **Mary** told her to take in Jewish children. And th-that's what led to my sisters being placed with this woman. Subsequently, my mother asked a neighbor across the way from us, where we lived, to -- to take me in. And th-the plan, apparently was for me to place -- be placed with her, and then eventually to be transferred to a safer place somewhere in the Dutch countryside, where most Jewish children apparently were hidden.

Q: What -- where -- what -- what was the address of your family's house? Wa -- you're talking about neighbors --

A: Sure. It was 100 **Zoutmanstraat** in **The Hague**, and I don't recall exactly, but they lived on the same street, on **Zoutmanstraat,** right across the street, actually.

Her name was **Annie Madna** and that's -- that's the woman I was -- I was placed with.

Q: And your family knew her because she was a neighbor.

A: They were very -- they were close neighbors. She was divorced from her husband, **Tolé Madna**, who was of Indonesian background. She herself was Dutch. And they had had -- they had tw -- three children, and the three children really were apparently in and out of my mother's house all the time. It was a very, very close relationship. They also played with my two sisters and knew them very well. So it was -- it was a logical thing for me, you know, to be placed with her initially, certainly. That probably was in September 1941, because I -- I think I was nine months old at the time when I was placed with **Annie**. And at that point my mother sold most of our furniture and belongings and placed a lot of items in hiding with our neighbors, basically emptied the house and she too, she joined my father in -- in hiding at the same psychiatric clinic, the **Remarkkliniek** and -- but sh -- in her case, she worked there as an attendant, as a nurse's aid, basically.

Q: Was she known as his -- his wife?

A: I don't think so. I'm not sure. I really don't know. There were quite a few Jews who were hiding there in the same way, although I never asked my munther -- my mother exactly how many people. She did tell me about the shock it was to her to --

to -- to be in a -- in a s -- in a hospital where people had been confined -- and psychiatric hospitals at that time were quite different from the clinics we are accustomed to. So these people had been confined for -- for much of their lives and it was a tremendous shock for her. My father apparently adapted much better and he found a little clique of -- of Jewish men who were in hiding and they played cards. But for my mother it was -- it was much more difficult.

Q: Did she have contact with him?

A: She did have contact with him. As a matter of fact, for Christmas day 1942, the -- in **Holland** Christmas is celebrated for two days, but the -- on Christmas day, the -- my two sisters were brought to the **Remarkkliniek** to visit my parents. I'm not sure whether that was actually Christmas day, it may have been in -- and I have some notes somewhere -- it may have been the feast of **Santa Claus**, which is also a big deal in **Holland**, which is the sixth of December, but I think this was actually f- for -- for Christmas day. Yeah, it was Christmas day. And they -- so that that part of the family at least, was reunited that -- one last time. This was December 25th, 1942. The following day the clinic was invaded by the Germans and apparently was emptied not only of all the Jews who were hiding there, but also of all the patients and the entire staff, they were all taken prisoner. And my parents were taken, first to a -- a temporary prison in **The Hague**, the former home of the philosopher, Dutch

philosopher **Spinoza** had been converted into a prison. And then, just within a matter of days really, early in January they were transferred to the first concentration camp, and that was **Westerbork. Westerbork**, which is located in the northernmost part of -- of **Holland**. **Westerbork**, my mother told me, initially had been built actually as a receiving center for Jewish refugees fleeing eastern **Europe**.

Q: And -- and so they were together in **Westerbork** for how long?

A: They remained in **Westerbork**, I believe for sev -- for -- for several weeks, not a very long period of time. My mother was put in charge of the nursery there, of taking care of -- of young children, and it gave her, she said, a sense of security that -- that her own children were not there. She was really quite glad of that, actually and very grateful that -- that there ha -- was -- that we had found sa -- that she had found safe refuge for all three children.

Q: Once she was in **Westerbork**, was there any contact with -- where y -- where you all were placed?

A: I don’t think so. I don’t think -- there was no contact. And I -- I think at that point every attempt was made probably, to keep things as secret as possible, so she did not disclose. There was some contact later on, and I can mention that now, is actually my mother, on -- on her way subsequently to -- to **Auschwitz**, wrote a little

note on a piece of -- of toilet paper which said, en route to **Auschwitz**, all is well. And she dropped that on the railroad tracks and she put an address on it, not -- I -- probably to my mother's neighbors, not to where my sisters were or I was. And a railroad worker in **Holland** found the note and it did make its way back. I've never seen the note, I'm not sure whether my mother saved it or not, but there is a very similar note in the museum in **Amsterdam**. So I -- I assume that this was really s-something that was done fairly commonly. But in any event, from **Westerbork**, my -- my parents were deported to the next concentration camp, which was **Vught.** And **Vught** is -- is a -- is a camp located in northern hol -- northwestern **Holland** -- northeastern **Holland**, sorry, not far from the city of **Eindhoven,** and it was home to the **Philips** factory. And both my parents were put to work in the **Philips** factory. And at that time they still had contact with each other; although they were separated in the camp, th-they saw each other and still had contact.

Q: Did your mother talk about her state of mind at that time or your father's state of mind?

A: Just an extreme hope for peace. One of the things that my mother told me that, you know, they had these -- these morning line-ups, and -- in the camp, in **Vught**. And at one point actually they were -- they were visited there by -- by **Himmler** himself, who told them that as long as they worked, they were in no danger, nothing

would ever happen to them. **[indecipherable]** Whether it's at that same line-up or one of the others, I mean, very humiliating experiences. She saw a little church way in the distance in the du -- Dutch church on the horizon, and she wondered how -- how wonderful, how it would be if peace would break out at that moment. And she said she would just run to that church, she didn't care if it was a church or a synagogue and just thank God for -- for being freed. So she did maintain hope. I think that's -- that's really what kept my mother going then, and -- and subsequently. She never lost hope. She -- she always tried to -- to -- to really make the best of -- of the situation.

Q: And she would have been in her what, mid to late 30's by then.

A: She was in her -- in her 30's at that time.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: One of the things which -- which happened really a bit later was -- but which sort of says something about her state of mind I think, is when she was in one of the cattle, the infamous cattle cars. She -- she looked outside, she was able t-to -- to look at the -- the countryside, the German countryside and -- and realize -- this was springtime and she realized how beautiful it was and she -- she said to herself that after the war we probably would not have much money, but that this still was one way that the family could actually go around and see **Europe** and still admire the

beauty of -- of creation. So that's -- I think that says something about her state of mind. This was much later, when things were much worse for her. Much worse than they were when she was at -- in **Vught**.

Q: And did she talk about what your father's state of mind was, there at the factory?

A: Not at that time, but she -- she did tell me about my father's state of mind actually, earlier. He kept hoping that the Germans would be defeated by the Russians. He had -- he had great faith in th-the -- in history and what happened during the Napoleonic wars, and he -- he felt that when -- when **Russia** entered the war, he -- he felt it was a strong possibility that the Germans would be defeated in **Russia** and that that will be the end of the war. But that, of course, was not to be for a long time.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And then how long did they stay at this factory?

A: I'm not entirely sure. I do have some documents that I could refer to, okay?

Q: Well, why don't you continue with the story and we can talk about the documents later.

A: Right. I think -- good. They -- they stayed in **Vught** for sev -- as far as I know, several months and then were transferred from, or tra -- deported from **Vught** to **Auschwitz**. That's where my mother wrote that fame -- that note, which she

dropped on the railroad track. They were still together on arrival in **Auschwitz**, and were both selected for work -- to -- to work in **Auschwitz**.

Q: What did she say about that journey with your father in the cattle car?

A: I don't think they were in th -- in the cattle car together. They just -- I -- I -- I don't know, but I don't think so. I think men and women were separated, but I'm -- I'm not sure of that. But -- and I d -- I don't know of any specific conversations what they had. She did, on arrival in **Auschwitz** they -- they -- they both, I think, were very much aware of -- of what the realities of **Auschwitz** were, there was no -- no hiding it. You know, she -- she told me of Torah scrolls that were on the floors. She told me of **Tallisium** that had been com -- made into curtains and sh-she realized that things in **Auschwitz** were going to be very, very, very bad. My mother somehow found a way to make herself indispensable in -- in many different ways. The first kind of job that she had actually, was making fur coats for the wives of -- of German generals. My mother had never done any kind of tailoring, any kind of work before, hard work, let alone working with fur, but somehow she managed to persuade them that she was able to -- to work with fur. And so she made some -- some fur coats. That was her -- her first job. And then through the grapevine is how she learned that people working in electronics were very essential to the work effort, and that led to a different kind of work, first in **Auschwitz**, but then to a

transfer to **Reichenbach**, which was home of the **Telefunken** factory, and there she was put to work assembling radio tubes essential for the war effort and for transmission.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Munzer.** This is tape number one, side **B.** You were talking about your mother's experience in **Auschwitz**.

A: Yes, my mother found work in **Auschwitz**, made herself indispensable first by making fur coats, and then she learned through the grapevine that people who worked in electronics were saved, actually had a way of saving themselves. And so she started doing that, she claimed that she knew how to -- how to work in electronics, and she was -- that led to a transfer to the **Telefunken** factory in **Reichenbach**, sort of a continuation, if you will, of what she had been doing at **Philips** in -- in -- in **Vught**. And in **Reichenbach** she -- she worked assembling radio tubes. Her state of mind at that point actually improved, or she took heart from the fact that there were not only Jewish and other -- other inmates of the concentration camps working at **Telefunken**, but there were also German soldiers who had been injured on the Russian front, many of whom were missing limbs and

were put to work basically, as best they could in the factory. And their state of mind, they were so anti-**Hitler**, and anti-**Himmler** that they would do everything to -- to sabotage the effort at that point. And she took tremendous heart from that, and told me of her own sabotage efforts basically, you know, she would spend the whole day assembling the radio tube, and then when the alarm sounded, or the siren sounds at the end of the day, she would take the -- the entire radio tube apart and put it back in the drawer and then the following day would start the process again, which is kind of a daring thing, certainly. But by that time, things like that were quite common.

Q: What did she say a-about leaving your father in **Auschwitz**?

A: We didn't talk about that specifically. I -- not that I recall.

Q: Did she have contact with him when they were there together?

A: In **Auschwitz** they still had contact together, but that was the end. It was in **Auschwitz** really that they were separated. I did not realize that until much later, but my father actually remained in **Auschwitz**, amazingly for -- for over a year, before being transferred to another hellhole, **Mauthausen,** another work camp, death camp. It's -- it's hard to distinguish the two suddenly -- certainly. And then he was transferred from **Mauthausen** after being there for several months, to several other, smaller subsidiaries of **Mauthausen**; **Gusen, Steyr** and then finally ended up

in a camp called **Ebensee**. My mother and I for many years thought that he worked in salt mines. I don't know where we got that idea from, but there were salt mines in -- in that area, that part of **Austria**, actually. And it's called the **Salzkammergut**. And -- but the-these were actually abandoned salt mines that were used for assembling of **V-2** rockets. And that's where my father di -- where my father worked to the end of the war. And he -- he remained there through the liberation, survived the liberation by the Americans, and -- but was much too weak, contracted -- well, what we was told was tuberculosis and died still in **Ebensee** and still without having been able to establish contact with us, two months after the war, on July 25th, 1945. He -- he died in a -- a c -- a convent in **Ebensee** that had been converted into a hospital for concentration camp victims who were very ill. My partner **Joel** and I visited the -- the convent, actually, and spoke to one of the sisters about her experience there, and she -- she had -- she was much too young, I think, to have been there, actually. But she said that -- that literally there were hundreds of inmates who were being cared for, and that people were just also dying on a daily basis. And my father was buried actually, in -- in a cemetery in the former concentration camp of **Ebensee.** It's -- it's an absolutely beautiful place. It is im -- un -- it's unimaginable that -- that horrors like that could have taken place. It -- it's -- I think it's one of the most beautiful places on earth.

Q: Is that a marked grave?

A: Well, his grave originally was marked, and there are some -- some mass graves there, because of the tremendous number of people who died immediately after -- they were found dead in the concentration camp. And then there were a lot of marked graves, but for the sake of -- of uniformity, basically -- initially actually his -- his -- the first time my mother visited the cemetery in 1952, there was actually a cross on -- on his grave, that we didn't know -- there were Jewish graves that did not have crosses, that had, you know, just plain markers. We didn't know why there was a cross on his grave. And we didn't know whether in -- somehow in his last days he had converted, or whatever, what had happened. But we were told at the t -- or she was told at the time that all the markers would be removed because there were far too many errors like that. And also because many of the people were unidentified, and so all markers were removed, but we do know exactly where he is buried.

Q: Mm-hm. And to get back to your mother's experience?

A: My mother eventually -- **Reichenbach** was bombed by the allies and the factory was destroyed and again showing my mother's attitude at the time and her continued hope that kept her going was she said the **Shechianu** prayer, as she saw the flames engulfing the factory. She said that was one of the greatest joys that she

had, was seeing that factory going up in flames. And then after that she was put on -- on one of these many death marches that were occurring and she was just transferred from one camp after another, in very, very desperate conditions. She told me that she stuffed newspapers around her -- her -- her feet to keep them warm, basically. And sh -- barely -- she barely had -- had shoes. Just absolutely desperate conditions. She did become ill along the way, developed a **diarrheal** disease, and -- but somehow managed to survive.

Q: How did she continue to carry the photographs with her, do you know?

A: My mother told me that the photographs were hidden in her hair, and she told me that her hair -- I asked her whether her hair was ever cut or shaven like -- like most women in **Auschwitz**, but she said it was not. I don't whether that was just -- she was just being discreet with me, but she -- but she claims -- she told me that she had them hidden in her hair. She had the feeling that if these two little photographs of my -- my bris were ever lost, it would mean that I had died. And so she really, she held onto those, and I still have those photographs.

Q: Did she have a number on her arm?

A: Yes, my mother did have a -- a number on her arm.

Q: Do you know what it was?

A: I have it written down somewhere, but I -- I don't remember it offhand. It's -- it's interesting, my mother never wanted me to photograph the number, and she -- she talked many times of having it removed, actually. She always kept it covered. She was -- til the end of her life she would shop for dresses that had, you know, sleeves that just barely covered the number. She -- she did not want to show that number. Eventually my mother ended up at a -- a camp at the German-Danish border, and that's where she eventually was -- was liberated. It was actually about a month or two before the end of the war. It turns out, and this -- this was really found out -- and my mother did tell me that she was liberated, came off a train, was in -- in territory that was marked, Red Cross. And she was greeted by a Count **Bernadotte** o-of **Sweden**. And I believe the Danish -- Swedish crown prince was with him. And she was, it turned out, part of a large convoy of -- of women who had been kept hostage by **Himmler** to try to gain his own freedom, eventually, negotiate his own safety after the war through -- wi-with -- with Count **Folke Bernadotte**. And also she was fortunate enough to be -- to be saved as a result of that, and to be liberated.

Q: What was the name of the last camp that she was in? Was it --

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: -- was it **Ravensbrück**?

A: I think it was **Ravensbrück.** She did mention that camp. There were other -- several small camps in the area that my mother was -- was with -- was in. And that's -- that's -- that was the last camp and then from -- from the train, she was transferred. Now, she never mentioned the white buses, the famous white buses specifically, but subsequently I've seen photographs of those. I've never been able to verify with her whether that's how she was transported, but she did tell me that she crossed **Denmark**, which was then still occupied, and was taken in by a family in **Sweden**. The inmates were just -- were distributed to -- to different families in **Sweden** who were willing to take in the prisoners and be part of the rehabilitation process, basically. And she remained in **Sweden** through the end of the war until August 1945, when she returned to **Holland**.

Q: All right, well now let's -- that helps us get back to your story, which was that you were then placed across the street with **Annie Madna**.

A: We also need to --

Q: Yeah.

A: We also need to talk about my sisters.

Q: Yeah, yeah, I meant your -- your -- your story and your sister's story. Yeah, okay, so you're at **Annie Madna's** house and your sisters are with this Catholic family.

A: Right. I don't know exactly the name of the family that -- that my sisters were placed with. Much, much later I found a book that -- that contained an advertisement asking for the whereabouts of my sisters, and the name they were given was **Jonson**, the last name. And I don't know whether that's the name of the family that they were hidden with or not, my mother didn't tell me. But in any event, I-I was placed with -- with **Annie Madna** --

Q: But before we get to that, who placed that advertisement?

A: This was an advertisement placed in a Jewish newspaper in July 1945.

Q: By whom?

A: We don't know. We don't know who placed the advertisement. I gave a talk about my family's experiences and someone in the audience worked at the Library of Congress, and the following day just happened to pick up a book that contained reprints from Jewish newspapers in **Holland** and there, in the middle of the page was an adver -- was an advertisement a-asking about -- the whereabouts of my two sisters and where they had last been seen when they were deported.

Q: But no n -- knowledge of who placed it?

A: There was a -- the -- the name, actually was th -- was -- there was a name in there in terms of contact and it was **Van Luhrmann** family. So I think that this was

a different member of the same family, the **Van Luhrmann** family, because they were not -- this was not **The Hague** address.

Q: Mm-hm. All right, now let's get back to th -- yo-your story and their story.

A: I was placed with **Annie Madna** and again with -- with the -- the -- with the goal of eventually going to the countryside. I remained with **Annie** for -- I don't know exactly how long, I think about two months altogether, because I -- I think I was told that I was 11 months old when I finally arrived at the **Tolé Madna** household. **Tolé Madna** was the ex-husband of **Annie Madna**. They had joint custody of their three children, **Vidy -- Willy, Davy** and **Robby.** And so I was transferred to -- eventually to -- to her husband. **Tolé Madna** had a housekeeper by the name of **Mima Saina, S-a-i-n-a.** We don't even know what -- what -- what her real name was, if that was her real name. She was an Indonesian woman who was really -- the Indonesian term was a **babu**, which was nursemaid. She took care of -- or nanny. And she took care of the children and also the entire household. She was a -- a young woman, probably in her 20's at the time and had no -- was not married and had no children of her own, but she had taken care of -- especially o-of -- of **Robby Madna** when he was very young. And -- so it was completely natural for her to -- to take me on as -- as -- and take care of me. And she really did not want to part with me, and apparently the other children in the household also liked the idea of having

a baby in the household, and so I ended up remaining with the **Madna** family until the return of my mother in August 1945. Obviously, since I was an infant I have, you know, very few memories, direct memories just of -- of my stay with the **Madna** family, but I do have a few, actually. I -- I remember listening to Indonesian lullabies that Papa **Madna,** Mr. **Tolé Madna** played on the piano.

Q: Can you sing any of them now?

A: No, I can't. My native tongue apparently was -- was **Malay,** or Indonesian, but I've totally -- I've just almost totally forgotten it, for two -- a few words, but I was told that that's how I communicated with **Mima**, who did not speak any Dutch. She was actually illiterate, couldn't read or write.

Q: When you were gr -- not you, but when your family, in the 1930's and your sisters were talking to each other, it was in Dutch?

A: Yes. My family, th-they all spoke Dutch, and my mother had learned Dutch. Close -- it's close enough to German that -- that she learned Dutch fairly quickly, that's what my father spoke, and certainly, you know -- they tried everything really to -- to -- to become a part of the -- the Dutch community.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So they -- that -- that was their language, definitely.

Q: Tell me about the **Madna** family, a little bit of their background and the neighborhood that the house was in.

A: Sure. The house that I was hidden in was located -- was not -- **van Kinsbergenstraat,** number 40. And it was a -- a -- a very modest house in -- not too far from the -- the home of my parents and also my -- my parent's home was actually an apartment that was just a door away from where my mothe -- my father's business was, his store was. And this was probably half a mile, or a mile away from-om where the store was, certainly within walking distance, was where the **van Kinsbergenstraat** house was. It had a front room, sort of a middle room, typical Dutch house and then a back room and then two little rooms at the very, very end. And I slept in sort of an enclosed porch, as I remember. My father -- my foster father, Papa **Madna** also had kept birds, that was his hobby. He had canaries. And that was one of the other sounds, besides the -- the -- the lullabies, the Indonesian lullaby, what I also remember was the sound of canaries. I've subsequently made a tape of that, actually, because it -- that's -- it's something that he -- he stuck to through the end of his life, really. He had a tremendous love for his birds. It was a very joyful household as I -- as I remember. I -- I do remember one specific thing, which must have been when I was a little bit older, obviously. I came there when I was less than a year old, my guess is when I was about two or three. I -

- I tried to copy the writing. I saw my -- the -- my foster -- my sisters, then sisters, **Willy** and **Davy** tri -- writing and so I scribbled on a piece of paper. And I remember that they were laughing and I was very unhappy about that. It's -- it's just one of those memories that -- that has stuck with me. I -- I also remember some of the f -- a little bit of the furniture. Here in the apartment I have -- I have some items actually that were in -- in the house. There was a big, Indonesian **wayang** doll, which is a puppet, which is now hanging in my foyer. And just to show, you know, the dimensions of -- of -- perceived dimensions as a child, Papa **Madna** had a -- a little liquor cabinet that was shaped like a barrel, and to me it looked very big, actually and it wasn't until many, many years later, recently in fact, that I encountered that barrel again and realized that it was very tiny. And I -- I -- that barrel is now in my apartment as well, I -- it -- it arrived here rece -- just a few weeks ago. And just -- just one other reminder of those days. I also remember some of the toys I had. I had a big yellow stuffed dog and then a little stuffed rabbit, also yellow. And I subsequently found out that that's where much of my mother's jewelry was actually hidden, was sewn into -- to th -- my toy rabbit. I also, towards the -- remember one particular time when I was hungry and the last winter of the war in **Holland** was extremely bad, very rough, and there was really very, very little food. And the only thing we had to eat at that time -- again something I found out

subsequently, is tulip bulbs. And I remember waking up, or -- one night and feeling hungry and seeing the table set for the following morning. And so I just sat down at the table, waiting to be fed, and I -- I -- I really distinctly remember falling asleep and my head falling into the plate. That's one very distinct memory. And then the -- the most definite memory I have is when my mother returned, when I was reunited with my mother.

Q: We'll -- we'll get to that in a little bit. Let's talk a little bit about your experience before that. Did you go outside at all, or were you confined in a house?

A: Oh no, I -- I was confined to the house and to the backyard, basically, and I do -- my view of the outside world was really through a mail slot. That's the only thing that I saw.

Q: So you never went out the front door?

A: I never went out the front door, never went out to the street, but was allowed to play in the backyard, and I have some photographs of me playing in the backyard. Very --

Q: But you -- you could be seen in the backyard?

A: Some of the neighbors were aware of the fact of my -- were aware of my presence. My -- Papa **Madna** told me that in fact he had made a -- concocted a story that I was the illegitimate child of his ex-wife, who now had a new boyfriend who

didn't want me around, and that's how I ended up in his household. Whether, you know, he really used this story with the Germans or not, I don't know, but that's the story he told me. The n -- our neighbors on va -- on **van Kinsbergenstraat**, I was told were actually very anti-German, were communist and so they were of the where -- aware of the fact that I was there. Many members of the Indonesian community who came to the house, I think also were aware of the fact that I was there in the house and -- and in fact, many, many years later, when I would visit Papa **Madna**, we -- we -- we'd go to a Indonesian grocer store and the grocer had one look at the combination of Papa **Madna** and myself and immediately realized who I was. And he called me by my then name, I had a name in hiding called -- I was called **Bobby**, and that's what he called me, you know, **Bobby**. I -- I -- I thought for many years that I -- I was named after the dog, I had -- there was a dog in the family. And that the reason for that is so that people would think the dog was being called when I was being called, and -- as a -- as a disguise. That story turned out not to be true, because I found out that the dog's name was actually **Teddy**.

Q: What was your relationship with the other children in the family that you were told either later or that you remember?

A: Well, to this day, I am still their younger sibling. It's -- it's -- you know, that -- it's -- it's very, very interesting actually, you know. For example, September 11th

last year, the first telephone call that I got to make sure I was safe was from one of the siblings, was from **Davy Madna**. She -- she called me here several times, left messages on the machine, was desperate to find out, to make sure that I was okay. And whenever -- and I've maintained contact over the years and there is no question but that when I'm with them, I always feel the younger sibling. Mr. **Madna** subsequently remarried and three more children and there is no question but that I feel like the older sibling to the next three children. So I'm really the bridge between them. In fact, the only time that they ever talk to each other is when I'm there.

Q: When the two sets --

A: The two sets of children.

Q: Uh-huh. And when you were talking about September 11th, that was 2001.

A: That's right.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the elder Mr. **Madna**, what you know about his background.

A: Mr. **T-Tolé Madna** was born in **Indonesia** and came to **Holland** around -- he was born in 1896 and came to **Holland** around the time of World War II -- World War I, sorry. With either -- and I'm not sure whether this was his mother or a foster mother, I'm not sure, he was very, very mysterious about his background, never

talked about it very much. Apparently he came from a family that was relatively well-to-do, because he -- he -- after he arrived at **Holland** he was able to take piano lessons. He was very proud of the fact that he owned a motorcycle, and he -- he really became a part of -- of the very -- the young Indonesian community that was being established in **Holland**. **Indonesia**, of course, was a Dutch colony at the time. And he -- he then married **Annie Madna**, further really integrating him really into -- into Dutch society. But he also, I think felt very proud of his -- of his Indonesian heritage. He -- there were paintings in the house that illustrated, really, life in the Indonesian villages. And he -- he enjoyed gardening in -- in the home, in **van Kinsbergenstraat** actually, we kept chickens in the backyard, which he -- he really greatly enjoyed. Many years later, when he moved to a smaller apartment after the war, he -- he got one of those little gardens outside the city and th-there was no question as t -- his garden, his little garden was the most luxuriant of any of them around. And -- and he had all sorts of -- of little quirks. For example, he -- he dug a big hole in that backyard, which became a -- a refrigerator. Was very, very clever, that's where he kept his beer, so that when he worked in the backyard he could sit there and -- this little yard, little garden, he had his -- his -- his little comforts from home, actually.

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Alfred Munzer
August 4, 2002

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Munzer.** This is tape number two, side **A.** And you were talking about Papa **Madna**. Any other memories that you have? What -- was he a very affectionate, physically affectionate person? Do you remember any of that?

A: He was a very affectionate, very warm person. I'm not sure about physical affection, but you know, we -- we were very, very, very close. He was always to -- to the very end very protective of me, certainly. And I remember sitting on his lap. I remember also, this was immediately after the war when I was allowed to go out of the house, I remember sitting on the back of his bicycle, or he also had a little seat on the front of his bicycle where I would sit, and I enjoyed that a great deal. We would take long walks together. He -- the -- we'd alway -- he would always -- this was after the war, immediately after the war an-and he worked in a -- in a restaurant and I would go up the back stairs with him and the Indonesian women who worked in the kitchens would always have little snacks for me. He -- he always as -- as -- even when it was really no longer necessary he would always have a -- a little savings, a piggy bank for me, for example. He fashioned those out of his cigarette boxes. These were **Player** cigarettes, which came in metal cans at the time, and I

remember he made those into a piggy bank for myself. And that continued for a long time. He bought me comic books, because he knew there was one comic strip that I really enjoyed called **"Panda"** which was really just only found in **Holland**, and he would always buy me the little books, and I -- I really enjoyed those. So we -- we really had a very, very close relationship. And that -- that continued to the very end of his life when he died at age 96. I-I saw him just two months before he died. **Joel** and I went to vi -- went to **Holland** and we visited him, spent quite a bit of time with him and with his t -- other children. And I -- I remember his final gesture -- first of all, his final words to me was to -- to be careful, and watch over my mother, which was very typical. This is the way he had always been, very concerned about her as well. And then, as we were leaving the apartment building he stood at the window waving a white handkerchief. And that was the last gesture, that was the last time I saw him alive. And then two months later I went back for the funeral. And people say that he kept himself alive waiting for me to come and visit him one last time because he -- he and I were very, very close. And I also to -- to the very end always called him Papa**.** There were no qualifications to that. Now**,** **Mima** we have not talked about. Obviously, the person who really raised me, especially when I was very young, when I was an infant, was **Mima**. I was told that I slept in her bed, slept with her. And I was also told that **Mima** kept a knife under

her pillow and that she said that if ever the Germans came for me, she would kill me and then herself. Again, I have no direct knowledge of that, but that's what I was told. I was very, very close to her. I have absolutely no direct memory of -- of **Mima**, except perhaps the few words of -- of -- of **Malay** Indonesian that I remember, but other than that, I have no direct memory while she was alive. **Mima** tragically died shortly after the war. She died in October 1945 of a cerebral hemorrhage, very, very unexpectedly. And I do remember visiting her grave many times. I also remember going back there to -- to the grave when Papa **Madna** buried his favorite canary in -- in the same grave, the gravesite. And many, many years later I went to visit the grave with Papa **Madna**. And th-there -- there was a woman at the gate, who again, because of the combination of an Indonesian man and a Caucasian young man -- younger man, immediately knew who I was and recognized me from the little child who had come to visit the grave of **Mima**. And I was able to find the grave without anybody telling me where it was. So there was a very sharp divide, I just totally bla -- have -- have totally -- have no direct memory of her alive, but I do remember her grave very well, very distinctly.

Q: Were there any times when it was very dangerous? Did any Germans come to the house? Was there any particular incidents like that?

A: I have no direct memories of any particular dangerous times, but I do remember being asked to hide in this -- it's not -- a little cellar. Was a space, I thought it was beneath the stairs, but I'm not quite sure there were stairs there. There was a little cellar and th-that's where all the families -- the families' Christmas decorations were -- were -- were actually kept, and I -- I remember playing with them while the house apparently was being searched. Another memory that I have of the house besi -- I mentioned the little barrel before -- my very favorite place in the house was actually the kneehole of Papa **Madna's** desk. It was sort of a dark mahogany desk and I -- I still very distinctly remember that kneehole. I also remember opening one of the drawers one time and finding a gun and then closing the drawer again. And I -- I didn't tell anybody about it at the time, but told Papa **Madna** about it many, many years later and he was absolutely shocked that I had seen it and remembered it.

Q: Mm-hm. So what did -- what were you told that you did during the day? You just played with **Mima**, and -- the other children were at school, correct?

A: I think I just -- I -- I really -- I -- I don't know, specifically. I did play with some of the children next door, there were other young children, and I have some photographs.

Q: But only in your backyard.

A: On -- only in our backyard. And I -- I did have my toys, and I did look out the mail slot to the outside, but just was confined to the house. But I -- I really do not recall anything sp-specific as to what -- what I did in the house during those years.

Q: Do you have any memories of what it was like to look through the mail slot to see the outside world?

A: Not really, you know. I-I remember doing it, and standing there and evy -- and even the mail sl -- even though the mail slot was very low, to me it seemed very high, I do remember that. You know, **van Kinsbergenstraat** was actually a very quiet street, there wasn't much going on, even there. And so I think I spent more time, really, in the backyard than anywhere else, which was enclosed, so that people really couldn't look in very easily.

Q: And these two people were your parents at the time, **Mima** and -- and Mr. **Madna** were your mama and your papa.

A: Absolutely. And that was, you know, became very difficult, of course, when I was reunited with my mother.

Q: While this was -- while you were at the **Madna's**, what was happening with your two sisters?

A: Unfortunately there was -- a fight apparently had broken out between the husband and wife of the home where my sisters were hidden, and the husband

denounced of his wife and of my two sisters to the Germans. And so his wife and my two sisters were deported. They were taken to **Westerbork**, and were actually there at about the same time as my mother. Either there, or subsequently in **Auschwitz [indecipherable]** obviously they never saw each other. The woman, the wife eventually was liberated, but my sisters were deported from -- taken from **Westerbork** in 1944, early 1944 to -- to **Auschwitz** and they both died in **Auschwitz**. And it's na -- something that we did not -- my mother did not find out until she returned, actually, back to **Holland**. I'm not sure whether my mother had had any warning when she was still in **Sweden**. I -- I just -- we never talked about it. I really don't know exactly when she found out. I don't think she found out until she actually returned to **Holland**, what had happened to my sisters. My mother was so upset at the time, obviously, that she -- she squeezed -- she developed this habit of squeezing her fi -- her hand with -- with her other hand, one hand with the other and she actually developed an infection in her fingers. It was -- you know, she squeezed so hard. I remember very distinctly the time when I was reunited with my mother, finally. This was in -- in August 1945.

Q: Well, let's back up a little bit.

A: Sure.

Q: When -- do you have any memories of the time when the war was over in **Holland**? Any celebrations? Do you have any thoughts or any memories of that time?

A: Well, this is where, you know, my -- my old memories and -- and the memories of others, you know, begin to sort of --

Q: Right.

A: -- flow together. I do remember leaving the house and I-I'm told I was all dressed up in -- in the national colors of -- of **Holland**, and watching a parade. It's interesting because I don't have any direct memory of that, but I do have a memory of about eight months later or so, being with my mother at the place where we watched the parade and telling her that's where I was with **Mima**. That memory I do have, which is -- which is interesting. And -- and my mother really didn't believe me at the time, and she had to -- she verified this with the family. But other than that, I really don't have any -- any specific memories of -- of the months before my mother returned. When I was -- I -- I was sleeping the night she came back and someone came to wake me up. I don't know who it was. I think it was one of my sisters, foster sisters, **Davy** or **Willy**. And I went to the front room of the house where everybody was sitting in a circle. And I was crying because I was unhappy about being woken up, and I was being passed around from lap to lap. And I do

remember very distinctly refusing to sit in a strange woman's lap, and that, of course, was my own mother. And it took awhile for my mother to -- for me to get used to my mother, and to be -- I -- I have no specific memories of all the things that happened. One thing my mother told me was that she as -- she told **Mima** -- she -- she got tickets for **Mima** to go to a movie, which was something very special at that time, and just so -- so that my mother would have some time alone with me. And **Mima** left the house and then came back a few minutes later and told my mother, don't hit him. Just -- that's how protective, of course, **Mima** was, even vis-à-vis with my mother. Initially my mother and I stayed with the **Madna** family and then my mother found an apar -- was a very small apartment. Well, these were furnished rooms, really. Again, somewhere not far from where our original home had been on **Laanformairdafort,** another -- sort of all in the same general area. It was an apartment upstairs and a woman and her daughter lived there and they -- they rented out the front room. I do remember that they had a little dog. You know, it's funny what children remember. Little dachshund.

Q: How long did -- did your mother stay at the **Madna's**? She stayed with you at the **Madna's** for how long?

A: I think it was a few weeks, I'm not sure entirely, cause then we moved with -- to this first apartment and I think we were only there for a month or two and then moved to a larger apartment.

Q: D-Do you have any memories of leaving the **Madna** house?

A: You know, I think that this -- I -- I don't, and I think part of that is because it was a very gradual thing. I still spent a lot of time with them --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- initially.

Q: I mean, you were -- you were only -- close to four years old, you were still a very young child.

A: I think it's really only probably after **Mima** died that I moved entirely with, or primarily with -- with my mother. And she -- sh -- she had to go out of the house to try to make a living, and the reason I say that I -- I -- I was really away from the **Madna** family at that point, because I remember one time having trouble getting into the apartment and that was because my mother was away, she was actually selling some of the merchandise that my father had left behind from his tailoring business. Fabrics were very valuable at the time and he had many factories that owed him fabrics from -- from **England**. And that's -- that was her first business, was selling those.

Q: Who kept up his stock while he was taken away?

A: I really don't know. This was not in his store any more, the store was -- was gone, had been taken over. So these -- this was really more a credit sort of -- and my mother, actually, her initial work was out of a suitcase. But then I remember the day when -- when I couldn't get into the house, she was extremely upset and that's when she decided to -- to start her own business, basically and she bought us a store. But this was over a fairly long period of time. I would imagine -- I think she bought the store probably about 1947 or so. I'm not entirely sure because I had already gone to kindergarten at a -- at a school that was around the corner from that second apartment that we lived in.

Q: Was that a hard adjustment, to leave, to go to a strange school?

A: I love difficulties mixing with other children. I don't remember too much to -- having too many difficulties at the kindergarten, actually, but I do remember my mother sending me to a summer camp. And that -- that created tre-tremendous difficulties and fears.

Q: Was it a Jewish camp?

A: It was a Jewish camp called **Wijk aan Zee**, not too far from -- from **Amsterdam** and I was surrounded by very, very rowdy Jewish kids who had all been in hiding and who all had, in retrospect, tremendous difficulties, you know, they were very

difficult to control. And I had come from a t -- you know, very quiet household, basically. I had had it easy compared to -- to many of them. And I was -- so I -- I just did not fit in, and I had trouble, you know, wi-with that. So then the next place that my mother sent me to for summer vacation was not a summer camp, but it was actually a private home where I went with m -- friends of my mother in a -- in a town called **Appledorn**. And th-that's -- that worked out much, much better.

Q: Y-You have actual memories of th -- of those experiences?

A: Of?

Q: Of being with those children who were rowdy, and so forth?

A: Very much so, yeah. I remember vomiting every day and really being sick and then finally my mother, you know, take me -- took me back. I -- I did not last one we -- I think I lasted about a week and then she took me back, and -- because it d -- it just did not work out.

Q: How was your proficiency in Dutch? Were you -- you said you -- you knew Indonesian at the time. Were -- were you also being brought up as a youngster to speak Dutch when you were with the **Madnas**?

A: I don't remember ever having any difficulties when I was in -- when I started kindergarten or school, so I think I -- I -- I think I was pretty fluent in Dutch. As I said, I d -- I never -- I don't remember ever speaking **Malay**, so this was really very,

very early on. It's only in speaking to **Robby** and **Davy** that I -- you know, that I was told that I -- I really did communicate and answered in -- in **Malay** whenever I was spoken to. And I was able to understand **Mima**. But -- but I must have, you know, learned Dutch at that time as well from the other children.

Q: Did you ask your mother about the rest of the family? Again, I know you were very young at this time, but when you were -- in the beginning, those first few years after the war, did you ask her? And if so, how did she answer you?

A: I learned about my sisters and -- and about my -- my father very, very early on. The interesting thing is, you know, that at that time my story was not unique. So having sisters who were deported was not unusual. And so it didn't particularly shock me, it didn't particularly affect me. They were just gone. And my mother -- my mother's neighbor, the **Van Luhrmann** family, they were both schoolteachers and they had taught my sisters how to -- to read and write at a very, very young age. And they and my mother had saved all of my sisters' notebooks. And my mother would show me those notebooks. And this -- this was before I started elementary school, so it was really pretty soon after the war that she showed me those. She had portraits of my sisters that were -- that were hanging in -- in the -- in the apartment. So again I knew certainly, of them. She told me many stories about my sisters. They were held out, really as a example to me in many ways. And so I got to know my

sisters through my mother's words and also through her neighbors, the **Van Luhrmann** family. They v -- also showed me -- my mother showed me the notebooks that -- that my sister **Eva** was writing in. I don't think my sister **Leah** was -- she was much younger, obviously did not know how to -- to write, but the **Van Luhrmann** family also showed me books, and they were actually -- because, as I said before, my sisters had gone to a Catholic religious school, so she would show me books, little Catholic books that my sisters were able to read. And I remember had a little devil one side, a little angel on the other side. And I -- I remember very distinctly looking at those. My mother always told me that she -- she had decided that she did not want me to learn how to read at a very young age. She thought somehow that this was a jinx. That when -- when, you know, my sisters were so precocious in their reading and writing, that somehow had something to do with -- with their -- with their fate. And so in my case, my mother really did not encourage that.

Q: Who watched over your parent's belongings while you were gone? You said your mother had pictures of your sister, or portraits, or other things. Who -- who oversaw that?

A: The **Van Luhrmann** family next door had some of the things. There were others also who -- who had hidden things, and we sort of gradually -- my mother gradually

had things returned to her. Again, you know, this -- this was sort of part of normal life, to have things returned. All the people we had contact with after the war were people who were -- either had survived the concentration camps or people who had been in hiding, so that was normal conversation. You know, it was how you survived. How did you survive, what did you do? It's without -- with very little emotion, as far as I can remember, actually, because it was so much -- just an everyday occurrence.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: The same thing, for example, one of the families that we were very close with after the war was the **Vanderpool** family**. Hela Vanderpool** was a woman who had gone through all the concentration camps with my mother. And she was younger than my mother. Also came from the same general area in **Poland**, **Galicia**. And after the war married a -- a Dutch man. Her -- her maiden name was **Helen -- Helen Enwine** and then she married **Max Vanderpool.** And my mother remained very close friends with her. Probably -- she was probably my mother's closest friend. And the only housing that they could find in **The Hague** was in the attic of one house that was sort of left standing in this entire bombed out neighborhood. And I remember this is a time my mother already had her store, taking this very, very long walk across this bombed out area, this -- this -- all this debris and rubble, through

the rubble to this house where they lived, this attic. And again, it was -- it was a joyful occasion to take those walks. I thought it was the most normal thing to do, was to take a walk across, you know, bombed out rubble. I remember thinking that it was the most normal thing to find bunkers with shells on the beach. Again, this was just part of normal growing up after World War II.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Munzer**. This is tape number two, side **B**. And let's now talk about your schooling after the war.

A: Well, before I even started schooling, my mother, who as I said before, did not really want me to learn how to read or write before had to teach me some other things. And that was the first thing she taught me, was really a love for -- for theater, and for theater type games, and I remember very distinctly playing those. She would tell me things that -- plays that she had done when she was a young girl, young -- growing up in **Poland**, she was part of a -- a theater company. And I would remember those, and that's -- and I would -- I would actually start playing those before I even learned how to read or write, with a puppet theater. That became one of my favorite toys. Another thing that really fascinated me, probably because I

had spent those early years completely confined to the house was the tramway outside and going from place to place on -- on public -- this public conveyance, on the tramway. And I very quickly memorized all of the stops on the tramway, the local tramway. And one of the first toys that I got from Papa **Madna** after the war for my -- the first birthday that occurred after the war was a miniature tram. And right about that time the numbers, in sort of a bureaucratic thing, were -- were changed on the tramway. And I remember, since I didn't know how to read or write yet, but I did remember asking either **Willy** or **Davy** to make sure and change the number on my tramway. It's a very, very distinct memory I have. This was just about the time when I started kindergarten. The kindergarten was right around the corner from the house that my mother and I lived in, which was on a place called **Archimaidastraat [indecipherable]** street -- **straat** in -- in -- in **The Hague** and right around the corner was the first school that I went to. And I do remember very distinctly enjoying kindergarten, doing all the things pe -- children do in kindergarten, you know, making things wi -- c -- playing with clay, remember that very distinctly. Little artwork, bringing that home, learning about some -- some holidays. For example, I -- I learned about Mother's day through kindergarten and bringing home a card that I had made for my mother. I also remember going shopping to buy my mother a gift, and it was a geranium. That was the first plant. I

went to a store and asked her, you know, if she has this much money, whatever it was, I said, what would she get? And so that's -- that was the first time I ever bought a gift for my mother. I think for her birthday, which was very close actually, since that was May 20th -- the two were very close -- I bought her a bottle of perfume which I accidentally dropped. Also one of those -- those childhood memories. I kept it hidden from her in back of -- and so I was holding it in back of me, and phew, it fell to the floor as th -- as she opened the door. After -- it was after kindergarten that -- just about that time that my mother bought her business. That was in a -- that was a -- a cosmetic store, perfume store. It was in the --in -- not in a very good neighborhood, quite far away from where we had lived before and where I had spent my years with the **Madnas**. This was near the -- one the train stations in **The Hague**. Little bit of a red light district, as a matter of fact, and certainly non -- not a wealthy neighborhood, but it was the only -- housing was extremely short in **Holland** because o f-- in **The Hague** especially, because such a big part of the city had been bombed out by the allies, actually. And so we -- she found this -- this store, this perfume store from a man who -- it was called **Parfumerie Idajale,** and she bought it from a man by the name of **Sharfstein** who moved to **South America**. And she took over the store and we lived in back of the store. And then I -- she -- she had to decided on a school for me to go to -- decided that the -- the public

schools were just not the greatest in that neighborhood. There was a -- a Catholic school right across the street from us, but for whatever reason, my mother did not want to go that route -- route again, because probably it brought back too many memories of my sisters. So instead, I went to a -- a private Protestant school called the **Weeshuis,** it was called **Weeshuis,** it means orphanage. I don't know whether there -- there ever was an orphanage attached to that school at one point, but that was what it was called, the orphanage school. Which was a fair distance from -- from home, but not -- not too great and I -- I was able to walk to school by myself, and I went there for my -- for the first few grades, first two grades.

Q: Was that a pleasant experience? Did you find a better adjustment with the other children then you did in the summer experience?

A: Oh definitely, I -- I did very well in -- in elementary school, I did very well in -- I did very well in kindergarten and I did very well, I had no trouble whatsoever in elementary school in terms of fact, you know, I sort of became a leader among ah, the children. I had no trouble making friends at all. There was an incident with -- with a schoolteacher who sang a song that had some inappropriate words in it and I told my mother about it, and --

Q: You mean anti-Semitic?

A: No, no, not anti-Semitic, just sexual. And he made some gestures that were inappropriate and I told my mother about it, and I -- you know, the teacher and the principal of the school, with whom we were very good friends, my mother had become close friends with the fre -- with the principal and I was very close friends with the principal's son. His name was **Bati Bos, B-o-s**. And they came over to the house and I was confronted, I was asked to -- to confront the teacher and tell them what -- what had happened, and I did. And after that my mother decided to change schools and I then went on, took a tramway actually to go back to take -- to -- to attend the school in the neighborhood where we had lived before the war, because my mother really felt those were the better schools. And that was a public school. And that's where I went for third and fourth grades **[indecipherable]** something approximately, and I again, you know, enjoyed that. And then subsequently then, after that, is when we -- when we moved to **Belgium.** And so I attended schools in -- in **Brussels.**

Q: When did you move to **Belgium**?

A: We moved to **Brussels**, if I remember correctly, probably 1952 -- either 19 -- some time between 1950 and 1952 is when we moved to **Belgium**. And my mother at that point, at the -- was considering or attempting a remarriage that -- that utterly failed, but we did end up living in **Belgium** for several years.

Q: Was that hard for you, to leave the **Madnas**?

A: It was difficult to leave the **Madnas** and by then also I had become very close with -- with other friends of my mother's. For example, one family that we're v -- we were very, very close with was a family that lived -- called **Ravensbergan**. Husband was **Truus, T-r-u-u-s**, and **Piet, P-i-e-t.** They -- my -- my Uncle **Emil,** whom I mentioned earlier, had actually been hidden with them in this little town called **Rijnsburg,** outside of **Leiden.** And -- but he was -- he was found out by the Germans and was deported. And I never really found out anything else about him. I have no new information whatsoever. But we became very close friends with the **Ravensbergan** family and we would spend many weekends traveling there. We would take the train, first to **Leiden** and then a second, more local tramway, actually **[indecipherable]** tramway to the town of -- of -- of -- where they lived. And I -- I would spend weekends there, or sometimes a week and I would ver -- I was very, very close with those people. By that time the **Vanderpool** family had left for the **United States**. They emigrated du -- in 1948 to the **United States**, so that was a loss for my mother. And that's, I think, when she became really very -- even closer friends with -- with these -- the **Ravensbergan** in -- in **Rijnsburg.** And we would go there almost every other weekend. And -- and leaving them when we moved to **Brussels** was very, very difficult. And I remember catching rides

periodically to get back to visit them. **Rijnsburg** is a -- is an area where it's in the middle of all the flower fields of **Holland**, the flower industry. And trucks with flowers would go to **Belgium** to deliver them to the market. And when these trucks would go back empty I would catch a ride with them to go back and visit the family from **Brussels.** So I remained in very close contact with them as well.

Q: Was your mother extremely protective of you when you were young, after the war because of what you went through? Did -- did you sense that maybe more than other parents of your friends?

A: Well --

Q: When you were in elementary school.

A: Sure. It's hard to say, you know, because it's -- it's compared to what, you know, I have no -- I have no way of comparing. I-I don't f -- you know, I -- when I was in elementary school I became -- I had -- I became very, very ill. I had a ruptured appendix. And this was in my first year in elementary school, if I remember correctly. And at that -- at that time there was no -- there were no antibiotics, as yet. Penicillin had just come out. So I was really very, very sick. I was in the hospital for about 10 weeks altogether. And my mother had a tremendous fear that she was going to lose me at that time. And she talked about that, a lot. And that's -- that's when I really found out how much I meant to her, that -- that -- you

know. I was the one thing that kept her going, and she told me that many, many, many times. So yes, you know, she was very protective. But at the same time, for example, did allow me to play outside, did allow me to have friends, encouraged me to walk to school by myself, even though there was some danger there. And one time I was almost hit by a car. But nonetheless, sh-she did allow me that freedom and she allowed me to grow up, basically. So she was not overly protective. She also tried to encourage me to mix with other children. Hence, you know, the -- the camp I mentioned before. I went to -- I would go to the Protestant elementary school in the mornings and then in the afternoon I would go to a **cheder,** to a -- a Hebrew school which was in a building adjacent to the big synagogue in **The Hague.** And that was a very, very long walk actually. But I **[indecipherable]** my mother never accompanied me. She couldn't, she had her store. And she certainly allowed me to go there by myself, and I -- I do remember attending the Hebrew school. I remember also her warning, because I was -- the -- the Protestant school was extremely good at teaching Bible, and so she -- she told -- and I was very good at that, so she told me, don't repeat in the afternoon, what you learned in the morning.

Q: Did you feel very Jewish then, when you were that young? You really knew you were Jewish.

A: I definitely knew that I was Jewish. I -- certainly my mother made -- you know, sent me to the **cheder** very, very early on. I think at the same time, virtually that I started elementary school, I started going to the **cheder**, which wasn't much of a school at the time because there were very, very few kids left. My teacher was the cantor of the synagogue, Mr. **Mussel**, and I -- I don't remember too much of what we -- what he ler -- what he taught us, but I -- and shortly -- it was around that time also, when my mother definitely found out that my father had died, when we got documentation through the Red Cross. My mother had a very good friend who worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. **Liza**. And he managed to speed things up so that we got documents from the Red Cross explaining exactly what had happened to my father. And as soon as we found out when he had died exactly, we -- my mother di -- encouraged me to learn to say Kaddish and to go to the synagogue on his **Yahrzeit**. And I probably was about six or seven when I started doing that. And I also remember going, certainly, to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, on Yom Kippur with my mother. I remember very distinctly, for example -- you know, that -- this was an Orthodox synagogue in **The Hague** and so the women sat in the gallery upstairs and of course, there I was all by myself downstairs, and I had to be adopted by some -- some of the men downstairs, yes. And I remember for the first time th-the honor of rolling up the -- the scroll, the Torah scroll is usually given to a

child in **Holland**, and I remember being given the honor. And then afterwards, you know, going over and shaking the hand of the president of the congregation, or the **parness**, as we called him there, and then rushing upstairs to the balcony to ask my mother if I had done okay.

Q: Did she observe the Sabbath at your house?

A: Yes, she did. She -- she certainly lit candles on Friday night and she observed **Pesach**, very distinctly I remember. The **Pesach** I remember most distinctly was in -- in 1948, and the reason I remember it is because my mother was telling me the story about the Egyptians, and then at the same time there was the Arab Israeli war. And I remember asking how -- her how this was possible since all the Egyptians had already been defeated. Passover. So that was -- that was -- I remember that. I remember, you know, going out and buying matzos, which were hard to get in **Holland**. They were round and came in special boxes. The other thing was that -- that I remember in terms of -- of -- of Jewish things is that I had -- a-as I indicated before, I went to a Protestant school, and either the principal of the school or someone passed out -- passed my name on to a -- a pastor, a p -- a Protestant pastor who was a Jewish convert, by the name of **Suril Tabachsblaat**. And he came to my mother's store with the idea, I think, of trying to convert her to becoming Protestant. But by the time he left the store, she had sent him on errands in

Antwerp, she knew he was going to **Antwerp,** and so he brought back mezuzahs and a **siddur,** which we didn't have, you know, none of that was left. And to this day the mezuzah on my door is the mezuzah that Mr. **Tabachsblaat** brought back from **Antwerp.** She also persuaded him to let her -- and I don't think it took much -- she told him, she said we were going to have a Seder and she said, you know, Seder is not necessarily a Jewish thing, why don't you have a Seder in your church? And she -- she persuaded him, something that became very commonplace afterwards, to have a Seder in the church. And my mother spoke to his congregants about the Jewish lifecycle events. And my mother, in many ways, I think, rediscovered Judaism after the war. Her experiences in the concentration camps did not seem to lessen her faith, but if anything increased it, and she became much more interested in Judaism after the war. Before the war she -- she used the word, searching. After the war there was no searching any more.

Q: When you were at this Protestant school, where there other J-Jewish children there?

A: No, there were no other Jewish children at the -- at the Protestant school, I wa -- as far as I know, I was the only one there.

Q: Were you accepted by the other children?

A: Yes. I -- I don't think there was a -- as I said, you know, I was very close friends, for example, with the -- the son of the principal. The principal's wife was also one of the schoolteachers and I -- I remember watching her grading papers and things like that and spending a lot of time in their household, and I had many other children in the playground. And I had no difficulty, you know, playing games with them. I remember our favorite game -- my favorite game at that time, because I enjoyed going to -- Papa **Madna** had taken me to the circus and my mother took me to the circus in **Holland**, which is really a big deal over there, and I remember playing circus in -- in the playground with the other children.

Q: Then, did your mother talk about your father and the children as you got older -- your sisters, as they -- got older, was it a big topic of conversation?

A: Well, as I said before, my mother showed me my sister's notebooks and through the **Van Luhrmann** family I also -- you know, we constantly talked about my sisters. Maybe a little bit less so about my father except my mother did tell me about the -- his store, and what it looked like and the furniture they had bought. In many ways he was really kept, you know, in the family and very early on she gave me a -- a pen, a **Parker** pen that belonged to him, which I have -- which I still have. That sort of became a good luck charm. Whenever I took an exam or anything, she told me to take the pen along and use that pen for writing. So she -- she -- she really

tried, you know, to impress on me who my father was. Said things like, you know, your father is with you. And when -- whenever, you know, there were moments of difficulty, or -- or sadness, or po-potential difficulties, we -- I do remember fairly early on after the war, visiting the woman who had hidden my sisters, where my sisters had been hidden. She and her husband, as far as I know, separated, so he was not there. But my mother took me in to what -- t-to what me seemed -- seemed like a very long trip actually on the tramway, way outside **The Hague**, somewhere near the beach is where this woman lived. And it was very important to my mother to thank this woman and let her know that at least one of the children had survived and to relieve some of this woman's guilt. And my mother gave her some -- some money, some gifts. I don't know whether my mother had any subsequent contact with her. That must obviously have been an incredibly difficult time. We also had continued contact with the two priests, one of them I mentioned before, Father **Schulling**, the other one was called Father **Lodders, L-o-d-d-e-r-s**, and he was -- oh, he was much younger though, **Schulling** was the older man and **Lodders** was a -- a younger, Jesuit priest. And he would come to visit my mother's store quite frequently on his motor bike. And I -- I very much remember him also. And in some ways they -- they also encouraged me in Judaism. Not too many forms, actually, the -- you know, is -- I was at my -- my mother took great pride in exposing me in an ha

-- to -- to many different beliefs. It was very important to her, which is really amazing after what she went through, to -- to have a respect and an understanding of other religions. And she would take great pride, for example, at birthday parties for me, in counting around the table how many different religions she had represented. And there were always very devout Catholics, there were the **Madnas**, who were probably Moslem in origin. There were the Protestant family from -- from **Rijnsburg**. And you have to understand that in **Holland**, Protestants and Catholics do not speak to each other. But there they were, all around the table for my birthday. And then there were Jewish members, and some of them were very Orthodox Jewish, and my mother took tremendous pride in bringing -- and in the convert Minister. And my mother took tremendous pride in bringing all these people around the table. This was very, very important to her.

Q: You had mentioned that when you went to visit the woman who sheltered your sisters, your mother wanted to give her some gifts. Had j -- had your folks given any money to the **Madnas** to take care of you?

A: No, they didn't give any money, as far as I know, to the **Madnas,** or they had th -- in other words, there was no money paid for my -- for -- for -- for them sheltering me. They did give them some ration cards and ration coupons so that they could obtain food for me. There may have been some money, you know, to -- to -- to help

take care of me, defray expenses, basically. But they certainly weren't paid, you know, to take care of me. There was no -- no -- no, there was no monetary gain to them.

Q: And what about the family that took your sisters?

A: I think it was the same thing. No, it was really -- my sisters, th -- all their possessions were taken to them. And again, the most important thing at that time was ration cards, and I remember what they looked like, even. I remember immediately after the war even, you know, when rationing continued, going with my mother to get those ration cards at an -- at an office and standing on line to get them. So I was -- I was very familiar with those.

Q: And then you also mentioned the probab -- possibly the Moslem background of the **Madnas**. Were there any holidays or any traditions that you -- that they carried out while you were there?

A: Christmas was the only holiday because I remember the decorations. They had a Christmas tree and it was decorated. There were no electric lights, but I remember there were real candles in the -- in -- in the Christmas tree. I'm not entirely sure whether there was one during the war years, or whether the one that I remember was immediately after. I th -- it may have been immediately after when my mother was actually in -- I just remembered that now, is when my mother was actually

living there with us. She was there at the time, also. So this may -- this -- this may have been the first Christmas, 1945, but I'm not --

Q: I -- I -- I thought you said she stayed a few weeks with them?

A: I'm not sure. Or whether she came back, we came back to stay with them, that may have been, but -- but it's -- I remember my mother being there for -- for that Christmas at -- at -- at the **Madnas**. And we may have had the trees before. I do remember that, you know, seeing the decorations before, but that's where sort of memories blend into each other.

Q: Right. Did you have any hobbies when you were a small child? Any -- or did you like sports?

A: I didn't play many sp -- any sports, I -- I rode a bicycle, but what I -- my -- th-the earliest hobby that I had as a child carried through from the puppet theater. I u -- I used to really take the puppet theater to all my friends birthdays an-and have puppet plays for them. And then the next phase after that, related to that is when I started writing plays, and I started doing that when I was what, about six or seven, as soon as I learned how to -- to write. I still have some of those early manuscripts and they were based on stories that my mother told me. And my f-first play was produced in elementary school, and I remember taking down my mother's curtains -- draperies, to make -- fashion curtains for my stage. I also had little gifts for the teachers, to get

them to send their kids in to watch my play. And I'm ashamed to admit it now, but I had little packets of cigarettes and had little samples, soap samples, I remember those, they were in the shape of a hand, because those are things my mother got in her store. So those -- I handed those out to entice people to come and watch my play.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Interview with Alfred Munzer
August 4, 2002

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Alfred Munzer.** This is tape number three, side **A**, and you were talking about your performances and your playwriting ability.

A: Well, this was something that really was encouraged by my mother, who had a tremendous love for theater. My mother was also an accomplished painter, but I could never master that, but the writing -- I really did enjoy playwriting. And I also learned public speaking and the way that came about was kind of interesting. When we would go spend our weekends with the family in -- in **Rijnsburg**, another religious angle, I would also always go to church with the family. And after the church service I would be able to repeat the sermon that I had heard almost verbatim. And so that's -- that's really where I learned public speaking, and I've -- I've always enjoyed that, and it's -- it's a very, very valuable experience I had. But the interesting thing is again, that my mother was not afraid to have me exposed to a variety of experiences, and then to know at the same time that my -- my Jewish foundations would remain very, very strong. One more thing in the involvement in terms of the Jewish community in -- in **The Hague**; I mentioned, you know, attending services, but there also was a -- a Purim party immediately -- very shortly after the war. My guess is that it would probably have been '46 - '47 approximately,

probably more ’47 because I remember where we lived at the t -- we were living at the time. My mother already had her store, and she would dress me up as a **Karen Kayemet** collection box. And I won second prize, actually. First prize was to a girl who was dressed up as a Sabbath queen. And that -- that was a very, very major event. Actually, you know, now -- now that I think about it, prior to this Purim fe -- feast, it was also an even earlier experience that I had, which was a Hanukkah party earlier, because I remember very distinctly the kinds of gifts that we got. And they were not toys, they were not books, they were socks and very common things that people needed immediately after the war. So that -- that probably was -- may have been the end of ’45 - ’46, something like that. As I remember also, related to that, going with my mother to -- to a place where packages would arrive from overseas, and one of my mother’s brothers had survived and escaped to **Bolivia** and he arranged for packages to be sent from the **United States** to us. And I remember going with my mother to collect those packages.

Q: What about the extended members of your parents’ families?

A: As far as we know, the -- the only person who -- who survived for sure was one of my mother’s brothers, **Adolf,** or **Abraham Munzer.** And he managed to leave **Germany** on th -- right after, or right around **Kristallnacht,** and the only country that he could go to was **Bolivia**. He had married a German woman who converted to

Judaism, and they had one son, **Norbert** and the three of them managed to escape to **Bolivia**. My mother's sister in **Berlin** was deported eventually, and -- with her family, her son **Yossi**, who was exactly the same age as **Norbert**, they sort of looked alike, and I have some beautiful photographs of the two of them. But sh -- that part of the entire -- of the family was deported and all of the ones who remained behind, the immediate family that remi -- remained behind in **Rymanow,** or my father's side in **Kanczuga,** they all died at concentration camps. There were some cousins of my mother, an aunt of my mother who survived and we did not find out about that until we came to the **United States**. But she managed -- she survived with eight children, which was totally am-amazing, actually.

Q: Were your parents strong Zionists?

A: My mother was a member of some Zionist youth organizations, but I don't know how strong Zionists they were. My mother, you know, did face the choice of after the war, whether we should come to -- go to **Israel** or come to the **United States**. And I know it was a difficult choice for her. A lot of people did mo -- who we had contact with in -- in **Holland** came -- went to **Israel**. And it was probably about equally divided. But she -- I guess I think she did not -- wasn't ready for renewed hardship and she felt -- and that's why we ca -- we eventually came to the **United States**, although that was not so many years later.

Q: Is there anything else you want to talk about before you move to **Brussels**?

A: Do I think -- no, if things come up we can come back -- we'll backtrack.

Q: All right, okay. So then your mother decided to move to **Brussels**?

A: That's right, we moved to **Brussels** in 1952 and she sold her business in **The Hague** and we then remained in **Brussels** until 1958 when we came to the **United States**. I attended scho -- my -- my education continued in **Brussels** and my mother made a decision that the s -- French speaking schools were better than the a -- that the Dutch spe -- the Flemish schools, so initially I went -- this -- this is where I did go to a full time Jewish school actually, called the **E-École Israel Elite** in -- in **Brussels**. And a little van would pick us up every day, make the rounds and pick up the children for the school. Not a very big school, probably had about a hundred students is my -- my guess, at most. And I went there for approximately two years and then graduated and went to -- in -- in **Belgium** they call it **attenay** or it's li -- **Lycée** in French, or in **France**, but basically that's -- that's seventh grade. I started the -- the **Atheneum** School, and that was -- that was not a Jewish school. That was just a -- a public high school, in French.

Q: Was it hard for you to leave **Brussels** -- leave to go to **Brussels**?

A: It was hard because we had very -- you know, as I said, we had many close friends in **Holland**. My mother attempted a -- a remarriage, it didn't work out, she -

- it was someone, a man who was much older than she was. But at the same time, the positive thing that came out of that, we became very, very -- I became very close with his family in -- in **Brussels,** the **Schumer** family, and have maintained that friendship to the present day. They were very, very warm, very supportive to me and to my mother. Some of the members of the family live here in the **United States,** lived there at the time, they were coming back and forth between **Belgium** and -- and -- and the **United States** and others lived in -- in **Brussels**, actually. And they -- so that became my next family. I also became much more aware of -- of Jewish things, things Jewish after we moved to **Brussels**, **Brussels** had a much more active Jewish community, more synagogues. It even had some, as I said before, a -- a full time Jewish school that -- that had somehow survived.

Q: What about your **Bar Mitzvah**?

A: And that's where I had my **Bar Mitzvah**, in -- in **Brussels,** actually, in a fairly small synagogue, synagogue that was attached to a -- an old people's home, nursing home actually. Nursing home or senior citizen home, and that's where we had the **Bar Mitzvah** and it was very, very nice. I do remember that.

Q: Did you have many friends?

A: Fair number. Not -- not a great number of friends. The friends of the **Schumer** family, they were all there, but I -- we had some neighbors were friends, but ah,

Jewish community even in -- in -- in **Brussels** was fairly small, so certainly I did not have many, many friends. But nothing again, that seemed out of the ordinary f- for me, simply because that's the way things were in **Holland**, you know, we weren't -- it was much more of -- of a -- of a shock really, coming to the **United States** and becoming aware of the intensity of Jewish life and J-Jewish community. That, you know, was just -- it's a totally different scale.

Q: What was your life like in high school, junior high school, high school. Did you talk about your early childhood with people? Were you accepted?

A: I did not enjoy the Jewish day school particularly, I don't know why. It was -- I -- I just did not particularly get along well with my teachers. It's the only school experience that I had that was negative, and I don't know why it -- why that was particularly. I had a very good experience subsequently in the -- in the Belgian school, the **Atheneum.** And did very wer -- well, even though French was a new language to me, but still, you know, did very well. But there was some anti-Semitism there. It was very -- it was kind of subtle. There were several Jewish students in my class in the **Atheneum**, and we had religious -- Jewish religious instruction in the public school. There's no separation of church and state in **Belgium**. And so the -- the probl -- the -- the s -- religion is handled differently. People -- students basically pick what religion -- religious instruction they want to

attend. So it could be protest -- they could go to a Protestant class, Catholic class, Jewish class, or one that was called ethics. And I did go to -- to a class with a Mr. **Deener**, and I think, you know, the entire class we only had two or three students at any one time because there were so few Jews in the class. But then one time -- I did not -- there were classes on Saturday mornings, that was part of the regular school week, and I did not go to those classes on Saturday mornings, and I remember -- and the principal, you know, contacted my mother and said that I -- I was in danger of failing, you know, because, you know, the Jewish students, you know, were -- were staying away on Saturday morning. And that didn't happen, the Jewish students graduated, you know, near the top of the class. But there was a -- that little bit, definitely. Anti-Semitism actually, hadn't thought of this, but certainly was prevalent also in **Holland**, and I -- I remember when I was walking back from **cheder** being pursued by kids yelling dirty Jew and things like that, or the equivalent in Dutch. Was -- Jew with glasses was the term, I can't translate it, **burla yout**. And that's -- that's -- that was a very common thing. So there was -- there was a fair amount --

Q: What did you do when you heard those expressions?

A: Just -- just ran. It was very frightening. Very, very frightening. And --

Q: Did you tell your mother?

A: Definitely. We talked about it and my mother had similar experiences, actually. One time she -- we were on -- in line to go to a -- a movie and the newsreels. And I don't know, someone noticed my mother's number and made a remark about, well there's one they didn't get. So it's -- it's -- there was still anti-Semitism after the war, certainly, in -- in -- in **Holland** and in **Belgium**.

Q: So then you stayed in **Belgium** until what year?

A: Well, in ninet -- I stayed -- I -- my mother stayed in **Belgium** til 1958. I stayed in **Belgium** til 1956. I had gone to summer came in **Belgium** in a -- a summer camp sponsored by **yeshiva**. I'd been to several summer camps, but the last one I went to was one sponsored by a -- a j -- a -- a **yeshiva**, actually, near **Antwerp.** And they encouraged my mother to send me to a **yeshiva** full time. I was not getting along with the man my mother had remarried and so that was one solution. And plus the fact that, you know, I was really encouraged. So we -- I went to a school in **France**, a **yeshiva** in **France** in a town called **[indecipherable]** and my mother took me there in -- in 1956 and that was a very, very wonderful experience, actually, a very, very positive experience. An extremely warm, caring atmosphere

Q: So it wasn't hard for you to keep picking up and changing where you lived, I mean you -- you had already, at a young age, had made so many moves. But you were able to adapt to that. How do you explain that?

A: I don't know, but it's -- it's just -- it's just the facts, you know, that I did really da -- did make many changes, and somehow this -- this was a very, very different atmosphere. Obviously this was a very Orthodox **yeshiva**. It was -- the -- the head of the **yeshiva** was from **Lithuania**. He was a student of the **Chofetz Chaim**, so it was -- you know. But I -- I somehow managed to fit in very -- fairly quickly. Again, made very, very good friends very quickly. And took charge actually of the -- volunteered to take charge of the infirmary, that was my first inkling of becoming a doctor. You know, all the students had different chores and my chores were in the infirmary.

Q: Whi-Which you chose, or you were assigned?

A: No, I chose. So that was the first time that I made, you know, the choice that I -- ultimately I was going to be a physician. Th-The school was sort of -- had -- had students from -- half the students were **Ashkenazi** and the other half were **Sephardic** from **Morocco** and **Algeria**. And so they -- that created -- there was an interesting dynamic. That was a whole different exposure again because they spoke Arabic, in addition to French and so to resolve that dilemma, the -- the head of the school actually decreed that were two languages that could not be spoken. One was Yiddish and the other one was Arabic, they were forbidden. And also, all the studying, everything was done in French as a result of that, which was very, very

difficult for the head of the school, because his -- his French was -- was atrocious. But he was a very, very nice man who had been imprisoned during the war years. His name was **Haim Haiken**. And he died in er -- a very advanced age, in early 90's.

Q: And you stayed there for two years?

A: I was there for two years, and --

Q: During that time did you have any correspondence or connection with the **Madnas**?

A: I stayed in touch with the **Madnas**. I can't remember specifically whether during that time I went to visit them. I think I did. I did go back to visit my mother, you know, several times and finally, just before we left in -- in early July, after I had taken some ex -- my exams, my final exams, which in -- in fr -- in **France** at th -- at that stage are fairly elaborate. You have to go to a different city and be -- take an oral exam, a written exam and then an oral exam by teachers from different parts of the country to make sure it's absolutely honest. Well, anyway, I passed that exam and then there was -- you know, then I left the **Yeshiva** and for f -- to go to the **United States**. Basically, my mother never told the man that she had remarried to that she was leaving, she just packed up her things and we met, actually. We arranged to meet in **Ebensee** where my father was buried. I took the train from

France and she took the train from **Belgium**. And we met a little town called **Bad Ischl**, which is very close to **Ebensee**. We met actually because of all the coupling, uncoupling of the trains, I remember meeting on the train and my mother was being -- walked from one end of the train, I walked from the other. And we went on to **Bad Ischl**, stayed there overnight and then the following morning took the train to **Ebensee** to visit my father's grave. My mother wanted to be sure that I saw it before we left for the **United States**. And then -- that's the first time that I really shed tears over my father. I remember very distinctly crying at the grave. The reality of my father had really -- and of his death had really never quite registered. You know, it was -- it was like a page in a book, it wasn't -- I had sort of -- was detached from it. But standing there at the grave and knowing that's where my father was buried was incredibly -- an incredible experience and I -- I did cry. And we -- we left **Ebensee** and **Bad Ischl** and stayed my mother's -- stayed -- I stayed with my mother for a few days in a town called **Bad Nauheim** in **Germany** and then from there went to **Rotterdam** and met up with the **Madna** family and the **Ravensbergan** family from **Rijnsburg** and some other friends of my mother, close friends of my mother from **The Hague**, and who saw us off on the **Ryndam** and we left for the **United States**.

Q: What did you know about the **United States**? You were 17 years old. What did you know about the **United States**?

A: I had been -- I was scared of the **United States**, especially when we were in this spa at bel -- in -- in -- in -- in -- in **Germany** called **Bad Nauheim**. There was a woman who sat at our table who was there from the **United States** and she told me that I'd better toughen up, that all the kids here were extremely rough and that I was going to have a very hard time. And so I was -- I was -- frankly, I was scared. I didn't know what I was going to encounter. You know, I'd certainly seen cowboy movies also, and that's what I expected the **United States** to be like. And I -- it was a very different experience, very positive when we arrived.

Q: Di-Did you -- d-d -- were you upset that your mother wanted to move to the **United States**?

A: No, because I knew that this situation in **Brussels** was really not tenable. At one point I actually -- we had even planned on going to **Canada.** The reason we didn't go to the **United States** earlier is because it took that many years to obtain a visa, because of the quota system. And so we have -- we had applied for a visa to go to **Canada** in about 1954 or so, but then there was a flood in **Holland**, and -- I may be off somewhat on my years, and all of a sudden we were told that the -- that I had -- that there was a visa for me to go to -- to th -- the **United States** opened the Dutch

quota basically, because of the floods. And so I got a visa and my mother assumed that she had one too, and she didn't know about the visas being by national origin. So she did not -- was not able to come t -- **[indecipherable]** to the **United States**. But that's -- as a result of that, we dropped our pla -- we had dropped our plans to go to **Canada** and -- so I was prepared for the change to come to the **United States**. I had also -- I'd gotten different warnings. I also -- the -- my -- my si -- teachers at the **yeshiva** and the older, more senior students, you know, warned me, said that the **United States** was extremely materialistic and I shouldn't forget the things I had learned over there, you know, that -- and that one of the -- the lessons that I should take back from the war was that material objects were really not that important. There were more important things in life. School over there was very, very much geared towards the **Mussar** ethical movement and was very, very valuable. So I was prepared for the worst in many ways when we came to the **United States**, but instead, I think both of us really adapted quite well. We -- my mother purposely had booked a trip on -- that was fairly long because she -- she looked on this as kind of a -- a vacation. So our -- our trip to the **United States** took about 10 days. The ship made stops in **Ireland** and **France, Halifax, Canada** before finally arriving in -- in **Hoboken**, **New York.** And in **Hoboken** we were met by someone from the **HIAS**,

Mrs. **Citrin**. By f -- our first exposure to a real American woman who was super-American.

Q: Did you know any English?

A: Very, very little. I had taken English as my second foreign language which -- which was really bare bones, was twice a week for about two years, so it was very, very little. But there was this -- this very swaggering woman, very, very different from -- yeah, the -- the very quiet European women we -- and that was -- that was intere -- and then we -- we took the taxi to -- to -- to **Brooklyn** and joined -- and stayed with the **Vanderpool** family, who had -- since they originally -- they i-initially had lived in **Williamsburg** when they came to the **United States**. **Hela Vanderpool** had a job actually, in a matzo baking factory. And then finally, you know, they -- they moved to a nicer part of **Brooklyn.** We moved in with them for a short period and got our own apartment.

Q: Did it mean anything to you to put -- to arrive in **America**, to walk onto American soil? Did that have any special meaning?

A: I very distinctly re -- remember seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time. You know, we were having breakfast on the ship and there it was, and really -- it -- it si -- it did symbolize a tremendous amount. The other thing that really struck us as -- as we got off -- as we were on the boat watching, you know, being processed

on the boat, was they were -- the dockworkers were unloading things from the ship and that the dockworkers were wearing leather -- were wearing protective gloves. That was one thing that really struck us. The second thing that struck us, that on this big loading platform at one point, they brought -- they dropped a newspaper and containers of coffee for the workers. And this was very, very different from working conditions in -- in **Holland** at the time. And that -- those two things, the newspaper, especially, and the cups of coffee and the leather gloves, the protective gloves, somehow struck us as being very special and showing that -- you know, that things were much, much better in the **United States**. The other -- very shortly after our arrival, we also -- we started looking for permanent places to live and -- which is quite an adventure. We ended up in some of the worst neighborhoods of -- of -- of **Brooklyn** before we finally found a place, but -- and my mother had to look for work. And I remember visiting the offices. I think it was either the **HIAS**, or there was another organization called New Americans, which was -- and this was on **Beekman** Place in -- in **New York,** not far from **Wall** Street. And I remember one of the first things we visited was -- was **Trinity** Church and -- and the graveyard, and how impressed we were to see this old graveyard next to **Wall** Street over these -- these skyscrapers. That was also a very, very positive impression. And we both feel -- felt -- my mother, I know, felt liberated. She really is the one who wanted to

leave behind the memories of **Europe**. She found **Europe** extremely confining. The memories were bad, but in addition to that, she -- she did not -- she did not like being referred to as the widow **Munzer**, which was how women were still regarded, single women, widowed women in -- in -- in **Europe** were still regarded at that time. Whereas here in the **United States** she could get a job and make a living, and she would just be like anybody else.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Alfred Munzer**. This is tape number three, side **B.** And you've arrived in the **United States**, did you -- and where did you eventually live?

A: We actually lived in an apartment that was almost next door to the **Vanderpool** family. There were some people who -- these were two family, two si -- houses and we took an apartment next door to them. And we stayed there for several years and then moved to an o -- to a larger apartment a little bit further away. My mother, almost immediately got -- got work, went to work in the -- the ladies' garment business, basically. She made -- she had a variety of jobs. One of them was making hats, all sorts of things, til she finally got a s -- a job that she kept for a long period of time, which was working as a t -- at a tailor in a -- in a women's store. The

reason she took that particular job, which was on **Williams** Street, again, and **Wall** Street, was because it was closed on **Shabbas**. And by then my mother really had become much more observant and she would go to shul every -- every **Shabbas**. So that -- that became very important for her.

Q: Considering what she had gone through during the war, how was her health?

A: My mother was in very, very good health, actually. Had -- had no -- was never si -- never sick at all. Had no -- no major health -- no health problems that I know of at all.

Q: And your health was good, too?

A: Yeah, I had no -- no problems in spite of, you know, malnutrition. I'm told that there's some dental problems, probably from early, you know, development that may be related to that. My mother was concerned about my health early on, but there really weren't any -- any problems. After we came to the **United States**, started looking for a school for me and I enrolled actually at -- I -- we -- we explored one of the more religious inst -- **yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaath** in -- in -- in **Brooklyn.** But that was in a -- in a -- in a very ver -- bad neighborhood and my mother wanted -- but by then I was beginning to think really of -- of eventually going to medical school. And so my mother really wanted me to go to a school that was more progressive. That's why I went to **Yeshiva** University High School in

Brooklyn. And it was a -- that was a very -- it was a difficult move because I knew -- spoke very, very little English. And I must say that the school was not supportive. No one at the school asked any questions about how I had survived, how my mother survived. It -- it's unfortunately left a sour taste in my -- in my mouth. The students were very, very friendly and the students were very interested in my past. And I still have an article that they wrote for the school newspaper, actually an interview about my experiences in **Europe**. So it's -- it's -- but the adults were just -- I -- I -- for whatever reason, no one wants to talk about. The only person who really asked us about our survival, how we had survived, it was very interesting, it was someone who wasn't Jewish. It was when my mother went to open up a bank account at **Manufacturer's Trust**. And when the -- the woman who read the application, she called over the bank manager and they were both in tears practically, when they found out my father had died and how he had died and -- and such. That was -- but that was unique. Most people -- there were some other people, obviously, who had been through similar experiences we talked to. We went to a small synagogue, Rabbi **Moshe Weiss**, and he had lost much of his own family and certainly we were very close with him and we talked with him. But other than that, certainly at **Yeshiva** University High School there was no -- there was no talk about the Holocaust at all. And I -- I was asked to take every single **Regent's** exam for the

entire four years of high school in that one year because they were afraid really of -- of giving me a diploma without doing that, so I did. But it -- I -- the unfortunate thing is that it's probably as a result of that experience that I did not go -- did not attend **Yeshiva** University. I was interviewed there and would have gone there, but ended up going to **Brooklyn** College. And that's where I graduated from eventually. And that was a very good experience. And the interesting thing is that over there there were the beginnings of talk. At least there were other foreign students and there was some interest. But I felt very much at home, felt very comfortable there, made good friends and really blended in.

Q: So you did not feel like an outsider?

A: Definitely not, no. I -- o-or if I did, it was -- it was something positive. But I no -- definitely felt a part of the school.

Q: And you obviously picked up English quickly.

A: Very much so. I had a -- I did have a -- a very heavy accent, initially, because I -- and I had a very, very good speech teacher, Professor **Dorothy Lawson**. And she spent hours with me with a tape recorder, and I would listen to my voice and then she would make corrections and she taught me the international phonetic alphabet, and that's how I learned English.

Q: And then you -- so you attended for four years to **Brooklyn** College, and then what?

A: I attended **Brooklyn** College for four years, then applied to medical school. Did not get in the first time, so I did a year of graduate studies at -- also still at **Brooklyn** College and then fi -- and then was admitted to -- to medical school and went to the **State University of New York, Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn.** And after that, it's part of my internship, my internship and residency at **State University, King's County Medical Center**, then went on to the **University of Rochester,** then **Johns Hopkins,** and then finally did my military service in **Washington, D.C.** at **Andrews** Air Force base. And that's how I came to live in **Washington.**

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And you always found it was easy to have friends, and a social life and so forth? You did not feel arre -- being a refugee, so to speak?

A: No, I did -- I did not feel like any stranger, refugee or foreigner. I never really found that an obstacle at all. I found it really a positive -- I tried to -- to use it as a positive experience. You know, certainly all of the different exposures that I had to different people, different cultures, different religions, I -- I tie th -- try to keep that basically as part of me. And I think to this day it's -- it's something that has -- has helped me.

Interview with Alfred Munzer
August 4, 2002

Q: When did you become a citizen?

A: We became citizens in 1962, really the first up -- no, ’63, five years, I think. The first opportunity that we had, basically, we became citizens. Unfortunately, that was not a good experience. **[indecipherable]** everybody has wonderful experiences, but we were being interviewed -- we were interviewed by someone who basically told us that -- said, you know, remember in this country you don’t do what you want, you do as you are told. This country is run like the army. And that -- that was pa -- horrible, you know, and the man tried to trick me in -- in the citizenship questions. He threw my -- my mother’s green card and mine on the floor. The positive thing that came out of that is that I wrote a letter of complaint to the Immigration Naturalization Service, which initially -- and to the Justice Department, which at that time was headed by **Bobby Kennedy**. I did not get a reply, but then wrote to **Emmanuel Seller**, who was my congressman in **Brooklyn** and who was head of the Judiciary Committee and I got immediate action, they actually -- there was a hearing held in -- in **Brooklyn**. And I was confronted -- and the man was forced to apologize. And I think h-he retired shortly after that. So it -- it did show the negative and the positive, you know, the fact that you can stand up and -- for your rights.

Q: Did he give a reason at the hearing why he treated you that way?

A: Absolutely not. You know, it's -- it's interesting because the -- the hearing examiner told me that this man had never even served in the army, and why he was making the reference to the army was bizarre, and he didn't -- he said he didn't know whether the man was having a bad day, or what it was, but obviously the behavior was -- was totally -- was inappropriate.

Q: So then you s -- you said you -- you worked at **Andrew's** Air Force base and you stayed in **Washington** since then. And what -- and what do you do now? Or what did you do after **Andrew's** Air Force base, professionally?

A: Well, after **Andrew's** Air Force base -- well, I ni -- I had become -- I was a lung specialist by then and I looked for practice opportunities in the **Washington** area and decided to join an associate at **Washington** Adventist Hospital and that's where I have been in practice since then.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And your family situation?

A: Well, I -- I have a partner, **Joel Wind** and we've known each other for 21 years and we've lived together here for about 11 years. And I'm very, very close to his family, another survivor family. **Joel's** father is a rabbi and came to the **United States** in 1938 from **Lvov**, and -- on a scholarship to the Jewish Theological Seminary. **Joel** has -- had an aunt who actually was one of the people who lived in

the sewers of **Lvov**. So there are a lot of connections, family connections and I'm -- I'm very, very close to **Joel's** family and we are one family.

Q: Mm-hm. Now let's talk a little bit about some of your general thoughts. Though, before we do that, you kept up your relationships with the mand -- **Madnas** I assume, all through -- once you got to the **United States**?

A: A-After we came to the **United States**, I did keep up my relationship with the **Madnas**. For many years it was just writing and sometimes, you know, there would be -- months would go by before I would write, but we always stayed in touch. I did not go back for a visit to **Holland** until I think in 1973, 15 years after we had been here is when I -- when I went back on a visit and spent a lot of time -- primarily went back to visit the **Madnas**, basically. And Papa **Madna** was as protective of me as he had ever been. I had never been to -- to **Amsterdam,** actually. My mother had always said negative things about **Amsterdam**, she sa -- basically she said my father did not like **Amsterdam**, it was too noisy and that's why he lived -- they lived in -- in **The Hague**. And so, as a result of that, I had never gone to **Amsterdam**. And I decided that on this trip I was going to go to **Amsterdam** and Papa **Madna** again, almost completely dissuaded me from going altogether, then scared me so much that I went there for one day and then came right back t-to him. And -- but that's -- that still is the -- the -- the influence. You -- you asked earlier

about whether my mother was -- was protective. I have the sense -- I had the sense really that i-in many ways he was more protective of me than she was. That was very, very special. And he -- he had remarried in 1947, and I was very, very close with this second wife. And they had three children, **Vonny, Tolé** and **Matipah.** And I was very, very close with all three of them, and remain close with them to this day. **Vonny Madna** and his wife **Annika** have been here to visit, and just a few weeks ago, their son **Rodewick** and his girlfriend came over here for a visit. And so the -- we're -- we're passing on the -- the accomplishments or -- of his -- of his grandfather, or -- of **Tolé Madna** now to the next generation. And I think that's what the **U.S.** Holocaust Memorial Museum is all about in a way. We had a -- a wonderf -- we had -- we visited the museum together and the importance of a museum and of a memorial suddenly hit me. Prior to that I thought that people could get information from books, but there is something very special about a memorial, in terms of the passage from one generation to the next.

Q: Mm-hm. When you went back t -- at Papa **Madna's** funeral, did you feel like you were losing a father?

A: What do yo -- yes, I think when he f -- when he finally -- I -- you know, he was -- even though we were far removed geographically, he really remained very much a part of my life to the very end, and -- and certainly, you know, his -- his death was -

- was a big loss for me. Fortunately he lived to a -- a ripe, old age, and fortunately, you know, we were able, **Joel** and I were -- were able to spend time with him. It was very important for me for **Joel** to get to know him, and we made several trips together where we saw the **Madnas**. I made that initial trip by myself in 1973, but then in 1985 **Joel** and I were in **Holland** together and visited the **Madnas**, all of them, and it was a -- a very, very good visit. And then **Joel** and I were back again just before **Tolé Madna** died. And that too, was very, very special visit.

Q: Did you speak at his funeral?

A: No**, Rob Madna** is the one who spoke at the funeral, I did not. But **Rob Madna** -- I can't remember ma -- whether I did or not.

Q: Are you angry that you had to go through such terrible difficulties and such terrible losses and other people living, let's say in the **United States**, did not?

A: You know, there were times when I really miss not knowing, not having had, you know, my sisters. Not having nephews, nieces and nephews and feeling lonely at times. I certainly have missed my father. The interesting thing is that I really have never, you know, you -- you mentioned the word angry, and I don't think that describes it. I don't think I've ever really felt anger. It's -- it's very interesting. When **Joel** and I went to **Austria**, for example, he was much angrier than I was. I was able to speak and converse with people without, you know, difficulty. We had

one very special experience there. We were staying again in the town, the same town where I stayed with my mother, **Bad Ischl**, and we had ma -- made reservations in a -- in an inn, and the woman who was the innkeeper, when we arrived told us that she had made a mistake. She said, you know, you're going to have to change rooms tomorrow morning because of some mistake I've made in the reservations. And I told her that would be very difficult because we were going to take a train first thing in the morning to visit my father's grave in **Ebensee**. And the woman told me that her family -- she burst out in tears and she says, you know, my family is from **Ebensee** and I am so ashamed. And we hugged, and that -- that was truly an incredible experience. But **Joel** would not -- would barely look out the train window. He -- he could not bring himself to say anything positive about **Austria**, and couldn't wait to get away. That's one reason we did not -- this was around my -- the time of my father's **Yahrzeit** and so we visited **Ebensee** and then from there, instead of going to **Vienna**, we went to **Prague** and said **Kaddish** in the **Altneu** shul.

Q: Do you feel you had a childhood, or you never did?

A: Well, it was a very different childhood probably, but I -- I definitely, you know, definitely had the childhood. I had a lot of fun. I learned a lot. M -- you know. I was taken care of by many different people and I was fortunate, I think, in having a read

childhood, a good childhood, and learning many different things. And I -- I think I -- because of the unusual nature of my childhood, I had had many opportunities that other kids probably did not have. So I was able to learn several languages and be exposed to many different cultures.

Q: Are there any sights today or sounds or smells that kind of trigger memories from your early years?

A: Well, when we went back to **Holland** and crossed the border, I smelled the coffee. And there was something very special about the smell of Dutch coffee, and that -- that was very, very distinct. And of course, you know, Indonesian cooking still ha -- is a -- something very special. And I -- I do enjoy, you know, going back to **Holland** and the sights of **Holland**. And I do enjoy going back to visit **The Hague,** the places where I grew up. The house at **van Kinsbergenstraat**, number 40 doesn't exist any more, but other places are still there. Where my father had his store, that's still there. I've taken **Joel** there on a visit. So -- the -- the one place that -- that gave me some difficulty was the **Anne Frank** house, actually. It's interesting, you know, you mention the word anger, maybe there I did feel some anger. And the first time I went there was with my foster sister, with **Davy** and both of us had to leave. She more so than I did. For her it just brought back too many memories and she -- she really was very upset, very angry. In my case, it -- it was

just wanting to shout out, you know, there were other people like **Anne Frank**, like myself, you know? And --

Q: Do you feel very Dutch, or very American?

A: I think I feel very American. You know, I think the Dutch has sort of faded, although, you know, I -- I -- I still pride myself on being able to read Dutch -- Dutch newspapers and being able to converse in Dutch, but I -- I don't really feel -- and my mother did not have any -- any great affinity to **Holland** after the war. My mother, I think, really understood also, that there was a large Nazi presence in **Holland** itself, and that -- that **Holland** really never faced up to that. Apparently that has changed and now there is -- there is -- it's been -- there's mo-more talk about the Dutch Nazi party. It's one of the things that even in the Holocaust Memorial Museum doesn't get enough emphasis is -- is the size of the Dutch Nazi party. It's -- it's sort of between the lines, when you look at the -- the percentage of people who lost -- or Jews who lost their lives, the greatest percentage was in **Holland**. But then there's nothing said about it and why that was, and part of the reason was that **Holland** had a very large Nazi party which collaborated with the Germans. So we -- we know about the **Vichy** regime in **France**, but we don't know enough about the Nazi collaborators in **Holland.**

Q: Mm-hm. As you've gotten older, do you think more of your wartime experience than European experience?

A: I think it -- it's become more important for me to -- to really preserve the memory of -- of **Holland** and of the story of my family. And I'm -- I'm very, very glad I've had the opportunity to sit down with my mother and go through all the names of all the concentration camps that she was in and sit down with a map with her, and -- and have a presentation p -- on that. That -- that -- that was very, very important. Emotionally it's very hard to tell. You know, at times I have dreams about it that obviously come from there, and -- but it's not a part of my -- my everyday life. I also -- sometimes I'm concerned that there are people who may resent talk about the Holocaust, and the experiences. So it's -- there's some -- there's a little bit of caution there.

Q: Are you talking about non-Jews?

A: No, more in the Jewish community, I think. There is -- there is some feeling, I think that enough is enough. At times I have -- I have a sense of that.

Q: Are you more comfortable around people who were born in **Europe** and have wartime experiences than others who grew up in the **United States**?

A: Not really. No, I think it's -- it's really m-most of my friends now and most of the friends we have are p -- are people who grew up in the **United States**. But you

know even when you begin to talk to people, you -- you realize that -- how common the experience really is, and I'm -- people may have been born here, but their parents may be from **Europe**. I had a ni -- a fascinating experience very recently. I -- I was speaking to a young man at Congregation **Bet Mishpachah** and he -- his name is -- his last name is **Flatow, Warren Flatow**. I told him, I said, you know, **Flatow** is not a very common name, and I worked with a gentleman many, many years ago who was a -- was from **Germany**, a German refugee and whose last name was **Flatow, Anzd Flatow**, and he said -- and he worked as a translator and I worked in the same translation bureau in -- in **New York** while I was in college. And he -- he said, gee, you know, he has a grandfather the same name, but his grandfather was a lawyer and to his knowledge never worked in the translation bureau. Then he asked his father and it turned out to be the same **Anzd Flatow**. And we worked together at the Lawyers and Merchants Translation Bureau in **New York**. And he was, you know, had escaped from **Germany** in 1944 and was a lawyer. Obviously couldn't do any work as a lawyer in the **United States**, so he took this job as a translator. So the -- the connections are many, once you begin talking.

Q: Did you go into medicine -- though I know you said you -- you thought about it early on, but do you think you went into this helping, giving profession because of what you experienced?

A: Pro -- probably. It probably was one of the factors, you know. Certainly my mother always impressed on me that I was there to serve human kind. And I don't want to be overly dramatic about it, but that goes all the way back to -- to her reading the story of -- the biblical story of --

Q: Of -- of **Hannah [indecipherable]**

A: Oh **Hannah**, right, the biblical story of **Hannah**, and -- and **Hannah's** promising to -- to -- you know, to have her son, you know, be in -- of service to God. And that story really stuck to me. My mother said, you know, that I too, that's the promise that she made to God. And when times were bad, when I -- I would give her trouble or something like that, she would repeat that story. My mother never hit me. She never spanked me, but she certainly used every psychological means, and that was one of them, and you know, and so becoming a physician -- she wanted me to be a rabbi, she didn't want me to be a physician, actually.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Interview with Alfred Munzer
August 4, 2002

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is the continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Alfred Munzer.** This is tape number four, side **A,** and you were talking about your relationship with your mother and how she was -- she wanted you to be a rabbi and not a doctor.

A: Sh-She felt that I was more suited -- that I was really suited to becoming a rabbi. She -- she felt that I would not do well in -- in hav -- in business, for example. She just -- she thought that I was too, quote, honest, and that -- you know, that that -- so she wanted me to be -- to be -- she also thought that that would be a natural way to acquire a family, in a sense. But she was basically, as to a large extent on -- on the respect that rabbis have in -- in **Europe**, especially. When we came to the **United States** she realized that -- that rabbis do not necessarily have it all that easy here, and that congregations can be very difficult. So anyway, but -- but -- I had really never considered that that much. It was a -- was a brief consideration. The oth -- the other place where that came from, being a rabbi was, strangely enough, the family that we used to visit in -- in **Rijnsburg**, in **Holland** and who would take me to church and then I would repeat the sermons and one of the women there would say oh, he's going to become a preacher and then the other one would say, no, he's going to become a rabbi. And so that was -- that was one of the early things. But it

was -- those were the two professions that I really considered seriously. But from -- from my standpoint it was really all -- I -- I can't remember. Maybe it was when I was really sick as a child and had the ruptured appendix. That's, I think, when I really made up my mind that I was going to become a physician. But my experiences of -- of -- certainly of having had my life given to me in a -- in a very direct sense by -- by the **Madna** family, I would say probably it has had a major impact, not just on becoming a physician but also volunteering my time. When I picked a specialty it was one where I -- I knew I could have a wider -- I wanted one where I could have a wider impact. And so I chose lung disease because lung disease is so much related to -- to an -- the environment, it's related to smoking and I became very active in the American Lung Association and eventually served as -- as president of the American Lung Association, nationally, and also received their **Will Ross** medal a few years ago, which is their highest volunteer honor. So at -- it's -- that certainly -- and it, interestingly enough, at that ceremony the story, the **Madna** story was told very, very prominently and to -- to an audience of thousands of people. And the **Madnas** received a standing ovation. They weren't there, but you know, just -- it was -- it was extremely moving. So my past, my experiences certainly have been a very important part of forming my life and of determining the kind of person I am. And I guess it's possible for that, depending on the

experiences, to be positive or negative and I'm very fortunate that in my case, it was very positive.

Q: In talking about the **Madnas**, did you -- have you come to any conclusion why Mr. **Madna** really risked his life for you?

A: I -- I really haven't. You know, it's -- it's very, very interesting. To me, this seemed like the most natural thing to do. You know, recently at -- when I was at **Adas Israel** at a service, it was a -- a young girl who had a **Bat Mitzvah** who came here from **Russia**, and th-the rabbi mentioned all the languages she spoke and all the things she had done and then he had asked her, you know, how did this happen, how -- how is this possible? And she said, it's normal. And those words really stuck because that's -- that's probably what describes the way I look on -- on what the **Madnas** did. To me there was nothing unusual about it. That may be terrible, but it's -- it's really -- it's really true because I -- I was so much a part of their family. They never made a big deal about it. My mother did, she expressed, certainly, her gratitude, especially to **Mima**. To her **Mima** was really the important person. But it's -- it's -- so I -- I -- it took me a long time to -- to give them the recognition they deserved as a result of that, again, because it was just part of my everyday life, they were -- you know, they were never out of my life. I couldn't -- I never really distanced myself to -- to be able to say this was something incredible they did.

Q: But when you were an adult, did you ever ask him why he risked -- you know, took such terrible risks?

A: No, I never did. I really -- I -- I -- I just -- you know, it would have been like a child asking a parent why did you have me. You know, it -- it really -- it -- it was very strange, may seem very strange, but it really -- it never occurred to me. It -- you know, he knew that I loved him dearly, you know, and --

Q: I -- I -- I really meant the initial --

A: I know.

Q: -- acceptance that -- not -- not you particularly --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- but accepting a child and putting --

A: Right.

Q: -- his life in danger.

A: No, no, no, I know, no, no, no. I -- I just -- I really don't know. The only thing that I -- that I -- that I've heard was that the plan originally was that this was supposed to be an intermediate step. I'm not sure that this was a conscious decision on his part. It is -- it's -- it's very possible that this was more something that was thrust into him -- at him, and I don't -- you know, at that point he really didn't have any control over. I think one of the factors really was -- was **Mima**. Papa **Madna**

was ready also to adopt me if my mother had not come back. And I did, you know, find that out. He did tell me that. He -- he also told me that he had felt very warmly towards my father, and that -- you know, th-that -- but again, nothing specific as to why he took the risk.

Q: So he knew your father? You said that she had -- his first wife had lived across the street, but -- but Papa **Madna** had known your father also?

A: Yes, and one of the things that he -- he showed me after the war was a suit that my father had made for him. So yes, they knew each other.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. What about your religious feelings? Are -- are you affiliated, Jewishly?

A: Yes, I am. I'm not as religious as I was when I was at the **yeshiva** in **Aix-les-Bains,** but I certainly, you know, I -- I certainly am -- I'm very much involved. I'm involved in three different synagogues. Maybe it's -- maybe it's that -- maybe that's where the -- the -- the ambivalence or the -- the division between different religions is still coming to **[indecipherable]** I can't make up my mind which one. No, but I'm very involved at -- at **B'nai Israel**. That's where my mother was a member for many years and so I've maintained a -- a strong connection with -- with **B'nai Israel**. It also turns out that there is a -- a family relationship through -- through **Joel** and Rabbi **Schnitzer** there. I became involved at **Adas Israel** when I was

saying **Kaddish** for my mother, and -- because it was in the neighborhood. And then of course, through the ceremony honoring the **Madnas** at **Adas Israel**, I've become very much a part of that congregation and feel very, very warmly. And then last but not least, I've been a member of **Bet Mishpachah** for -- for many years and on a fairly regular basis do have a chance to -- to write a **[indecipherable]** sermon, the high holidays or sometimes during the year. So I've been -- I've been very much involved in -- in religious things, and what I learned certainly at the **yeshiva** in terms of ethics especially, in Jewish ethics is -- is something that really still guides me -- I hope guides me and is something that I still try to convey to others as being very important.

Q: What are your feelings about **Germany** or Germans?

A: I have had some very close German friends, whose -- I had one German friends whose -- one whose parents I think it was, part of his family were Nazis. We -- we -- we didn't talk about it a great deal, but it was, I think, part of -- almost the reason for our sh -- our fr -- our friendship, on both sides. It was very important. And I -- I real -- as I -- I have ha -- I-I've no great discomfort around German being spoken or -- or **Germany**. I am baffled by -- by **Germany**. In 1973 when I went back to **Holland** to visit the **Madnas** I also -- I was still in the air force at the time and I took a flight into -- in and out of **Frankfurt,** and that was the first time that I had

really, except for going to bat -- being in **Bad Nauheim** with my mother, that I spent time in -- in -- in **Germany.** And I had spent also a little time at that time, in **Paris,** and did not have very pleasant experiences as a tourist in **Paris**. In **Germany**, for the one night that I was there actually, it was in a very nice hotel, they were very honest, it was very civilized. You know, turned on the radio and it was opera and there was -- there was beautiful music. And I became -- I've become -- became more and more baffled. And to this day I -- I cannot understand how Nazism arose. I can -- I can do it on an intellectual level -- yeah, I can certainly read about it and I -- I know what happened, but it's beyond me as to why Nazism took root to the extent it did in **Germany**. And what frightens me about it is -- what I think is if it happened there, it can happen anywhere. I really -- because I don't think -- I cannot tell if there is anything different about the German character from any other country.

Q: Do -- do you receive reparations, or did your mother?

A: I did for a brief period of time until my 18th birthday and I'm s -- my mother did get reparations to the very end, and s -- she encouraged other people also to -- to apply for reparations. She had many friends who re -- who -- who refused, but in her case she felt that this -- she -- this was something she was owed. And so she did not hesitate.

Interview with Alfred Munzer
August 4, 2002

Q: Obviously everyone has a close connection with a parent, a mother, but when you lost her, because of your special story, was that even doubly painful?

A: It was, because you know, I -- I -- I -- you know, it's -- I was more afraid before it happened, before she died. My mother, the last few years had fairly severe, progressive dementia. So I felt, you know, I was becoming -- but nonetheless, you know, that -- that's -- the touch, the warmth of being with her was very, very important. And you know, s -- even the number was very, very impor -- she didn't like to look at it, but for me, you know, it brought back a lot of memories. And -- and -- and I -- it was totally amazing to me how my -- what my mother's attitude was towards life after the war. I -- I -- to this day cannot understand that. My mother could speak with joy about her childhood in **Poland**, in **Rymanow**. Talking about, you know, the policemen called **bambula** and -- and all of the places where, you know, they -- the kids would go out to play and then -- and I have a very, very vivid picture, actually, of the town. She could talk to me about, you know, experiences in the concentration camps when she put on plays with other prisoners and sh -- and portraying **Hitler**. And then after the war, beginning -- starting a life over again, I would hear her cry at night at times, certainly, in the first few years. She would be very -- sometimes she would accidentally refer to me by my father's name and that was a very frightening thing. But somehow, you know, she was

always very cheerful. You know, when I was little and she had her store, after she closed the store we would take very, very long walks to the park and she would race me to the park. She took me to the theater. You know, every Su-Sunday there was always something. We either went to a museum, we went to -- to a play, we went to -- I-I -- I remember the very first time I went to a -- a -- a Jewish dance company. I was probably seven years old or so, and I -- I still remember it to this day because I remember putting on a performance in the store window afterwards. It's really -- her -- her introduction of me to the theater. And then she picked up painting again. Somehow, being able to enjoy life and to continue to really enjoy life is -- is just -- without f -- ever forgetting what happened, my sisters or my father, is -- is beyond me. I don't know where -- where that strength came from. And I was a very f -- I feel very glad to have had my mother for so many years.

Q: Politically, do you -- are -- d -- are -- are you -- is your political inclination influenced by your war experience?

A: I tend to the liberal side, I don't know whether that's really related, except that people have responsibility for each other. That is -- that's -- that's an important part of -- of certainly my outlook, politically. And -- but other than that I don't think it has had a direct bearing. I certainly do not consider myself, you know, a -- a far right, or a -- no, not at all, I think.

Q: Has it affected your feelings about **Israel**?

A: Certainly I think it has -- it has made **Israel** all the more important to me. I realize the role of **Israel** really as a refu -- as an ultimate refuge is very, very important. At the same time I've also come to appreciate recently, more recent -- in recent years, the importance of the **United States** as a place of refuge. And I really do feel very, very positive about the **United States**. I think the -- the ability to accommodate the diversity of beliefs of peoples. You know, we may have many problems and there may be anti-Semitism here and there may be f -- there may have been oppression of -- of African Americans, Latinos, and negative things said. But in the end, I think, there's a tremendous amount of positive in the **United States**. And I feel very good about being here and being an American. Hadn't really thought about that very much, but I do.

Q: You had mentioned that the **Madna's** story got recognition when you got your award. Can you just tell a little bit about any other recognition that the **Madnas** have received, the **Madna** family.

A: I'm -- I'm told that the **Madna** family was recognized within **Holland,** actually. There was a ceremony held by -- by the queen. I don't know an -- too many details about that. But I've also submitted the family history to **Yad Vashem** and hopefully in the near future, they will also be honored at **Yad Vashem.**

Q: Mm-hm. And then they were honored at your synagogue.

A: At **Adas --** yeah, at **Adas Israel** we had a wonderful ceremony in the garden. There is a Garden of the Righteous at **Adas Israel**, where every year a -- a righteous family that was responsible for saving Jews is honored. And this year the **Madna** family was honored, and that was an incredible experience for me. Not just the immediate ceremony, which was beautiful, but because it gave me a chance to speak to -- altogether I figured out there were close to a thousand schoolchildren. All the schoolchildren at **Adas Israel,** plus all the s-schoolchildren at the Jewish Day School heard the **Madna's** story with slides, with pictures. And many of the s -- children wrote letters to the **Madna** family and I think that -- that was incredibly exper -- an incredible experience, very, very positive for me, and -- and -- and for ma -- for **Rob Madna** and I think the rest of the family as well. I also, again realize the importance of a monument, as when I came there to visit with one of the ma -- recently with the **Madna** grand -- one of the **Madna** grandchildren and they took tremend -- he took tremendous pride in seeing the name inscribed, the **Madna** family. And we took a nice photograph there and then after that, we went to visit the **U.S.** Holocaust Memorial Museum and I -- I -- it's -- it's the next generation now coming up. We talk about the Jewish next generation needing to keep the Holocaust in mind and not to forget the Holocaust, but I think it's -- it's even more important

that the next generation of the heroes also, that they are remembered for generations to come.

Q: That's a wonderful note to end on. So thank you very much for doing the interview.

A: Thank you.

Q: This concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Alfred Munzer.**

End of Tape Four, Side A

Conclusion of Interview