

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Volunteer Collection Interview

**David Brombart**  
RG-50.106\*0170

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Interviewer - Gail Schwartz

**Tape 1 of 3, Side A** - David Brombart was born in Brussels, Belgium on August 3, 1933. His father Aaron was from Blasky, Poland where he married his first wife from whom he was later divorced in 1937. They had a daughter Sarah. Aaron came to Belgium in 1925. David's mother Mina Lewin was from Warsaw, Poland and came to Belgium around 1925-1927. Aaron first worked in the coal mines in Lieges for a year and kept up relationships from that time. He then had a successful leather business. Mina's mother, father and 3 sisters were employed by David's father. David's family first lived in a small apartment in Brussels, then moved to a larger one in 1935. As a middle class family they would go to the seaside. Aaron was a member of the Jewish Labor Bund and David's half sister Sarah was a leader in Hashomer Hatzair. The family was not religious, but did go to relatives for Passover. They spoke French at home, though his father's family and friends spoke Yiddish. David had good memories of his childhood until the invasion in 1940. Now he feels that his mother and father made a mistake in not realizing the consequences. Mina, whose sisters Marie and Esther went into hiding, resisted leaving though Aaron had purchased passports to some Central American countries. After the invasion, David's father showed David piles of money hidden in his leather factory. On May 9, 1940 David was in their apartment near the Belgian Army barracks and heard shooting. David started school in September.

**Tape 1 of 3, Side B** - They lived in the neighborhood of Ixelles and David went to school there until mid 1941. In early 1942 young adults were ordered to work in Germany. Sarah, who was told her family would not be touched, went to the train station in August 1942. She may have gone directly to Auschwitz in Convoy 2 on August 11, 1942 with 163 people. David's maternal grandfather, Noah Levin, was a member of the Board to assist the Jewish people and made lists which helped the Belgian police arrest people. David still does not know whether the committee was an instrument of cooperation with, or in opposition to, the Germans. Mina, his mother, was taken to the Malines (Mechelen) camp and then deported on Convoy 18. David went to a Jewish boarding school in nearby Uccle but did not like it so walked home by himself after the first day. His father then placed him with a non-Jewish family who had been business clients. After a few months, he went to a second family. He does not remember the families' names. His father was arrested in Brussels in 1942 but was able to escape as he had a lot of money. The Germans took away the family furniture and paintings. David then went to a third family, in Hornu, a mining town. Neighbors knew of him but nobody renounced him. He took the name Daniel Verbruggen. His father also went into hiding, in Gistou. Aaron would send suitcases of food. David, while in Hornu, had no contact with his father, but then from May to September 1944 he went to be with Aaron.

**Tape 2 of 2, Side A** - David went to school in Mons, near Hornu while visiting his father in May. In June 1944, after his teacher taught the song "My Lovely Normandy", Aaron told David about the Normandy invasion. While his father was in Gistou he never went out. He exercised in the attic. David saw American planes after the Normandy invasion. David was able to stay in the farmhouse but not in the attic. At the time of liberation in September 1944 the Germans were very disorganized while they were escaping. People ate horse meat from dying horses. He saw American jeeps, after which international workers came with a truck and brought David and his father back to Brussels. Aaron never talked about the details of his life in hiding. He got a letter from the Red Cross that his daughter Sarah was dead. The affair with David's maternal grandfather, Noah Lewin, came out. He was accused of not protecting David's father while serving on the Jewish Committee. David refused to have any relationship with his grandfather.

David went back to his old school in Brussels but lived in a different house bought by the management of his father's business. The Germans had used it as an office building. School was difficult. He was 11 years old and had to learn how to write so he had a tutor. He got together with old friends. It was the beginning of a new chapter and he began to be interested in politics and labor unions. In 1948 a relative of his father's who was a radiologist was asked to be a U.N. observer and took David with him to Israel for 3 weeks. He learned about the international situation. He met members of the Jewish Brigade in Belgium.

**Tape 2 of 3, Side B** - He previously had a Bar Mitzvah at age 13 and felt linked to his heritage but he considered himself an independent thinker. David then went to a socialist training center high school. In 1952 at age 19 he was drafted into the Belgian army for two years until 1954. During the Korean War he worked on a campaign not to send draftees to Korea, just volunteers. After the army, he was head of the Socialist Democratic Youth until 1958. At the time he was living with his father they didn't talk about his mother. He then had a full time paid job with the Young Socialist Guard, a Trotskyite group from 1958-1964. He attended international conferences as the Labor Secretary of the international youth organization. He worked for the World Assembly of Youth in 1958 and 1959 in Paris. He went back to Brussels where he met his wife, who was a Belgian Flemish Catholic. They married in 1961 and their son was born that year and their daughter in 1964. He met Irving Brown, an American labor leader with the AFL-CIO. The organization's newly formed African Labor Institute needed a director for the French speaking area of North Africa. David was offered the position paying \$12,000 salary. He spoke English, felt "international", not Belgian, and accepted the offer. It was later revealed in 1967 that the Western European operations of the labor movement had been financed by the CIA.

**Tape 3 of 3, Side A** - David and his family came to New York in 1964. He was involved in advising the labor movements of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. The family first lived in Queens, New York, then purchased a house in Larchmont, New York. In September 1979 he moved to London and then in 1982 went to Brussels, all the while being involved in the international labor movement. In 1986 he moved to Washington, DC as the Deputy Director of the International Department of the AFL-CIO under Lane Kirkland. He retired at age 65, and now has 2 pro bono positions as a fellow in the Institute of International Studies and as the Labor Director for the Construction Institute.

He had no schooling for 4 years which he feels was a handicap to his intellectual development. He thinks more about his experience during the war since he retired. His daughter works for a German foundation and his son is a doctor. They were not raised in any religion. He and other Belgian Jews want the state to admit culpability as most arrests were made by Belgian police and gendarmes. As a Korean War vet he receives payments of \$700. Belgian archives has sent him photos and reports.

**Tape 3 of 3, Side B** - Memories of his early childhood remain gratifying. The war years were an interruption, but after that his father spoiled him. Now he wouldn't be welcome in Arab countries as he was before, with today's rise in fundamentalism and the danger of authoritarianism and dictatorship. He is in charge of a program called "Islam against Islamists", preferring to deal on a political level, not an emotional one. Renouncing his Belgian citizenship when he became an American citizen was not difficult to do, as he knew that the Belgian king had collaborated during the war. Even though he has an international outlook he is not comfortable in Germany, but he feels the de-Nazification of Germany has been excellent despite the fact that justice was meted out to just a few, as in Nuremberg. He was a member of the Jewish Maccabi Sports club as a youth and still feels a special connection to Israel. He has received awards from Dahomey, Togo and Senegal for his international labor work. He has no emotional reaction to the Holocaust Museum but feels it is a place for reflection. The panel on Belgium in the Permanent Exhibit is small. He is not a member of any groups of Hidden Children. The families who sheltered him are not honored at Yad Vashem as they did it for money.