

**Interview with Alfred Lakritz**  
**April 3, 2008**

**Beginning Tape One, Side A**

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Lakritz**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008, in **Washington, D.C.**. What is your full name?

Answer: My full name is **Alfred Julian Lakritz**.

Q: And what was the name you were born with?

A: **Alfred Julius Weber**.

Q: When were you born?

A: June 1, 1934.

Q: And where were you born?

A: In the city of **Kiel, K-i-e-l, Germany**.

Q: Now let's talk a little bit about your family, your parents, your grandparents.

A: Okay, in order to understand my history, I have to begin with my paternal grandfather. He was the first, on my paternal side immigrant from **Galicia** to the city of **Kiel**. He then helped to bring the rest of his family. He and my grandmother **Mirel, M-i-r-e-l** had seven children. My father was the sixth child of that family. And my father's name is **Simche, S-i-m-c-h-e Weber**. They changed his name also to **Lakritz**. He was also known as **Simon Weber**, or **Simon Lakritz**. My mother's name is **Marjem, M-a-r-j-e-m**, also known as **Mary**, in the **United States**. She was

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born **Fass, F-a-s-s**. She and my father were both born in **Galicia**. They both immigrated to **Germany** and arrived and lived in different city, my father in **Kiel**, my mother in **Cologne**. I was the first of three children born of my parents. I was born, as I said, on June 1, 1934 in **Kiel**. After that -- me was my sister **Rosa, R-o-s-a Weber**, and her name also was subsequently changed to **Lakritz**. She was born on July 28, 1935 in **Kiel**, and she died I think the first or second day of her -- her first day of her life. She is the only member of the family who is buried in **Kiel**, who has in fact a burial place, other than my mother in the **United States**. My brother then followed and he was born on September the second 1936 and he was born also in the city of **Kiel**. That is the extent of my immediate family. I will go into the extended family when I'm asked.

Q: Okay. Tell me a little bit about your parents. What did your father do, what kind of work did he do?

A: My father worked for his father. My grandfather, **Artur**, otherwise known as **Arthur Weber**, had established a business in the city of **Kiel**. From what I understand -- I don't really know the whole nature of it but at -- at -- after the first end of the first World War, when he arrived -- whenever he arrived in -- in **Kiel**, I'm not sure when, he established a -- a wholesale business, and I believe initially it was of material after the war. In any event, he then changed that business to basically a

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business of collecting during the -- th-the beginning of the Nazi regime, of collecting items that the German economy needed; raw material, reusable material. And so he became a wholesaler of **schmatter** and of all types of metal and all kinds o-of things that they could recycle. And he, during the time when Jews couldn't find employment, he employed many, many Jews of **Kiel** in this business, and they would go through the streets of **Kiel** with a handcart and call out something. And I'm -- I'm relating basically what I -- what I understand. And these people would buy the used material that was recyclable, that **Germany** needed and then they would sell it to my grandfather, my grandfather was their employer and I guess he was the contributor to the livelihood of many, many Jews who also came from **Galicia** and -- like he had. And they formed a community in **Kiel**, which is important to understand, I mean the history of my family, which is recorded in **Kiel** and in books and in theses. His relationship to the other Jews, and to his own kind of Jews who immigrated to **Germany** is important. He was a very devout Jew. A Hassidic Jew, and -- as I think most of them were when they moved to **Galicia**, from **Galicia** to **Germany**. And he was a member of the one synagogue in -- in -- in -- in **Kiel**. And as a devoted and daily religious man such as my father was also, he belonged to that synagogue. But the Jews of **Germany** who were integrated Jews, and my gr-grandfather kind of Jews, clashed. And they clashed culturally, they

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clashed religiously in their dress, in their manner, in their form of employment, economically, in -- in -- in all the other way. So those two groups in **Kiel**, separated. And my grandfather, having a compound property an-and -- and a -- and a big warehouse, and it was a big business, anyway, he created his own synagogue, and I take pride in the father -- in the fact that my grandfather, whenever I've told that story, is the only person that I know who had his own synagogue and his own congregation. And that synagogue, and the photograph of his synagogue is reproduced in the books -- in the history books, published by the state where I was born and by the city of **Kiel**, and I was given the books, an-and -- and the photograph of that particular synagogue is repeated over and over, even in the museum of -- of **Kiel** and -- which is outside the -- **Kiel**. And it is a example, I suppose of that there were Jews, and that there was an existence. Anyway, tha -- I want to lead up to why this is significant in my family, because I come from these people. They are ordinary people, they are very religious people, they are very good people. They are very honest people, hardworking people, family people, loving people. And all of these people were killed during the Holocaust. Thirty-one members of my father immediate -- im-immediate I'm -- I'm speaking now, members of my father's family were killed in the co -- various concentration camps of the Nazis. All of that is verified by documents that I have collected. And I'm

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talking now of my paternal grandfather, my paternal grandmother, all seven of their children, all seven, if any ha -- were married, and all of them but one were married -- all of them had children and of all of those children in the -- in this compilation that I made of the records of my family, I have the whole family tree. I have all of their names and birthdates and places of where they were killed, and all those children but -- seven of those children, survived. Seven children of this large family survived the war. And one of the survivor had been interned in **Auschwitz**. He -- he is the only one who survived the concentration camp of -- of all of my immediate cousins. All of my cousins otherwise, but the other -- my brother and I and I think four, survived. And the survival of these other cousins is interesting. Two or three of them went from **Kiel** o-or **Cologne**, or wherever they were living, right now I don't recall, and they went on the **Kindertransport** to **England**, okay? Of those, one, **Max Wiedman**, who is my -- also my first cousin, served in the British army and then in the Intelligence, because he spoke, of course, very well the language of **Germany**. He served in **Germany** an -- as a -- an Intelligence officer after the war an-and after -- before the [indecipherable]. Two of them were in **England**, one then emigrated to the **United States** and that's where we stayed when we first came. Anyway, the one who survived **Auschwitz** then married another survivor of the concentration camp and they were shipped out to then **Palestine**, and he established a sausage

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store or whatever in -- in -- in -- probably in **Haifa** if I remember correctly. And he died, and one of -- and one of his child -- his son is the -- a -- a vice president or some position like that in the **Weizmann** Institute in **Belgium**. And --

Q: **Weizmann** Institute in **Israel**?

A: Yeah, that institute, but they have offices in -- in **Belgium** --

Q: Right.

A: -- and **Europe** and he is the vice president of one of them. I think it's the vice president of that, in **Belgium**. Now, one of my cousins grew up in **Cologne**, and she was sent by her parents to **Palestine** in 1937. She -- I think her name is **Ruth**, right now. She became one of the early **kibbutzim** in then **Palestine**. She became a labor leader. She was extremely active in -- in politics in -- in -- in -- and in the **kibbutz** movement in -- in **Palestine**. And she, like the son of the **Auschwitz** survivor, and **Max Weidman** who was in **England**, us four were the surviving children of this family, other than my brother. But those four reunited in **Kiel** when we invited by the city of **Kiel** and by the state of where -- which we were born, to return. So those four, okay. The only one of the surviving children who were born in **Kiel** who were not killed, was my brother **Herbert** and he chose not to accept the invitation and not to go to **Germany**, to our birthplace.

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Q: Tell me why -- let's get back to your immediate family. Why did your family choose to come to **Kiel**? Was there something about that city particularly that attracted them?

A: Okay, well, my grandfather, as I said, had his wife and -- and -- and six children, seven children at the -- you know, okay, in **Galicia** in this little town on the [indecipherable] I -- I can't pronounce it. Anyway, I have the record, however it's spelled. And for some reason his family sent him in advance to go to -- away from **Galicia**. Apparently the lines of the Jews in **Galicia** at that time was becoming too overwhelming, too threatening, too whatever it is and he, because he was the most intelligent or the best, or what -- I don't know, whatever skills they gave him -- and he was, obviously, a great man -- he was sent to **Germany** -- I mean, not to **Germany**, he was going to **Denmark**. So, on his way to **Denmark** he stopped in the city of **Kiel**. And **Kiel**, he fell in love with that city. It's a beautiful city, a university city on the -- on the **Atlantic**, on I think it was on the **Baltic** Sea --

Q: **Baltic** --

A: -- [indecipherable] **Baltic** Sea, okay. He just fell in love with the city. And so rather than going to **Denmark**, which was a little bit further up, he stopped in **Kiel** --

Q: **Kiel**.

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A: -- and he establish in **Kiel** and he did -- I mean, he did fairly well, you know, for an immigrant, you know, particularly one with the long beard, the real Jewish tradition, a very Jewish looking man. Incidentally, his photo and that of th-the seventh child, my uncle, is also reproduced in the books of **Kiel**, over and over in th -- in the history books and it's the only picture I have of him with his long beard. I have the picture of my other grandparents, my maternal grandfather and grandmother and they also were of the same breed. Very religious. In fact, my maternal grandmother -- I mean the father, was a -- a man who studied the -- the -- the -- the -- the -- the -- the books, I'm not sure which one right now that he studied, but anyway, he studied them on a daily basis, was v -- extremely religious. And my mother lived in -- in -- in -- in -- in -- in -- in **Kiel** -- I mean, in **Cologne**. Now there's a time when my mother and her family lived in **Holland**, in -- I've forgotten now where. Now, when that happened, I don't know, but I assume it was during the first World War. And why they then moved to **Cologne**, I don't know, I didn't ask, I'm afraid, and -- but she lived in **Holland**, then she moved as a child to **Cologne**. She remained there until she met my father and they were engaged and they were married there. And then she moved, of course, with her husband to **Kiel**.

Q: All right. We're -- so then they got married and you were their first child?

A: I'm the oldest one, yes, I'm the first one.



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Q: And -- right. And what do you know about their beginning of their married life --

A: Well, okay --

Q: -- in **Kiel** and where they lived and so forth.

A: All right. I believe --

Q: We know you were -- you were an infant, and obviously this is what you've been told.

A: Yeah, but I -- I -- I -- I can tell --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- whatever I -- I know --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- or recall. I believe that they were introduced through a -- what was a tradition -  
-

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yes, and I believe that's how they were introduced. And I believe that the -- of the s -- a few surviving pictures that I have of my family, immediate family and of my father and mother, I believe I have two things. I have their pictures that maybe were exchanged, possibly. Maybe that's -- would explain those pictures. And I have, in the picture of my father and my mother, both taken alone, right, obviously by an official photographer --

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Q: What -- what year did they get married?

A: They got married in 1933, in April. In their announcement -- I even have their little teeny announcement of their engagement, and the name that she has in the in -- is **Marjem Willener, W-i-l-l-e-n-e-r**, and that is her father's real name, **Willener**. And I have a copy of his business -- I -- I don't know, since I don't read German, but I have their wedding picture, I have their **ketubah**, and I had it translated. I have their wedding picture and I have their announcement. And the announcement of their -- their engagement was in January 1933 and they were married on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of August 1933, and in th -- **Cologne**. And it -- it says that he is the son of **Artur -- Artur Weber** and she is the son of -- I mean, she is the daughter **Miriam**, right, an- and **Marjem** is **Miriam**, daughter of **Israel** and according to the law of **Moses** and so forth, and that's when they were married.

Q: Yes, okay.

A: Now, I don't know what you asked me any more, but what -- you asked me --

Q: Well, let's -- so now you are born. What is your first memory?

A: Okay, all right.

Q: What is your very first memory?

A: All right. Now, you were asking me about my -- the type of people that they were, okay. They were engaged, I believe in that fashion, they got married. I believe

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absolutely completely that my parents were totally, completely in love with one another. Tough part is coming. One of the things that hurts I think the most about what happened to my family, and I'm sure many families, is that they were totally, completely innocent, because they were totally good people. And the injustice of what happens to my family, as it is to thousands and maybe millions of others, who were just as innocent, just as good, just as nice, is what makes, in my view, the Holocaust such a monstrous crime. Now, my parents as I said, right, my father worked directly for his father. A good son, a loving son. His parents, my grandparents were wonderful, loving, religious, good people. My father and mother were tremendously good people. And they didn't do anything -- and I have to say this at the beginning -- anything to deserve anything of what happened to them. And so in this context let me tell you what I remember. I remember pushing my brother's baby carriage and walking with my mother in the streets of **Kiel**, I remember that.

Q: What language did you speak?

A: German. And -- both of us did. And I remember getting lost with a girl in the streets of **Kiel**, and some good people -- and we went towards the harbor, cause where I live was only three or four blocks from the -- from the harbor. And we got lost and -- and with the neighbor girl, and she was about my age, I suppose -- anyway, and then we -- they were -- some kind people found us and -- and -- and

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brought us back or restored us to our parents. Then my memory in-involves a time when my parents went out on an evening and -- and they left us without a babysitter and I remember that I -- I totally obviously panicked, and I turned on all the lights. And maybe that was the time also that my brother and I were playing and I was jumping on the bed and I fell and hit my head against an end table in their bedroom and I have a little mark on my forehead because of that. Now, I also remember a living room. In a -- in the living room we had a tapestry in the wall and there was a - - a deer and the main -- that was the main attribute of this tapestry, and I was fascinated that he kept looking at me. Wherever I moved, back and forth, this guy, this deer, he kept looking at me. That was fascinating. The next thing that I remember is having **Pesach** on the floor of our living room.

Q: Were you in an apartment or a house?

A: Well, i -- i -- i -- okay, my grandfather's property, a-as I recall involved, I believe, three buildings or four buildings. But anyway, from my memory, there is the front building, you know the address of 25 **Cuba -- kooba -- koober**, forgot anyway, its name, little something. Anyway, so we lived in the front building on the second floor. Underneath that was the family of my cousins, uncle and aunt, they're called **Weidman**, right, they had several children. They lived there, we lived above. Okay. My grandfather lived over here, right, the entrance to the -- to the compound

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was over here, and in the back was this warehouse, his big building. All right. Now, I remember being in that apartment, right? And it was, it was an upstairs apartment. And in the living room an -- we had one of the nights of **Seder**. And my father was all dressed in white and we were on the floor, we had pillows, and we had -- okay, I remember that. Now, the next thing I remember is an event that was very, very traumatic to me. My mother was hanging up new drapes that she had made for our apartment and she fell. And I rememb -- I remember the ambulance to take her away. And of course, I was three or f-four years old at the most. And I thought for sure they would take my mother away.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And it's interesting how children perceive different thing and understand, obviously a limited amount, and that's what I was afraid of, and --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- the next event that I remember I believe was on **Kristallnacht**. And on **Kristallnacht**, which I believe occurred in October --

Q: November.

A: -- 1938, yeah --

Q: November.

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A: Right. The Nazis came to destroy as much as they could of the synagogue of my grandfather. And I remember looking out the window with my father, you know, [indecipherable] down and they were burning things in front of the entrance to this compound, and I remember that. And I am sure that that was **Kristallnacht**. Then I remember, and there may have been a separate day or was the same day, again my father and I were crouched down the window so we wouldn't been seen, you know, and there were all kinds of soldiers lined up in front of our street there. Now, that may have been a different time and there may have been parades that they were doing, but in any event, I remember that.

Q: Was that a frightening experience for you?

A: Yes, both experiences.

Q: Well, the burning yes, but the -- just th -- seeing the soldiers marching?

A: Yes, that was frightening.

Q: And then the next memory that I have is us being arrested to be shipped to **Poland**. And this followed, I understand from history, the **Kristallnacht** deportation where the Nazis tried to ship the refugee Jews in **Germany** to **Poland**. And so i -- I remember the soldiers coming to our house with their gun, ordering my mother to pack, and she went an-and packed her wet clothes that were on th -- hanging on the roof, and she put them in a big bag or -- a duffle bag, I remember that. I remember

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the soldier with his gun, you know, standing there and I was so fascinated by the soldier and the gun and th -- tha -- and I remember that. And then I remember in -- in this state of arrest by the German, whether they were soldier, Gestapo, I don't know. Then we were transported -- were arrest -- I -- I believe that we spent maybe a night in prison, I'm not sure, but I know what I remember. I remember being on the train, right, with these German Jews that they were shipping out of **Germany**, and I remember the men -- I was with the men what -- I remember. They were praying, they had their **tallis**, they were crying and we were shipped to **Poland** and then **Poland** closed its border that day.

**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 Lakritz**. This is tape number one, side **B**, and you were talking about when you were arrested and then taken away.

A: Thank you. Okay, on this train ride, I remember getting off the train with my mother, so that I could make, okay, on the side of the -- siding on the plane -- I mean, of the train. And I remember doing that.

Q: To relieve yourself, you mean?

A: Yeah, right.

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Q: Yeah.

A: I remember also that at some stop, some people brought candy, ca -- chocolate and so forth to -- to be distributed and I remember that, and I'm sure it was distributed to the German. Okay, at that time of course, I was with my father and mother and my brother **Herbert**.

Q: And you are a little over four year --

A: I am a little over four years old, yeah.

Q: -- over four, you're about -- four, yeah.

A: Yeah, this is just a little over four.

Q: What -- what did you take with you? Do you remember? Did you take anything special with you --

A: Yes.

Q: -- as a four year old child?

A: I am -- yes, I am telling you, I -- what I am telling you, I remember. I absolutely remember. God has given me the gift, right, to be able to remember so that I can testify to what I saw and experienced, what happened to of -- my family, of course, and others. On the train, as I explained to you, I remember this tremendous impact to me, of seeing men praying -- which of course I had seen, you know, I saw my father pray every day, I went to the synagogue of my grandfather. I don't know how many



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times, but I went there. I'm sure [**indecipherable**] in the company of my mother. But here was something that really struck me as a four year old child, here were these men standing with their tallis and their hats and their yarmulkes praying and crying. They all understood that the German government, the German rulers had decided to -- because they came and arrested all these people, right, and said all you can do is take whatever, yo-you know, you can carry it in hand. You're leaving everything behind, right? You're abandoning everything, we're transporting you, we're shipping you back to where you belong in **Poland**. And they were crying. And to a four year old child, right, the sight of men, right, that obviously a child only understands, you know, the strength and the absolute of parents, here were these men crying. And I'm sure maybe my father was crying. And I -- this was a real shock to me, yes. And later I-I was told -- of course I didn't understand anything that was going on -- later on I was told by my mother -- not then, of course, years later, that that day **Poland** had had it. It did not want to accept any more Jews being transported or expelled, you know, from **Germany** into their country for whatever reasons they decided to do that. And our train, as far as my mother is concerned, our train was the train that was not allowed into **Germany** and it was sent back. So we were sent back to **Kiel**. Now, the second phase, right, of -- of my story has to do with how long, right, and this -- the legal system, both in **Germany**, then in

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**Belgium**, then in **France**, came and played a part on how Jews were treated. And so I understand, right. When I was born the Aryan laws were established, right, okay, with all its limitation and so forth. But I also wi -- and I believe, I'm informed that after **Kristallnacht** further laws were imposed and restrictions on Jews, you know, which limited their employment, their op-opportunity to survive, you know, everything was done obviously, to make it as difficult, you know, for them in hardship. Okay, so in my family, what happened is, I believe that early in this ballgame, the persecution of Jews was directed against my family as it was against others, and I will tell you why. For some reason my mother became very concern about their -- the future. For herself and for her children and for her husband. So she wrote -- I had a great **heeha** -- a great-uncle, her uncle, Uncle **Max Fass**, who lived in **Oakland, California**. And he had become a very successful businessman. And she wrote to him, and I have one of her letters that she wrote to him, asking him to sponsor us to immigrate to the **United States**. His application was approved, visas and -- and our permission to enter the **United States** was approved in 1935. He had paid for the transportation with the **Hamburg America** line. We had everything. The only thing we didn't have is the final stamp of the exit from **Germany**.

Q: This is for the three of you, your mother, your father and you?

A: Yes, in 1935.

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Q: Yeah.

A: That's before my brother was born.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And the little bit that I'm told over the years, the story is something like this. My parents, of course, lived in **Kiel**. They had to go to **Hamburg** to get these exit visas stamped and approved. I believe that the story is this, is that my father, being a religious Jew did not on the **Shabbas** or on this [**indecipherable**] holiday, carry any money. And so he didn't know, as smart as he was he did not know that they would require some payment for the exit permit. That's what I understand. He did not have it. So he asked them when he found out, I'll come back tomorrow when I can bring money. I have money. They had everything, okay, including the **Hamburg** line, you know, confirmation, you know, wh-which I have a copy of. Okay. The Nazi said no. Okay, now you have to understand, I was born in the city that I believe was one of the ultra-nationalistic Nazi cities, that's what I believe. That was where all the you -- the German si -- **U-boats**, submarines were located. That's where German armament ships an-an-and submarines were manufactured, I believe that by slave labor, right, who were gathered from wherever. I believe that was owned by **Krup**, okay, I am not certain, but I am. Okay. In -- if I spoke and read German I could tell you better, you know, than what I believe. But among the books that were given to me by the

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city of **Kiel** -- you know, they proudly displayed, you know, their pre-World War II history, their World War II history and the post-World War history. And my family is there in the pre-war, my -- my cousins, you know, in the -- in the Hebrew schools are all over, you know, in their book. Their pictures are all over, hanging in the museum of **Kiel**, which is outside the city, you know, gigantic photographs of members of my family. In fact, **Max Weidman**, when we were going touring that -- that -- that museum, he said to me, see, that's my picture, that's me. He says, how could it be that I'm in a museum? We're looking at my face on the wall? That is abnormal. Anyway, but seven of my cousins are in these photographs in the Jewish schools of **Kiel**. Okay, that's -- all right, now let's see, where was I? Oh --

Q: Can you -- can we just -- can you just take a diversion now and tell me why the names are different?

A: Yeah, my name --

Q: Your name.

A: -- okay, yeah, okay. I was telling you what I believe, right, was a -- a concentrated effort by the Nazis, you know, to intimidate, to humiliate, to debase, to deprive Jews in the city of **Kiel**, you know, of -- of a normal living and so forth. And that had started, and that's where it was at. It started early in the ballgame, because our denial of exiting **Germany** in 1935, when we had everything approved by the

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**United States** an-and e-e-everything, right, was denied because he was in the -- an observant Jew and he did not carry money. And they didn't give him the opportunity even to come back the next day when he would bring it, okay. I don't know of any indecency, you know, that's greater than to deny somebody even their right to religious observance. And that's what that is. Okay, now the next story is a story that is also very personal to me, and it is part of this pattern. I believe that it became part of the -- our request to immigrate in -- in 1935 in -- I believe. I am not a hundred percent certain, but I am 95 minimum certain that the Germans demanded, as part of the exit permits and identi -- they demanded a copy of the birth certificate of my father a-and since he was born in **Galicia**, a -- what I understand is that these people who -- who -- these Jews who lived in **Galicia** in these small little hamlets or villages or whatever it is, that the --

**Q: Shetls?**

A: -- y-yeah, that the only marriage that they had was a religious marriage. They were all religious, okay, and the record of their marriages and birth were recorded in the synagogues, but not -- they didn't marry civilly in that area. Now, in **Germany** the requirement is that you marry civilly and religiously, but that the only marriage which is valid and recorded and recognized is the civil marriage. Well, I'm giving credit to the bastards, okay? No, no, I have better words for them, but I am giving

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this much as a lawyer, right? A little bit of credit that -- th-that they used the law to then follow up and do the following monstrosity. They demanded, I believe, this evidence, the evidence that my -- my father's birth certificate. Now, I don't know that he had any kind of evidence, so they -- he didn't have it, let's assume, okay, because obviously he wasn't civilly registered at his birth. So then they demanded proof that his parents were civilly married and they had not been, apparently. So what they did is this: they demanded of my grandfather that he sign an affidavit, and I have a copy of it. I have the original an -- I mean, I have a -- a -- a -- a copy of it. And in that affidavit, okay I cannot describe totally every word, but what I understand from this affidavit that he was forced to sign, he was forced to say that my father was his bastard child. Remember, this was the sixth child of his wife and himself, right? This is a devout, you know, couple. My -- my grandmother didn't even have her -- you know, she followed the -- the Jewish Orthodox custom of wearing, you know, a wig. I mean, this is about as gross a monstrosity, you know, other than -- to debase human being, right. And this affidavit that I have a copy of, right, attests to the fact that his son **Simche**, right, is his bastard child. So now, what they did is they forced a -- a -- a family name change of my father, my mother, myself and my brother. No, not my brother. No, he wasn't born then. This was in 1935. So my pursuit and obsession is, to some degree it is to know who we were,

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what we were, where we come from, you know, wh-why -- who were we. Who were these people who were killed in this unjustified manner? So I, in 1988 went to the consulate of **Germany** in **Los Angeles** and I was received by -- and I explained to them on the telephone -- and I explained to whoever I-I spoke to, and I suppose it was the legal officer on the -- of the consulate, what I was after. And what I was after in 19 dia -- '88 is the beginning of my pursuit to try to prove what happened to my family, so that I could understand, so that I could know, but also so that I could tell my wife, my children and my grandchildren and so on, whatever future we have in this earth, of what happened to their fore-parents and how wrong this was and how this should never happen again, to anybody. So I went to the consulate, I was received with extreme courtesy, both by the legal officer and the vice-consul. Both were extremely nice to me, I -- and I explained to them who -- of course, who I was, an-and what my interest was, you know, and as a lawyer, you know, practicing in **Los Angeles**, they were extremely professionally connected to me. They were connected also intellectually, I mean, they -- you know, and they were young, you know, people, as I was. And so our discussions were very frank. And so they asked me a little bit of my history and I told them, you know, where I come from, where my family comes from, you know, and what happened. And so they se -- I told

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them, what I want to do is to establish -- I want a copy of my original birth certificate.

I want to know why my name was changed.

Q: From --

A: From **Weber**, which was the name of my father, right. His father, right, originally was born by the name of **Weizner**. He, when he went to **Germany** changed it to **Weber**. Now, I-I will tell you how horrible this is. In the documents that I later obtained from the city of **Kiel**, the records of the city of **Kiel**, when he bought his different parcels, different land acquisition to build this compound, the record -- the record, you know, is there, you know, of his name, of his changed name and so forth.

Q: From **Weber** to **Lakritz**?

A: From -- no, from my grandfather, from **Weizner** to **Weber**.

Q: Oh, **Weizner** to **Weber**, right.

A: Right, okay, but from then on he is referred always, you know, from 1914, 19 whatever it is, you know, in those records throughout, he's always referred to as **Artur Weber**.

Q: **Weber**.

A: Always, always. Never was his name changed, never. So when I ask that my -- I wanted an inquiry and obtain the -- the -- my birth certificate, and why was my name



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changed? So the German consulate, what they did -- and I couldn't speak German, I couldn't write German and I didn't know what to write. So they were absolutely wonderful to me. They handwrote the letters, and they, you know, o-of -- of who I should write to. So then I brought it to my secretary and she didn't speak German any more than me. Anyway, we pounded away, you know, the letter and we mailed it to **Kiel** with the proper money that they told me I should send, and I did send it. Then -- and they -- they said to me, those two guys, they said, you know, the German nation, the German people did many horrible things to the Jews, but that it didn't do. And I said, okay, I want to find out if they did or didn't do. So I sent for the information and I received information back. And the information I received back from **Kiel** is my new birth certificate and two judgments of two courts in **Kiel, Germany**. One of them is a police court, and one is a -- another kind of court, a civil court, and both of them are judgments ordering the name change of my parents and myself from the last name of **Weber**, which was our name, to **Lakritz**.

Q: So you were -- o-on your original birth certificate it said **Weber**?

A: Right.

Q: Okay.

A: And then they changed it to **Lakritz** --

Q: To **Lakritz**.

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A: -- okay. And I will tell you in a second why, but anyway, these two judgments not only ordered the name change, but they also named the judgments in order that my parents were forbidden to use the name of **Weber** under penalty of imprisonment and imprison -- and -- and fines, something li -- to that effect, okay, and again I have limited -- I have no understanding or knowledge of the German language, so I -- but I have the documents. So once I had the judgments, I called the legal officer and I had a second meeting with them and I showed them. And they couldn't believe it, that now I had the judgments of the two German courts, right, where I was born, right? My father was raised in **Kiel**, educated in **Kiel**. They were living there and my grandfather had property there and my God, they were about as honest a people as they obviously could be, compared to their comparative and their contemporaries. And they said they couldn't believe it, that this had officially been done. And they said well, you know, I mean, there's nothing to it, you know, just change your name back. And so I said, I don't know if I can do it, and I don't know that I'm allowed to do it. I don't know that my brother will agree to do it. I don't know what I can do.

Q: Where did the name **Lakritz** come from?

A: All right. Now, the name of **Lakritz** is my paternal grandmother's name.

Q: Okay.

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A: In other words, what these bastards did is they refused to recognize the validity of the marriage between my grandfather and my grandmother and they said, okay, you're the bastard son of this **Artur Weber** --

Q: **[indecipherable]** mother's name --

A: -- do you understand? Now -- then, your legitimate name --

Q: Is your mother --

A: -- is your grandmother's name, **Lakritz**. Okay, **Lakritz**, incidentally, in German means licorice, you know, which is a favorite candy in **Germany**, particularly in the northern part and also in **Denmark** and **Sweden**. And I had a story to tell about that, but anyway -- but **Lakritz** is the family name, okay. And my brother, when I had the evidence and I asked him in front of his children and my children, come on, we can change our name. And he says, it's too late. By then, of course, we were grown men with our own children and -- and -- and he says, you know, our name and our history is fixed, you know. So we didn't, and I haven't. But this is something I carry with tremendous resentment. I have resented that they changed my name. I resent it today, I si -- resent it every day. This is one of the burning things that burns to me. So th-the fact that they denied employment, that they denied exit, that they denied my name, that they imprison us and wanted to deport us with anything and that ultimately the only thing left was for us to escape, which they did -- we did, of

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course i-illegally from **Germany** into **Belgium**. These were the beginning of part of the picture, I believe, that affected of course, many, many Jews, right, many ordinary Jews. We were ordinary people, right. And this is the beginning of my life. And it is something that I have to say, that I am sure has marked my personality and my attitudes and maybe my choice of profession and my relationship to wife and children and others, because I believe that a child who is treated in this way, and in what follows, including the two years of being hidden in **France** and thinking we had been -- we had no longer had any parents, I believe that this is one of the most monstrous of crimes that's committed. The rapes and the killing that is done and was done, and is done today, right, against i-innocent people, you know, in different parts of the world I won't name now, but -- but we've had several genocides and one or two are going on right now. The aftereffect of what this has to those people who are the victim is something that unfortunately is not understood, maybe rightfully so, and is not, I think, shared. And I don't think it's gi -- ging -- giving credit to these poor people. So it's not just because it happened to me, but I am speaking, you understand that, for them, you know. It was real for me, it is real for me now and it will be real for them, you know, whether they are over there in **Africa**, you know, or in **Asia** where it happened, or in other places. So we should not and cannot think of the Holocaust or the other genocides that have occurred simply in the numbers,

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right. This has to be measured by the effect on people, and that effect is for a lifetime.

Q: Mm, yeah. Let's get back to your particular story now.

A: Yes, but that's part of -- of the --

Q: No, I understand.

A: -- aftereffect of the story.

Q: Yeah, I know, I-I do understand. So you returned to **Kiel**, you said?

A: Right, so we return --

Q: Did you go back to your house?

A: Yes, because they couldn't -- a-according to German law, obviously they could not just take it, right? I mean, the original decree of expulsion, you know, with -- following the **Kristallnacht**, you know, arrested us and shipped us, but that failed. So since that wa -- that failed, we -- obviously we had a right to our property, okay? And yeah, we went back.

Q: You went back to --

A: Right. But from that point on, all right, my mother, who is a very strong woman, I'm sure, told my father this is it.

Q: Yeah.

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A: Right. And there's no more, you know, we're not staying here, no matter what. And then, in some ways, they arranged for our exit, our escape from **Germany** into **Belgium**, and that I remember also.

Q: Do you know how they did it? They ever fi --

A: No. No, no, I mean, th-they -- we were smuggled at nighttime.

Q: When was that?

A: In -- in 1939.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay. Exactly when, I am not sure, but it was in 1939 that we were smuggle. I remember going under barbed wire, I remember that. I remember the -- the -- the big cloud in the sky that I thought it was God. That's what I remember. And I remember then we landed in **Antwerp**.

Q: Yeah.

A: In -- in **Belgium**.

Q: Okay.

A: And that's where we landed.

Q: Yeah. Wha -- wha -- and -- and we will, of course, get to that. What did it mean to you as a young four or five year old child with all this happening to you? I mean, you're on a train, then your parents tell you you're going back home again.

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A: That --

Q: Did you have any idea of what was happening?

A: No. No --

Q: No.

A: -- no, no, no, no.

Q: It was just a --

A: That --

Q: -- family happening.

A: No, tha -- I had no comprehension.

Q: -- hension, yeah.

A: No, no.

Q: Did you, at that point ever hear of somebody named **Hitler**?

A: You know --

Q: I know you were very -- obviously you were four or five --

A: -- I was very young and then --

Q: -- of course, yeah.

A: -- no, and -- and I -- you know, I-I believe --

Q: So at that point you hadn't heard.

A: Well --

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Q: Did you sense danger at that point, or did you --

A: Well, I'd -- I tell you when I sense danger, that I know of, right? Obviously --

Q: At that -- at that point.

A: Yes, I'm talking about that point. Look, when the soldier came -- you know, the soldiers that I remember, the soldier --

Q: To the house.

A: -- to the house, and ordered my mother, you know, to pack her --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- her -- her clothes, our clothes that we had to leave, you know, that -- you know, that was a -- a -- a grand thing, to watch the burning of the Torahs, and the prayer books and the prayer shawls and so forth, you know, that I witnessed. I'm sure that was -- the fact that my father [indecipherable] you know, was -- okay. But I also believe that my parents, being good parents like so many and most good parents, right, kept, you know, what was going on, an-and I don't know that I could understand. But I did understand that we were going through some rather a-a-abnormal, you know, obviously, I mean, I had a very calm, quiet, you know, loving family, you know? What was happening was not something I could understand.

**End of Tape One, Side B**



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**Beginning Tape Two, Side A**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum collec -  
- volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Lakritz**. This is tape number two, side  
**A**. You are now back in your house again, in **Kiel**.

A: Okay. Incidentally, I did not spell my bother -- my -- my father's birthplace. If  
you want I can spell that, if it's important. Anyway -- oh, we're back --

Q: You -- yeah --

A: -- in my --

Q: -- you were supposed to be going to **Poland**, but then you -- you did not, you  
came back to **Kiel**.

A: Well, they -- they -- they -- wen -- they -- we weren't going to **Poland** --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- we were forcibly arrested --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- forcibly attempted to be deported --

Q: -- ported.

A: -- and were not deported --

Q: Right.

A: -- because the Poles --

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Q: Right.

A: -- closed their border that day to our train. So, a miracle happened, as several others happened to those who survived. [indecipherable]

Q: Right. But then you said your mother knew that it was time to leave.

A: Time to leave, yes. And so she, I'm sure, was very instrumental to convince my father, you know, look, a-as difficult as it is to leave our family and -- and our -- and y-y-you know, our place in **Kiel**, you know, with family, we have to protect ourselves, we have to protect our children, we have to leave this hellhole. Because life obviously, in **Germany** had become a hell for these remaining Jews. And the future, you know, offered to my parents obviously, nothing but bad and despair. So my father, who obviously was a very loving father -- I mean son to his father, you know, I'm sure with great pain, you know, this time, left. And this time without the - the dream to go to the -- to the dreamland of **California** and its golden paved streets. I'm not saying he believed that, but I'm just saying that that was the -- the rosy image I'm sure, that must have prevailed at the time. Anyway, I mean, something convinced my mother to a-ask my -- her uncle for the visa to exit **Germany** and obviously my father consented. And so i -- i -- you know, obviously in 1935, life and its future for a young couple was such that they had decided that they had to uproot.

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Q: But now we're at 1938.

A: I understand.

Q: Okay.

A: So now there is a totally different set mind or -- or -- or mindset, forgive me, of my parents. Now it's simply, purely not a matter of choice or -- between degrees, right. Now it's a matter of life and death, and they understood that. So, to protect their children, right, they smuggled -- they paid for being smuggled out of **Germany**. They left property behind, their parents, his parents, family, everybody behind to do that. Now, this is important to demonstrate the character of my parents. At that time they did everything they could to save their children and they left to protect and to save their children, not to save themselves. And again we see the same repetition of their actions in August of 1942, and the title of the movie, one movie was, "**Into the Arms of Strangers**", they are the absolute example of sending their children into the arms of stranger, of an unknown, to save them. And if they had not done that we would all have perished in August 1942 when they were arrested and put in concentration camp in **France**.

Q: Okay, we-we'll get to that, let's [indecipherable]

A: Now, I unde-understand, but the things have to tie if they do tie. And the type of people that my parents were, as other people's parents were, who attempted to save

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their children, even at the peril of their own lives is one of the recorded evidence of what happened to people. At some point some people actually had a choice, and the choice was made to save the children. And I am one of those. I am an -- a survivor solely because of that, only because of that. Only because my parents, right, knew they were helpless, I -- without means to have any other choice. They knew that others had more choice than they.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And so here are two connect, right, between the events of us smuggle -- smuggling into **Belgium** to the one that will follow when we're in **France**.

Q: Okay, so you left your house in **Kiel**?

A: Right, and we were --

Q: And do you remember --

A: -- smuggled --

Q: -- do you remember then?

A: No.

Q: You don't remember that.

A: No, no, no.

Q: Okay. And where did you go in **Belgium**?

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A: We were in the city of **Antwerp**. We lived in the city of **Antwerp**, again in an apartment. I have vivid mem -- very vivid memory of **Antwerp**. I have a memory of my father lecturing me on how I was not learning Hebrew well enough in kindergarten. I remember that. I remember he --

Q: And this was September 1939 that you went to **Belgium**?

A: I -- I'm not --

Q: Okay. Approximately.

A: I can't -- I can't say that it was September. I know that we live in **Antwerp** for at least six months, I know that.

Q: Okay.

A: I know that we were forcibly -- had to leave, along with thousands and thousands of other **Belg** to flee the German bombing. That was at the beginning of May --

Q: Right.

A: -- 1940. So the only estimation that I -- I -- I -- I have is that I know that my mother said to me, you know, we were in **Antwerp** about six months. That's what I recall, and I could be very wrong. It --

Q: Did you go to school there?

A: Yeah, I went to -- to -- to Jewish kindergarten.

Q: Oh.

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A: Yeah, yeah, I did. And according to my father I wasn't learning fast enough or well enough. Oh yeah, yeah, I -- I --

Q: Do you remember that, him telling you, or not?

A: I -- yeah, oh, I remember him telling me, oh, for sure. I remember him telling me, scolding me, you know, in whatever way he did it. I remember more than that, of course. I remember the songs. We were learning Jewish songs and I don't know, whatever it is, I wasn't learning the alphabet well enough, I wasn't learning the songs well enough, I -- there was something I didn't --

Q: Can you sing one or two lines of a song?

A: No, I -- right now -- it's something about around -- being around the fireplace or the fire. It was something around the fire --

Q: Right.

A: -- or fireplace. I don't remember it now [indecipherable]. But anyway that was one [indecipherable] I mean, God, th-there were many others, I'm sure. In any event, if you want to know my recollection that I have of **Antwerp**, the -- they're interesting too. I remember going to a synagogue with my mother, upstairs right, we were there, I remember that. I remember one time seeing a funeral in **Antwerp** and I had never seen such a thing. And here was this horse draped in black and the whole hearse was black and people were following this hearse in black and I, for some

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reason, was walking on the street by myself and I saw this, I was fascinated and I remember watching it. I remember that. I also remember that we lived upstairs in this apartment in **Antwerp** and there was one time I was with my father and going downstairs and he didn't really want me to look at what was there. There was blood on the walls, and I was curious, I say what di -- what di -- what -- you know, why is there blood in the hall? And my father, he -- he -- he was fumbling, I think to explain to me that a man living in the building had an accident and he fell down the stairs and you know, obviously he had a bad scene.

Q: Right.

A: But anyway, so the struggle of my father trying to protect his son, you know, from a horrible scene, you know, again it underscores, you know, the tremendous humanity, you know, of people even in the worst of circumstances. Anyway, I remember my mother's sister, who also had fled from **Cologne**, she -- they had fled in **Mathus** and **Anver**.

Q: Did your -- did your mother ever tell you later why they went to **Antwerp**?

A: No.

Q: You -- so you don't know -- was it the resistance that got them out to **Antwerp**?

A: No, I -- I --

Q: Yo-You don't know why --

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A: -- I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: All right. All I know is that we were smuggle into **Germany** -- I mean to **Belgium** --

Q: Right.

A: -- and that's what I mean, and we ended up in **Anver**.

Q: Okay.

A: I also know that my mother's sister and her husband and two of her sons --

Q: Were there.

A: -- they were there in **Anver**, as well as us.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: And I remember them, ma -- my aunt and uncle and her two sons who were very tall in my eyes, visiting us. I remember sitting on the lap of my uncle and that I had a real good time with him and that he --

Q: So you were not afraid dur -- as a little boy --

A: Oh no.

Q: -- at that time --

A: No, no, no --

Q: -- it was just an adventure or something.



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A: -- no, no, no, no. My father had become nervous and easy for him to get upset and I remember him scolding me about the way that I was making too much noise eating. So I -- th-there's no question that my father was a changed person, in that the events which follow, you know, created more of a change in him, but not towards my mother, not towards his children, but the way he behaved and -- and he would get angry easily, something that -- that was totally strange to me, and so this is part of th-th-the whole episode.

Q: When you were in school in **Antwerp** with the other little Jewish children --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- they were just -- you were just playing like little children.

A: Yeah, there was nothing.

Q: Yeah, nothing to indicate what was happening.

A: Nothing, no, nothing.

Q: Okay, now it's May 1940.

A: Okay, now, before it -- yeah, it's May 1940, okay --

Q: What happened?

A: -- and I remember the following. I remember my aunt and uncle coming to say goodbye to us, okay, and I-I don't remember if they came upstairs, cause they probably did, but I -- you know, I assume that. But anyway, I remember them

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specifically looking down, you know, from the second story, third story of this building that we lived in and looking at them and saying goodbye. Of course -- I shouldn't say of course, but that the last that we ever saw of them, the four of them. And they were leaving and we shortly were also leaving **Antwerp**, so were others. And I assume, but I'm not certain that the city had already been bombed, that the bombing had started by the German Air Force. But in any event I know from later, these people, my aunt and uncle had a young daughter, n -- and not to depart, but at least to -- and that daughter was left with a couple in **Holland**. Why -- I don't know all the circumstances. My cousin, her name is **Adele Mendelssohn**, and she is alive, and she is in -- she's older than me but not by that much. And she was hidden by this family in **Holland**, a Christian family in -- who had another girl, right, a daughter, you know. And they, throughout the war saved my cousin **Adele**, s-saying publicly that this was th-their second child, you understand, and they raised er -- er -- you know, both children. She survived the war. After the war my uncle, **Michael Fass**, who went in our place when we couldn't go in 1935 to **Oakland** to emigrate, then my great-uncle sponsored my -- her brother, my mother's brother, my Uncle **Fass**, and they, the whole family emigrated, went to **Oakland** in our place. And -- so after the war, when **Adele** was left er -- as total -- as an orph -- orphan, they -- Uncle **Mike** sponsored her and they got her to emigrate to **Oakland** and she lived with

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them until she married, and -- which I witnessed, and she still lives in **Oakland**.

Anyway, so she survive in that manner. And how and why she was separated from her family, I don't know, I-I only know that she was.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I know that she was raised and saved by this Christian couple in **Holland**, whom she has honored in many, many ways, including designating them as the righteous -- as Righteous Jews.

Q: Yeah.

A: Which they deserve. Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah, we're leaving.

Q: Where -- you're leaving.

A: Okay, we're leaving **Antwerp**, okay. What I remember is being on the train and I remember hearing bombing, all right, that I didn't understand, right, but I remember distinctly, you know, as a child. I am now five and three quarters --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- years of age, right, and I remember hearing the bombing. Then the next thing that I know is we land in the city called **Marmande, M-a-r-m-a-n-d-e**, we li -- end up there.

Q: This is in **France**.

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A: In **France**. It's in the department of **Lot-et-Garonne**. It is very close to the **Dordogne**, to **Bergerac**. It is very close to **Bordeaux** and the wine country, and there's a very agricultural, beautiful part of **France** and that I love greatly. And we end up in a big warehouse, that's what I remember. And I remember we were sleeping on straw, and hundreds --

Q: This is the four of you?

A: Yeah, the four of us. The four of us -- and we, among other other other -- maybe a few hundred people who fled with us from **Belgium** were housed in this warehouse, and sleep there and provided some food, you know, I'm sure. And by God's choice, later on, after the war, my mother is able to rent an apartment which is right across the street from this warehouse. And there's another coincidence of significance in my history that also happens --

Q: Did you know what was happening as this almost six year old child, what -- what was **[indecipherable]**

A: Well, you know --

Q: Again that sense of danger, that sense --

A: A-And that -- let me tell you, the only thing I can remember, all right, and what follows has significant emotional feelings. I knew things were wrong. I knew things were not right. I knew things that whatever stability was born into this world, and I

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was, I was in a very stable family and environment, and I thank God -- this was no longer stable. Of course I didn't understand the circumstance --

Q: Right.

A: -- I didn't understand the enormity of what was happening to us. But in the bottom line of what was happening to us, must be recorded. We, along with thousands and thousands of **Belg**, fled **Belgium** because of the invasion of the German armies into **Holland**, into **Belgium**, and **Luxembourg**. They ultimately went back home to their homes and to their businesses and their jobs and so forth and families. We remained. We were total and absolute refugees. We were total stateless people. We had totally no rights. We had no property, we had no money, we had nothing. We had no rights. And we were able to remain in **France** only by police authority and permits, which had to be renewed every 30 days. We were living the life of people who have no rights to be, to live, to aspire, to hope, anything. We were returned to a state where you are now totally dependent on the whim, the laws, the rudity, the -- the -- the anti whatever is, you know, whether -- that existed at **France** at that time. Obviously I didn't understand all of that.

Q: Right.

A: Obviously I didn't know the history of **France**, I had no knowledge of why we were even there. I didn't understand anything. But what follows is I began to

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understand that we were not very stable, that we were not -- and yet, I was stable. I had a mother and father who were the marvel -- marvel of the world. And I had a brother, and of course we were the boys and we lived in -- as boys do. I have two beautiful, magnificent grandsons and I see them growing up and I was no different, you know, in terms of fighting and playing with each other, you know -- you know. And my brother and I were magnificent as -- as brothers. So the fact that we had each other and I wasn't an only child was very important. The fact that we had such loving, caring and responsible and protective parents was [indecipherable]. But the truth of our lives were really terrible. And so from this warehouse, living on straws, the others left, and I experienced this abandonment again and again in my life. We remained. And I don't know how, but anyway, they allowed us to have an apartment and my father went as a laborer to work for the city of **Marmande**. And he was a healthy guy and he was strong and he was able, and -- not that he was very big, he -- I'm sure he was a little bit shorter than me, but about the same height. And I remember one of the things that he worked on. And he worked on setting up the -- the -- in the -- in the plaza, a big plaza in -- in **Oakland**, called the **Plaza de Marie**, where we later on lived --

Q: In **Oakland**? What do you mean?

A: No, I mean, not in **Oakland**. Did I say **Oakland**? No, no, this is in **Marmande** --

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**Q: Marmande**

**A: Marmande** -- ma -- no, no, this is **Marmande**, okay. And he helped to erect, you know, the -- the -- the -- the walls that was -- that were to surround this celebration.

And this celebration was one of the games of the German and the **Vichy** government. In this little city of 15,000 people, thereabouts, there was to be a nationalistic event to celebrate how **France**, right, had a future and **France** survived and **France** was in honor in f -- in spite of its defeat, in f -- in spite of its -- that they had cut th-the country in God knows what, the portion. The **Vichy** government was, of course, the southern parts of -- of **France**. I was then in the **Vichy** government section of **France** and **Germany** had taken say two-thirds a-as far as their dependent state. And that **Vichy** government supposedly was an independent part of **France**, okay. Under the **Vichy** government, **Vichy** is simply because that's where the -- the government of **Marshal Petain** was allowed to -- to be. There's two parts to this story, neither one of them good, about **France**. This prefect, or this government employee came to this city for this national celebration, and what was the purpose of it? The purpose was to invigorate the people, that their lot, being a defeated people, conquered people now, under the boot of the Germans, whom they hated, right, whom they had fought in two wars, in the 1870 wars and the 1914-18 wars. **France** -- French people did not like the Germans, the **boche** they called them, that's the

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hated term, right, equal to the pigs. Now, the pigs, the **boche** now were in charge of **France**, and they had taken two-thirds of **France**. They had taken, you know, the big city, **Paris** in the north and then all the industrial wealth and the coal, and all of the -- the -- in the east, **Normandy** and -- and -- and -- and th-the glory. And they left a little southern part, which was agricultural, you know, and wine country and then the **Côte d'Azur** and then the access to **Spain**. Basically a region without power, without economy, other than agricultural, and you know, where th-there was not th-th-the great population, you know, that you have in **Paris**, and with **Lyon** and so forth, so forth. Okay, now, this guy came for one purpose and that purpose was to reinvigorate these people out of the sense of defeat and so forth, and they had this big celebration. So my father was one of those employed to set this party up, okay. What followed either preceded this or followed this is the imposition now of French laws, which equaled and in some ca -- exceeded the anti-Semitism of the German laws. Now, as a lawyer, you know, throughout my history, and the purpose of my giving this testimony is not merely to relate, you know, pain and suffering and death and numbers. It is to relate the context. The context, what happened, right, to the Jews of -- of my family, is the persecution, the anti-Semitism, the hate, right, the monstrosity, right, that they created. The Germans created, right -- these guys fantasized and invented a system of super race and super -- you know the history,



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you don't want me to talk, but it is important in my part of the story that now French laws follows and equates, right, in its anti-Semitism and a -- and its limitation on -- on -- on the rights of Jews, and certainly absolutely on the rights of immigrant Jews. And in **France**, with a history of anti-Semitism, of Catholicism, of teaching of the hatred of the Jewish people, right. We were the damned people, the condemned people, even though we were the -- the creators of their religion and supposedly, you know, ours was the-the-their chosen God, you know. Anyway, the French, not just in the **Dreyfus** Affair, but had a history of anti-sem -- Semitism and that history, even though it was not, you know, on the surface, it existed in reality. And I became now a part of that history. And my history is how these people dealt with all of these formulas, all of these factors that were facing them, the Christian, right, French. And I now am in this milieu, in this -- and how these people deal with the world as it's evolving out of their control, and the minimal amount of their choice, or the choices that they make either actively or passively, with regard to people like me, is part of the reflection of their religious education, their family education, right, and their laws. And the laws of **France**, to the shame of **France**, right, went to adopt German anti-Semitic laws and gave to the -- to the Germans the right to dictate to the **Vichy** government what the French police, the French states and the French functionary would do to the Jews, particularly the refugee -- refugee Jews.

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**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 Lakritz**. This is tape two, side **B**, and you were telling about after May 1940 --

A: Right --

Q: -- in **Marmande** --

A: -- okay, now --

Q: -- **France**.

A: -- what I remember is I said is my father working to set up this fête, they call it --

Q: Yes.

A: -- in **France**. And I also remember a little thing like I remember walking and smelling the roses. I remember being fascinated by snails after the rain. And I remember one lady telling me to go collect snails for her and I did, and so she gave me some money. And again, an act of kindness that again I wa -- re-repeated later. Anyway, that's what I remember basically of **Marmande** and I remember where that apartment was. Again it was an upstairs apartment. I know that it was close to the tomato -- tomato factory.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: **Marmande** is a city that is famous for its tomato, and the **Marmande** tomato was very, very famous in **France**.

Q: Hm.

A: In fact, on the -- on the streets of **Paris** where they sell the produce, my brother said that he found, you know, stands that said **Marmande** tomato, and later on I found out that in the recent years they change the tomato, an -- and anyway -- to accommodate machinery. But in any event -- yeah -- but anyway, that's what I remember about **Marmande**. But then comes a change. We are no longer allowed to live in **Marmande**. We are now forced to take up residence in the little hamlet outside of **Marmande**, seven or eight kilometers from **Marmande**. And this little hamlet is called **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil**. **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil** now is of important development in my memory because then I really understand. My eyes are open, I really remember, I really see.

Q: How old are you now? This is when? This is --

A: This is sometime in the 1940, I mean, or '41.

Q: Okay.

A: I believe it's in the 40's. I -- I don't think that we live in **Marmande** very long, because the city, the police, would not allow us to stay there longer. I don't know, but I suspect that because -- and I suspect this because of the fact that I learned when

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I visited **Saint-Pardoux** again -- and I've done that several times after the war, I learned then that there were several Jewish families in -- that lived around or in the hamlet, around the hamlet. And I suspect that there was probably a good French choice in that. I believe that they kicked us out of **Marmande** to put us in an area where collectively we were separated, but we were separated from the city, but we were easy picking for when they wanted to --

Q: So it was the French that determined where you moved?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: The French. The French police, the French city hall. A -- they made --

Q: Ordered you to go to this next --

A: -- y -- oh yeah, yeah, and they -- and -- okay. Now, I forgot one incident in **Marmande** which is very important in my life, and I have to go back to just this one point. I remember my father conducting the high holiday services in **Marmande**.

Q: So this is fall of 1940?

A: Yes. And I remember my father also blowing the **Shofar** during the service, and I remember the room, th-the -- the -- the -- some parts of the ceremony, you know, that I remember. He, of course, was a very religious Jew, and a very intelligent man. Anyway, so he conducted the service. Well, as God would have it, when we were

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reunited with my mother in November 1944, the city of **Marmande** allocated to her that apartment, and we lived in that apartment in -- it was i-i-in -- that building was a historic building, it is a historic building and street. It is a magnificent building, which comes from the Middle Ages, right, and it stands t-today, and it -- it's beautiful, it's --

Q: What is the address?

A: The address is on a little street that I cannot remember the name of, but it is -- I mean, it's probably, I think probably the only really historical street of **Marmande**, right, and I'm sure those buildings were available because they were historical document to the city -- I mean, buildings to the city. And we lived again on the second story, seemed to live in second story. And we were given that building. And that building, I don't know that it had electricity, and it had dark staircases and entry hall. The building was made up of mud and wood, you know, an-and -- and wheat -- I mean, and -- and a -- you know, the remains of -- of -- of wheat. I-In other words, this was the construction. But it's beautiful, you know, it's very authentic, you know, and -- and there are other buildings like that down this little narrow street of **Oakland**, which they preserved, you know --

Q: Of **Marmande**.

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A: Of **Marmande**. Of **Marmande**. It is **Marmande**, I am not talking about **Oakland**, I haven't gotten to **Oakland**. But anyway -- and I remember we living in that apartment after. But anyway -- so, before we go to **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil**, this is what I remember, my father conducting the religious services, and I probably -- it would be a guess, but I would bet you that everybody there is dead, that died, arrested by the French police, turned over to the Nazis all [indecipherable] which raises the other question, the question which is, you know, how can God have abandoned all his people?

Q: Yeah.

A: If we were in fact the chosen people, this is what we were chosen for? So there is legitimate religious dialog which is another of the [indecipherable] in my history. My -- law is on one s -- hand, family and love and -- and -- and -- and -- and -- and the sense of obligation and commitment and protection to the children, of your children, to preserve them. And now comes this other question of, you know, where is God in all of this? Where is God we're in the trenches, right? Where is God, you know? What have we done, God, to deserve this ultimate punishment? We are damned, condemned, hated, despised, you know, abandoned in every sense of the word. We have no rights, we have no property, everything is taken from us. God, why? You chose us according to our religion to be the chosen people. Did you also

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choose us to be this ultimate suffer -- and if we have been chosen, right, for that, then my story is the testament that I want to leave to my children, grandchildren and generations forever, because if there is a truth here, then there is an equal truth here. But if there is a lie here, then there is another one, right? In other words, if there is no God, if there is no religion, obviously then there's no commitment, there is no covenant, there is no obligation, right, and religion is a farce. But if there is, why did this happen to us, you know? And so this is a dialog, a philosophical question which has to be posed, right, and maybe it has no answer, and that's okay. Nor is there proof that there is a God. But the point is, all of these things intersect, intellectually, morally, religiously, philosophically, in my life. And then what happens? Okay, anyway, we end up in this village of **Saint-Pardoux**. It's not a village, it's a hamlet. The people there are magnificent people. We are given a habitat and that habitat, and I will call it that, is a mud floor, it is a chicken coop and on the other side there's the -- the cows, and -- and that's there whatever it is, I've forgotten now. Okay, and we live in this chicken coop, two rooms, mud, no electricity, of course. And it had the little well and the little area for a garden that later my father creates. And this was given to us by the **Marshal Feron**. The **Marshal Feron** lived across the street, this is his property, the -- the property is of his mother across the street, but the cows are hers, right. And this **Marshal Feron** is

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a very devout Catholic. One of his sons is in the seminary at the time to become a -- a -- a monk. And we're given -- we're loan -- we're given this place, without, of course, charge.

Q: Are you speaking French now?

A: Yes. Now, the --

Q: Are your parents -- are your parents speaking French?

A: My parents?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Unfortunately my father long ago left us.

Q: No, no, no, I meant at that time.

A: Yes, they are learning French, oh, oh -- oh yeah, at the time. I'm going to tell you --

Q: That's all right --

A: -- that's the -- raises an interesting question.

Q: -- you're -- you're speaking French at that time.

A: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Now --

Q: To each other?

A: No. My parents speak German to us. Okay, well, I will tell you about this. This is another of these anomalies or -- you know. First, this man and his wife are very,



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very religious Catholics. They give us this place to live. This was the same place they gave to people who escaped **Spain** in the Spanish war. And people -- those people fled from there to **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil**. Why, I don't know. They occupied the same place and they left later on back to **Spain**. Well now comes, right, this part of history, right, which is connected to the other history, right, to the -- this, and now they're refugees again. And so these people again, with their good hearts and their good attitude and their good intention, they lend it to us and they help. N -- this is part of the **Berny, B-e-r-n-y** family, and these people, the little street up to -- little bit of a hill from where we lived to where they -- their homes and his -- his -- his shop where he makes the metal horses and the metal -- I mean, the -- the shoe for the horses and he makes hoes and he makes hammers and he makes all these things, this wonderful guy. And up the street is the school. And in -- the two room school, and I go to school. And I -- my first el -- schooling -- wait a minute, hold on a minute. I also went to school in **Marmande** for a short time. I started school in **Marmande**, yes, the very, very first grade, whatever it is, right, that I am -- I am six years old --

Q: Right.

A: -- so the first grade. Yeah, I remember. Ah -- yeah. My first day in school was in **Marmande**, okay? So we still there October, November, okay, maybe December,

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but anyway -- but I'm in the school. And I remember raising my hand in the class to go to the bathroom. I needed to go to the bathroom and the teacher didn't see me, so I pissed in my pants, okay. I ri -- and maybe she didn't understand because I didn't understand, but I remember raising my hand, and I remember that. I also remember that we were learning a French poem, with -- a very famous poem from **La Fontaine**, I think or -- about the hare and the rabbit, and I remember that in that class. That's all I remember in that class. But anyway, then we go back to my story in the hamlet, in -- in that par -- **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil**. Okay, now, this is a very, very, very interesting and traumatic episode in my life. The **Berny** family owned a lot, an empty lot across from the schoolhouse. And they gave my father the task, the job to raise a garden for them in this lot. And I remember going up to him and bringing him lunch, and I remember him kissing me. He was all sweaty and had beard and all of that. Oh, that re -- that reminds me. I remember also the city of **Marmande** had given us a garden. A place where we co -- where each family could have its own little garden and cultivate their own vegetable. I remember that now. So maybe we were in **Marmande** maybe a little bit longer, you know. But anyway, I remember that and there is a connect to that one. Gee, I didn't remember that in awhile. Okay, anyway, he was there. Okay, now I went to that school, and I remember learning to count with sticks, and so we had sticks, packs of 10, right, and

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we had a rubber band around them an-and that -- we learned to count there. Okay, I remember that, but I also remember something else that was not so nice. I remember the other boys -- other boys, they grabbed me and they tied me or something to the fence and they said that I was the Christ killer and that they wanted to punish me or whatever it is, and -- I told this story also to this French historian and she reported it in her book, and I am sure this happened. That's why she reported it in her book.

That in this environment of **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil**, you have this play of attitudes of people. Here is this family being helped and sheltered, allowed to survive, when nobody was allowed to give work to the refugee Jews, and yet they did. And at the same time, the children of others of the age of six and seven, equal to me, target me as a Christ killer. And obviously they didn't come up on this on their own. Obviously this was taught to them. Obviously this underlines what was happening and the crimes of the Catholic church are now descended on me. And they descend on my father, because what follows, right, is a choice made by French police, and French government and French -- and I have that whole testimony laying around that I will tell, about one of the men who had the power and didn't exercise it to save my father's life, but who confessed to me that if he had known that the chief of police, his friend, right, he was the exec -- my friend **Guyaux**, right? **Gerard Guyaux**, a man of extremely great kindness and character. This man, at -- one of the

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times I went back to **France**, and this time to reward him for what he did for my mother, my father's memory and for us. I gave him a plaque as I gave to others. And this man said to me -- admitted something to me, and he says, there's nothing they can do to me any more, I'm too old, but I could have saved your father's life. And if you blew a bomb right there in front of me, I -- I don't think -- among the many, many shocks that I've had in life, this was one. And he -- and he explained to me why. He said to me, when they ordered the arrest of your father, and I participated in the arrest -- cause he was the chief officer of the city of **Marmande**, and **Saint-Pardoux** is within the -- the -- the -- the -- the -- the power and the sphere -- the space -- the jurisdictional surrounding of **Marmande**, under its jurisdiction. He said, I could have saved him, but I didn't know that the police, the chief of police, was of the same mind as I, that we didn't want this killing of innocent Jews. We didn't want to make the choice between refugee Jews and French-born Jews. But I didn't know that, and he didn't know I could trust him, and I didn't know I could trust him. And so when your father was ordered to be arrested in March 1942, he was arrested, obviously, with the consent and the cooperation of the city of **Kiel**, and the police of **Kiel** and of him.

Q: **Kiel?**

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A: I mean of -- of -- of **Marmande**. I am sure that the things that he did for my mother after the war and for my brother and I was to repent and to atone for what he had done. I'm telling you, my father's name stands on the war memorial of -- of **Marmande**. My father's name also is in another memorial farther in **France**, I don't know where [**indecipherable**], course he is in there and the memorial to the Jews that were deported from **France**, which is in **Paris**, that they have built in recent years. But the one in **Marmande** is the one that means something. He became the mayor of the city of **Marmande**. He became the representative from that region to the assem -- French assembly. He was a -- a man of tremendous personality and character, and again, a very religious man, a very French man. And again, they -- this interplay, you know, of -- of -- of what they feel, what they do, and what they -- and who they are, all right? It -- it plays into this whole -- you know? And what follows again is this conflict, between others who are obeying orders, others who are willingly passive, others who are willingly complicit and others who are morally -- a-a-a-a-abor, and afraid or you know, feel impotent to do anything. And so all of these people, I meet all of them. So, when I'm in school I'm treated well by the teacher and a -- you know, I'm allowed in school, and I'm just a normal kid. But the kids in the playground, I'm not the normal kid, I'm a Jew, dirty Jew, right? The **Berny** family, one of their son is the guy who is the vicar to the church. The church

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is -- in this hamlet there is a very prominent church, a very beautiful church [indecipherable] in the **Marshal Feron**, right, and the rest of it are farms, and this is a very, you know, beautiful, other than the school. Anyway, I remember many things. And one time I went back and the son of **Berny**, right, who had quit the monastery, you know, when I met him, I did -- you know, when the -- you know. So he didn't become a full fledged priest or monk, or you know. He chose not to. So when we revisited one time, my wife and I, the first time we went there, I took my children, and I couldn't enter the building, that chicken coop, it was locked and there was nobody around, you know. But another time we came back and they were there, the **Bernys**. And so they -- he took me around. And he said to me, you were an extraordinary child. He says, you learned the **patois**, which is the local French. You learned it in no time at all, you could speak it as well as anybody. And he says, you used to sit on my lap and I would read you stories, you know. He says, I was amazed that you could speak French, you know, you could speak the **patois**, and obviously I understood my parents who spoke German. And they were learning, you know, French too. And so, I guess he really liked me, and well, a lot of people, you know, a-as a child that I was liked. But above all, my brother was liked more. You know, he was a very loving and the second child in family, or the second boy in the family, they're always innocent, they're always sweet, right? And so he was. Now, for some

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reason my mother, to help us in our survival, got a sewing machine and she started to sew. And because of the hard work of my father, you know, toiling in -- in other people's **jardin** -- gardens, my mother started to do seamstress work. And because of that she was able to survive, through that skill. Now, the life for us in -- in **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil** is a very interesting -- it's very pastoral, it's very country, it's a little hamlet. Everything -- you walk. If there is any transportation it is by either camp -- two cows pulling a wagon, or one horse pulling a wagon. I remember many men many times -- my mother would send me to this farm to buy some milk or to send me someplace to get bread and you had to go there, walk there. And once in awhile, you know, people would give me rides, you know, on these wagon. I remember everybody was so nice, they would give you a ride, you know. And I remember walking on this little street and they grew watercress, and that was wonderful. I remember. But anyway -- and my father cultivated a garden and -- in our -- in our -- in the side yard. And I remember that he used human excrement as part of the fertilizer, and we were together. And a lot of it was happy, and some of it -- I remember my father getting mad at me and yelling at me, and my mother protecting me and I was running around my mother's skirts, and holding onto her skirt when he was yelling at me and my mother was yelling back at my father to shut up and whatever. Anyway, here comes June, July, 1942. I am just eight years old,

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and I am now condemned to become an adult. My parents decide, through some Jewish agency, whatever, to send us to a summer camp. And we leave **Marmande, Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil**. I remember the railroad station, my parents bringing us to the railroad station. I remember the last look I had of my father ever, there waiting on the quay, or the -- what we call -- what do we call? Well, whatever we call now, with my mother --

Q: The platform?

A: -- wa -- platform, right, waving us goodbye and I remember waving them goodbye, of course never thinking that anything was in the offing. But that's the last time we ever saw our father. I was just eight years old, my brother was less than six years old. And on this train we went, and I believe we went to a summer camp in the **Creuse**. The **Creuse** is the **C-r-e-u-s-e** of southwest **France**. And we are in this summer camp, operated by some Jewish organization. It could be the **OSE**, okay, I am not certain, but I believe that it -- it is them.

**End of Tape Two, Side B**



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**Beginning Tape Three, Side A**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Lakritz**. This is tape number three, side **A**, and you were talking about going to the summer camp in the s -- 1942.

A: Right. Now, we're in this camp with Jewish children, run by Jewish adult leaders and -- and everything is wonderful and normal and so forth, as far as a child is concerned. It's play, it's hiking, it's -- it's everything, it's games. Suddenly there is a day that I can never forget. I'm brought in with my brother to the office of Mr.

**Kohn**. I only know his name by the fact that I have four of the letters of my father of what prompted that particular meeting. And this Mr. **Kohn** says to me and my brother that our parents want us to stay with them. And I then develop terror. I don't think there is any other word to describe what I felt then. I saw out of the window that other children were leaving with their baggage, whatever th-they ha -- they had and here is me and my brother in this dark office and this man at this desk telling me that my parents don't want us to go home, that they want us to stay. And I have a brother who is not even six years old. I am just eight years old, and I am now put in a position that I have to understand, or cope and deal with the idea that somehow our parents don't want us to come home, but other children are going home to their parents. I am not going. That's impossible. There is no way you can explain my

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absolute connect. This is the first time I'd ever left my parents, ever, and they -- they send me on the summer camp with other children, to play and have fun. That's -- okay? Other children were there to play and to f -- have fun, too. But that they should go home to their parent, and I -- they want us to stay? That is a moment of absolute terror. Total incomprehension. Th-There is nothing that can describe it, nothing that can describe my feeling at that moment. I am paralyzed, I am horrified, I am scared, I cannot comprehend. This is one moment in my life where nothing makes any sense. And believe me, that has impacted my life forever. That moment. That revelation. And of course I had no understanding what, why, but the total incomprehension. I mean how could my parents, you understand, make this judgment? They -- it's impossible. Anyway, I remember being there, and from that moment, for the next two and a half years, I became the guardian of my brother. And I became obsessed that he should never be separated from me for a moment, because I was afraid of what was going to happen. If he was separated they may take him away from me, an-and no way. So, I succeeded in most terms, but there was a period of time when he was housed someplace and I was housed in another one, but that became an obsession with me, that I would go into freaky periods if they suggested anything that I should be separated from my brother, or my brother should be separated from me. So these other children went home, and a few children stayed.

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And we stayed with these, some of the Jewish -- for lack of another term, I mean they were adult supervisor, guardians, whatever you want to call them, in this camp. Now, they then proceeded on a plan, and the plan I can only describe is a plan of survival of our people. They put us through the ritual of every holiday, we had to observe them absolutely. We had to put handkerchiefs on our wrist on **Shabbas**, we had to observe every holiday religiously. I remember the last one we observed was **Sukkoth**. I -- i-i-in that place in -- in -- in -- one of them had drawn a map of -- of **Israel -- Palestine** on -- on a -- a thing with a light bulb behind it, and this was in blue, th-the -- the whole region. I remember that very well. I remember games being played, you know, then they would toss us in -- in blankets, you understand, I mean, we were little kids.

Q: How many children were with you?

A: I don't remember, but there were very few.

Q: Very few?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: And you're still in the camp --

A: It's not a camp in the sense -- I -- it's fenced. It's on a little, you know, a little country house --

Q: Really?

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A: -- you know, it's a country house.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Okay, and I have pictures after the fact, a few.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But in this camp I have the absolute conviction that these Jews had a sense of impending doom. That they were teaching us only about Judaism, only about our religion, only about the Promised Land, only about the -- I remember that. And I have the absolute conviction that these people were trying to preserve our religion and our people in th -- whatever means they had, and that -- in the hope that some of us would survive. Now, I remember several incidents, but let me tell you one. And this incident is recalled by another child, not necessarily in the same place, but the same event happened to him. And of course I don't know him, and I didn't know, but in the French book that was written by this French historian of the Jews, what happened, the Jews in the **Lot-et-Garonne** of **France** that she researched, among the many people she interviewed, she interviewed another survivor who told her the very same story. And I don't know him, he doesn't know me. But the story basically is this. I remember that those people change our names. And so my name was changed from **Lakritz** to **LaCroix**. **LaCroix** means the cross. It's a very French name. And one day they told me, and the other children too, we're going to have

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these people visiting and they're going to ask you some questions, and when they do, when they ask for your name, make sure, don't forget, give them your new name of **LaCroix**. So now I am eight years old, I have a new name and now there are people coming to interrogate us. And so sure enough these people came. I remember a woman, very well dressed, and some other man, but I remember the woman, she talked to me. And I told this story to the French historian, among many stories that I told her -- not many, but anyway -- and she reported that story in her book, right. And she gives credit to someone else telling her the same story, some guy who now lives in -- in **San Diego**, and who also had the same kind of -- the same people. Well, these people were Quakers, and this was an organization of Quaker, where they tried to save some of the children from **France** and to ship them to **England** or **America**, and I remember that afterwards, you understand, we understood that these people were there to try to save us and ship us by -- by ship, but that became too dangerous and we could not leave. But I also remember that by that time I was a bed wetter and boys, other boys were making fun of me and they were trying to get me to stop and -- and the way they hope was they wouldn't allow me to change my bed, and so every night I had to sleep in a bed that was full of, to put it in plain vernacular, piss, right. Smelled like hell. A-And that was my punishment, my sort of -- they're trying to teach me not to do it. Now, I'm sure e-everybody that has any

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education about children understand what I didn't know, is that I was so traumatized, I was so terrorized, I was in such pain, right, that that's how it is. And obviously no child should be treated this way. But of course it was not their doing, obviously they were saving us, protecting us, hoping that we could survive and -- and continue our people. To that extent, they succeeded. These were heroes. I owe them everything. Even though later I gave some of that to the nuns who sheltered me also, Catholic nuns, I give credit and my life wouldn't be what it is or could have been if it wasn't for my parents, and if it wasn't for them and if it wasn't for Christians that [indecipherable] follow my story. Numerous human beings who behaved at the risk of their lives and their liberties. And this is no speech, this is a fact. Anyway, from the **Creuse**, from that -- we went to another place and when I saw a few years ago a movie called, "**The Children of Chabanne**", I said, I remember that place. I was there. I was one of the children that was sheltered in that chateau of the French journalist and these two, also all Christian teachers who sheltered Jewish children, orphan children, who had to fight off, you know, th-the -- the police who wanted or were curious, who -- wh-what are you doing with these children? What did -- where'd they come from? And of course if they were Jewish children they were to be arrested and turned over to the French police who would

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then turn them over to the -- to the Nazi. And I remember one night we were told that we had to leave. This --

Q: Now up to that point, did you have any correspondence with your parents?

A: All right, let me just tell you this. This photo that I have of my brother and I with beret and wooden shoes, I believe was taken while I was at **Chabanne**. I know I was -- I had a problem with the dentist, I had pain and so I was taken to a dentist. I know this photograph was taken. This photograph was mailed to my mother, right.

Q: Yeah, but did you get any letters from your parents while you --

A: No, not that I'm aware of, none.

Q: Y-You never -- you never heard anything --

A: None, no, I never -- I --

Q: -- once you went away?

A: -- I never heard anything, but my mother did hear.

Q: Okay.

A: And she -- this picture of this little boy was shipped to her. This picture of both of her boys --

Q: Yeah, this is an audio tape, so it's --

A: Yeah, yeah, but I -- I understand, but I mean, I have it.

Q: Yeah.

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A: I intend to leave this --

Q: You have pictures.

A: -- I intend to leave this particular book that I created --

Q: Right.

A: -- so far, all right, in the documents of this museum.

Q: Yeah.

A: And she got these photographs. And so there were one, two, three, four photographs that were mailed to her by this Jewish organization --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- I believe it's **OSE**, of the different camps where we were hidden --

Q: Okay.

A: -- from place to place. They weren't camps, they were homes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Okay, and they were -- so one place was the **Chabanne**, and I absolutely believe that, and these other places were again in the **Creuse** and then later were in the **[indecipherable]** and then we shipped then to the **Pyrenees**. So from the Switz -- the border with **Switzerland** there -- they -- they sent us there in an attempt to get -- to smuggle us into **Switzerland** and that didn't work. And then they shipped us down to **Lourdes** where thousands and thousands of French war orphans were there,



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and that's located near the border with **Spain** and so they sent us there for sure, to put us among this great mass of orphan children that we would be saved in that process. So --

Q: Now how of -- y-you obviously went by train all -- to all these places?

A: Yeah. So the time -- I left off a moment ago was, we're in **Chabanne** okay, it's a night and they suddenly now get the notion they have to evacuate the children, and that's part of the movie, you understand. Well finally they goi -- the police is going to arrest everybody and we are smuggled out, right, into -- I go to a train and God knows where is --

Q: With your brother. You were --

A: With my brother, oh --

Q: You were always with your brother.

A: -- hysterical with my brother.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, okay. And we go to another place, right, again with Jewish children. And among these pictures that I have --

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: -- right, are pictures of other children and it's a matter of judging from picture to picture which w -- you know, how old I am. But in one picture, my brother and I are -- are the youngest. In another picture we are also the group of youngest --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- children there and then the oldest are older children. And again we are -- right. And we then spend two and a half years moving from place to place with other Jewish children. Of course, i-i-in a -- a house in -- however strange that may be, we don't go to school, we don't do anything, we just play. And people are watching us, feeding us, and --

Q: Are you with the same group of children all the way through, or do you meet new children?

A: No, I'm sure that we -- we are basically with some of the same children, yeah. And -- because I absolutely remember when I look at the picture, I remember some of these people, and I remember them, they are in this picture, and they are in this picture. So, it's the same people.

Q: Mm-hm. Were these children also from **Germany**?

A: I-I don't know where they're from. I mean, they could be -- you know, th -- in **France** at that time, from what I understand of the research that's done, I mean, you had refugees from all over --

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Q: Right.

A: -- you know, I mean **Czechoslovakia** --

Q: Right.

A: -- and **Italy** -- I mean, not -- no **Italy**, but **Germany**, **Austria** and so forth, **Russia** even, you know. I -- I don't know what's -- I mean, I'm a child, they are all children, right, they all speak French.

Q: Do you remember talking to them about your ex-experience and missing your parents? Was -- did you sit around and talk?

A: No, no, no, no. No, we -- we talked about playing, we had different forms of play, we had no toys, we had no education, we had no teaching of anything.

Q: Could you read and write by that time?

A: No, no, absolutely not, no, no.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I-I didn't have any schooling other than what I briefly described, you know, a very short time -- very, very short time in **Marmande** when I was in first grade, then the f-first grade and beginning of second grade, or the second grade --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- you know in th -- in that little schoolhouse in **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil**, and then no education --

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Q: No.

A: -- until I am returned to **Marmande**, you know, and then I enter school, and I -- I don't have very much schooling after that either.

Q: Yeah.

A: All right. Now, I don't know what you exactly want, but let -- let me tell you.

Q: Well, you said you were -- you moved around for two years, two -- two --

A: Two and a half years, okay.

Q: Two and a half years. Nineteen -- summer of '42 --

A: From the summer of '42 --

Q: -- to the summer -- fall of '44?

A: As to -- no, no, no, to the -- to the -- probably November 1944.

Q: '44, okay.

A: Yeah. Okay. Now, let me now say for the record why my parents abandoned us into the arms of strangers. I have four letters, signed by my mother and father, which were saved by my Great-Uncle **Max** in **Oakland** and his daughter gave them to me when she learned that I was collecting whatever I could collect about my history, my family, my -- now these four letters are written by my father. Two of them I think written to the director of the camp, and one of them is dated August 30, 1942, it's written in German.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: So I don't know every word, or everything he said, okay. These, among other documents, and I have many of them, will have to be translated. I have not had them translated, but they basically describe, in this letter to Mr. **Kohn** about us, my brother and I, about my uncle in **Oakland**. My father sends this camp director 50 francs for our care. Obviously he asks them to save us. I don't know if he says why, I don't know what he says, cause I don't know, it's all German. But I know what I didn't know, and I know now what I didn't know 10 years ago. And what I know is the following; that the French government on orders of **Vichy** had established under French law, certain conditions for arrest of Jews.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: With a preference of arrest of refugee Jews. And they made various choices, some totally idiotic, you know, doesn't make any sense, but -- so some people were allowed to keep children, and others were -- the children were to be arrested with their parents and sent to this camp in **Casanuri**. **Casanuri** was in the department of **Lot-et-Garonne**. And shortly after my father and mother sent these letters to the camp director and to my uncle, great-uncle in **Oakland**, they were arrested by the French police, the both of them were put in this camp at **Casanuri**. And among the idiosyncrasies of the French, one of the exceptions that they made for th-the

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incarcerated Jews was that if a woman was pregnant, they would release the couple. So my mother, in her usual good sense and courage, told them she was pregnant. So she was examined by the doctor and the nurses and the doctor and nurses said she was pregnant. The book researched by this wonderful Christian writer of the history of the Jews -- and I came at the tail end of her research. I came just before the publication. So obviously she didn't record this from my say-so. She had recorded all of this. Her name is **Marie-Juliette Vielcazat Petitcol**. Her book is, **Terre de -- d'Exile, Terre d'Asile**. It was published in 2006 and she -- she was telling me she was finishing and the books was going to get printed. Among the many things that she had discovered, well before me, was where my parents were incarcerated in a ca -- I didn't know where they were. And when I told her I don't know where they were, she said, but I know. And I said, this is what I know happened in the camp, cause my mother told me. You know, she feigned to be pregnant and that th-the doctor of the camp and the nurse said the -- they confirmed that, even though she wasn't. And as a result, my parents were allowed out of the camp. I'm going to tell you a historical fact, that if we had been with my parents in **Casanuri** at the time they were arrested, we would all be dead, because the French categorization of who is going to be shipped in to **Drancy** and then to -- to **Auschwitz**, at the time, in 1942, and then th-the enormous amount of Jews who were, and were shipped, th-

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they were all wiped out. They were all killed in the concentration camp. The only thing that saved us was these two events. The fact that my parents, right, decided that we should not come home, and that strangers had a better chance to save us than they did, cause they were helpless. And then comes this other story, that my mother, you know, tells this story to the doctor, and the doctor says, yes, you are pregnant, confirmed that. And this fine human being with these fine nurses -- they are named in here, in this book. And you know, if I said it privately to you before the start, or I said it otherwise, I think I have come to a time where almost every important event in the history of the persecution of my family, and I'm talking about my immediate family, that I have gotten the evidence. And you will hear, as we go along that that history goes to today. That there is a memorial now in **Kiel, Germany**, where there was no memorial, only because of me. Because when I visited **Germany**, I asked them, you know, I -- the only memorial that you have that remains, of the presence, and the persecution of Jews in **Kiel** is a little marker on the side of the curb of the street where the synagogue was burned, the main synagogue of **Kiel**. Other than that they had no memorial to the Jews or to the -- to the concentration camp, or to the -- the whole Holocaust, nothing. So when I went there, I asked them, I will pay for it. I will pay, you know, if you make a memorial. And what that memorial should consist of -- I understood the environment -- I said, it is a plaque like you did for the

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Temple, except with the plaque, plant a living tree. And I want you to know that the governor of the state wrote to me in 2005 -- I went there in 2000 -- and they have such a memorial and a living tree. And two of my cousins were invited to come to the inauguration, and the one who is the vice president of the **Weizmann** Institute, the son of the **Eichmann** survivor, is the one who spoke, right. And again, in the -- in the -- in the stories that were published, again it's of my family, right, and all of it tracing to the -- my grandfather and th-the -- the photos of the ceremony, of the monument on the back of -- of the -- one of the buildings, the synagogue of my grandfather, and here is also in one of the other newspapers, several of them, you know, were sent to me, is this Christian couple. And this Christian couple is the reasons we were invited to **Kiel**. They are the ones who sa -- researched the documents for me in **Kiel**, other than what I obtained on my own. They are another evidence of the -- th-the -- the goodness and -- and the fact that people do care, and they care immensely, because they -- they suggested to the city that they should honor those Jews who survived and who were born in the city of **Kiel**. So they invited my surviving cousins --

**End of Tape Three, Side A**

**Beginning Tape Three, Side B**



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Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Lakritz**. This is tape number three, side **B**. When you were ch -- those two and a ha -- two years, two and a half years you were with your brother, alone with him, did you talk about your parents a lot? You said you had no communication in the beginning even, from your parents.

A: Okay, there are many things I remember about that period. It's difficult for me to recall any particular conversation I had with my brother. It is not difficult for me to recall a number of events that I remember very specifically. The one thing I expressed earlier, and I say it again because it helps to explain; I had an obsession and fear, absolute fear, that I would be separated from my brother and he from me. I mean, this was an absolute fear. And obviously that fear is clearly tempered and explained by the fact that we were suddenly separated from our parents, right, without any comprehension or explanation by anybody. So now what happens in this episode to my brother and I for two and a half years is that we are in the company of other Jewish children, so they are contemporaries. Some are older, right, many years older, cause we're very little, and some of them are about our age, and we play and -- and -- and do things like little children. One of the frightful memories that I remember is my wife and I went for two weeks to a place in -- in the south -- I mean in the west -- I mean the east part of **France** call -- a city called **Anisy**. We

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went there to attend a French school provided to foreigners and we thought that would be really fun for her and I to go to French school, and she would learn a little French. In the meantime we have two weeks of vacation. And during that two week period, one day -- I mean, every weekend I would take her and we would go around. And one of the points that I tried to find, I tried to find where I loo -- I was hidden in the upper plateau of a big city called **Evian**, on the lake -- on the shore of the lake **Geneva**. And so one of them was this big house in -- in -- which is in one of the pictures, and I wanted to find this place. Now anyway, so one of those weekends we went someplace else, and this very nice woman w -- we had to find lodging, we had no reservation, so she offered us a room in -- in her big house, whatever it was, a hostel and so on. And some story about that her son -- I was looking to locate this place and that her son might know something, you understand, that he was cognizant of the history and th -- and th-the -- during the wartime and the resistance that occurred there and the -- the Jews. And so we went to her place, and she showed us the room, and it was terrible. Anyway, so we didn't want to stay there. But as we walked out, there was a queue -- a line of little children going to dinner, I guess, or coming from dinner, I don't remember exactly, my wife will remember. And I was absolutely thrown back to that time when this reminded me about me, about me and the other children, that this is how we were, we went on line, everything, everything

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we did was in part of the others and that we had little pajamas in this little house and I guess they were going to bed. I guess that's where they were. And I -- it was one of those moments where you're taken back to this memory. Anyway, these were times where we had the company of other children. Other children who were in the same boat as we were, and we knew we were in danger. We knew that we weren't allowed to go out and play, we were not allowed to do anything in the exterior, everything was done in the interior. In the **Ault Sevoir** we did something on the exterior, there yes. We went on hikes like in this one picture. I remember going in forests, I loved hiking, I loved forests, I loved nature. I remember those things. Then they sent us to **Lourdes**. **Lourdes** is, of course, the home of the historic religious event of **Bernadette** and there at first we were all together, placed in the **pensionne** and next to this **pensionne** were lodged these German **Luftwaffe** pilots. And we knew they were our enemy. And so I remember one day we had a snowball fight with these pilots. And I remember putting rocks, and the other boys did too, rocks in the middle of our snowball and sending them, you know. We knew these were --

Q: How did you know?

A: I don't know. I don't know.

Q: Had you heard of a man by the name of **Hitler** by that time?

A: No, no, no.

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Q: You still hadn't heard?

A: No, I -- I don't know. I don't know what I heard, okay. All I know is that these Germans were our enemies, the German -- now in -- in the town of **Lourdes**, it was easy, okay, it was very easy. In the town of **Lourdes** the Germans were in total control of the town, okay. You couldn't walk, you understand, they had barriers, barbed wire with guards, you know, everywhere. Crisscrossed so that nobody, you know, bicycle, on foot or anything could not -- you couldn't go walk straight, I mean, you know, you had to go through their security, okay.

Q: Is your name still **Alfred LaCroix**?

A: No -- yeah, oh then?

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh, absolutely. Oh, oh, oh, oh --

Q: You're still **Alfred LaCroix**?

A: Oh, I'm **Alfred LaCroix**, my brother is **Herbert LaCroix** --

Q: **Herbert LaCroix**.

A: -- oh yeah, yeah, oh that -- yes. We --

Q: Did he talk -- did your brother talk about your parents --

A: I -- I tell you --

Q: -- at that time?

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A: -- ve-very honestly, you know ...you know --

Q: I know you both were very young. [indecipherable]

A: It -- it is not just that we were very young, it's that ...I am not sure. I am not sure how we supported one another. I don't know how we survived. I don't know how we coped. I don't have any idea really, to understand, you know. The only thing that allowed us to survive is the fact that there were other children around who were in similar circumstances --

Q: Similar circumstances --

A: -- as us. And -- and so in that sense, you know, the will to survive is very strong, obviously in everybody. Also to be normal children, to play like -- I mean, we were looking for the four leaf clover, I remember that. We -- we played all kinds of game with the -- with the string --

Q: Right.

A: -- on our finger. That was our toy, you know, I mean this was a toy that we used every day, cause that's the only toys we had.

Q: Did the same staff people stay with you at the different places, or were there different staffs at different places?

A: Well --

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Q: In other words, the adult world changed at each new place?

A: I think so.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. The children remained.

Q: Yeah, but the adult --

A: In the main, the children remained. In the main.

Q: Yeah.

A: And -- but some of the older children also remained, and -- and some of them, I mean I -- I see their faces --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- in these photographs, okay. But some of the others absolutely did not stay with us, or we with them. What happened to them I -- I have absolutely no knowledge.

Q: Right. Well, now you're in **Lourdes**.

A: Now I'm in **Lourdes**. So I know that first we were in this ma -- in this **pensionne**, right next to the **Luftwaffe** office. So then we are moved into a hotel.

The hotel is built around th -- tourism, and all their hotels everywhere. By the hundreds of thousands they have rooms, you know. Th-They all cater to the -- to the Catholic --

Q: Right.

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A: -- you know, who come to pray for cures.

Q: Right.

A: The Pope, **John Paul** the second, he went there for a cure. And so have there -- by -- for over 150 years have they gone there, for sure. Now after, in the hotel -- up to then we're together, and then they move my brother. So now I -- I

[**indecipherable**] okay, I cry, I scream, I -- God knows what I did. Anyway, but they assure me that I will see him and I will be with him and that I shouldn't worry, that he is going to be fine and I'm going to be fine, but they have to separate us. And I am certain that they separated us because there was a danger, because our French maybe wasn't perfect, and he was younger, and he was innocent and he could speak up and give his real name and identity and then be discovered, then we both die. So I think they separated us there. In other place before that we were all with Jewish children, so it didn't matter. But there it matter, because we were hidden with all of these orphan Christian children, by the thousands, you understand. And I'm sure that it was an act of preservation, to protect us. So they put him in this place and they put me in the convent, and I was in the convent on the grounds of the **Basilica of Lourdes**. The [**indecipherable**] **magnifique** and I was, I believe, the only child that was hid -- Jewish child hidden by these nuns on that -- in that convent. Now, it's really not a convent. What it really is, is a hospice. And it is the place where this

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order of nun take care of the medically invalid visitors to the city of **Lourdes** and they come there and these nuns are nurses and they nurse these people during their stay, right, which is provided for free, I'm sure. And now comes the war, there's no travel, right, nobody can move, and now they have nothing to do and these children are being brought in, you know, by the government. Rounded up from **France** and -- and brought into the city cause it's -- they've got the road, they got the hotels unoccupied. The state takes over all of those hotels, and they offered, obviously, to shelter some children. Incidentally, I want to go back to tell you one part of the story. Among -- and I haven't -- I haven't come to the further development of what happened to my mother and father, but one thing has to be said, is that my parents were totally, completely trapped. They had no means, no right, no power to move. They had no papers, and police, French police would stop people, you know, for identification and you know, identity card, you know, with photograph. I mean, there's no way you could move. So my mother one time told me about that they had to go somewhere, all right, even at the risk of their lives, but it was that important. What it was, I don't know. And so she described to me the -- the -- the -- the episode for my father and I. They would walk at night on the road and if they saw two lights, they knew they were policemen with their bicycle lights, and so they would jump into the --



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Q: Ditch? A ditch?

A: -- the ditch next to the road to hide. And that's how they travel, right, to wherever they were going, I don't know where, but anyway, the point that I'm making is that when they were shipped from **Marmande**, they were not allowed to live there any more, and we were in this little hamlet. I said earlier that in my understanding of it, they were put there for easy picking, all right, by the French police. And the whole system was geared around keeping them there, locked in, with no escape and no means of escape. So now you can understand this couple, right. Now they say, oh my God, we have sent our children away and they're going to come arrest us. Now, okay, then comes the second judgment, well better they stay there in the protection of this organization then, cause we are trapped. We cannot escape, right. So they are like animals in the cage and the French are inhospitable. The police is absolutely their enemy, right, and hunt -- their hunter, right, and they know it. They're going to be arrested at the whim of -- of the police. They have no power whatsoever. So the total abandonment, you know, of these people, the total fact that they're totally left with no escape --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- right, explains how bad things were to them. Okay, now back to my -- I'm in **Lourdes**, I'm in this convent. I'm the only child there and I have experiences there

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that are very life long. I remember on the ground of the basilica by myself, I would go and visit the grotto. I was alone and I remember praying there. What I prayed for was for my parents. So the question you asked me about my parents, there I know. I know what I prayed for. That's what I prayed for. And so I never lost hope. I never give up, no. There I went to pray, and not once, but quite a few times. And today when I revisited **Lourdes** in the year 2000, of course there are hundreds, thousands of people with candles an-and the whole paraphernalia. But here's a grotto, I was the only occupant. It was just me.

Q: So you were there -- you said you were the only child sheltered there.

A: Ye -- I was -- I was -- no. There were -- there were other children sheltered in the convent, maybe 30 - 40 or whatever they sheltered, but not many more than that, you know.

Q: Did any --

A: Maybe fewer than that.

Q: Did the non-Jewish boys tease you about being so --

A: No, I don't remember anything. Nobody knew I was Jewish, but -- but --

Q: Do they -- but do they tease you for being circumcised, or they didn't know?

A: I don't remember that.

Q: Okay, so -- but that wasn't --

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A: I mean, there's no question -- there's no question that I was circumcised, there's no question that they --

Q: That's what I'm saying --

A: -- they knew.

Q: -- that the non-Jewish --

A: But I don't remember.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay. Okay, I don't remember that. I do remember that this convent had a priest and he was a young priest. And I remember one day walking with him, the grounds of this long basilica, this long walkway, and I told him that I resented that I had to go to -- to church every Sunday morning and that I was not allowed to kneel.

Q: Did he know you were Jewish?

A: Oh yeah, oh. No question. And he said to me in retort, and I remember it, never, never, never will forget. He was the nicest guy, he really loved me. And he says, well at least I don't make you go to catechism. So now, the way he said it, catechism was absolutely something terrible. Going to church, kneeling, may not be allowed in my religion, but I had to go for my survival, and he told me this.

Q: Right. Right, right. Right.

A: That I had to go, that I could not be made an exception --

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- right, I had to go. The other children, you know, have to go, you have to go.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And it is for your survival. Okay, so I understood all that.

Q: But why didn't you kneel? To show that you were --

A: Well, I went and I did kneel.

Q: Oh, you did kneel.

A: I did not want to kneel.

Q: Oh, oh, I see.

A: That i -- I knew it was forbidden in our religion.

Q: Yeah. But you did it.

A: Okay, the only time that I ever saw kneeling was in **New York** when my brother and I went in 1950 and we ended up in the **[indecipherable]** and we were there in the high holidays --

Q: Holidays, right.

A: -- and we were welcome into a --

Q: Right.

A: -- a -- a -- a -- a synagogue, one of the small cons -- strict Orthodox. And all of a sudden I see them kneeling.

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Q: Kneeling, right.

A: I had never seen Jews kneeling before. Anyway, so the nuns were nice to me. They knew I was Jewish. Every day and certainly every weekend, German officer, German soldiers, you know, we -- we see them, they were a few feet away, or you know, next to us or walking. Any one of them could have stopped, tapped me on the shoulder --

Q: Right.

A: -- and stop. I mean, they were there constantly, okay. Nothing ever happened. No -- nobody ever disclosed my identity. I was treated like one of the children, you know, we did whatever the hell we did. I remember that we went on hikes all the time, singing songs, you know, I remember that.

Q: What was the contact with your brother?

A: Okay. With my brother, I had contact with him from time to time. And one day the liberation, and I was -- before the liberation came, and some woman -- the French had organized some kind of system to ask local habitants of **Lourdes** to provide a home for these orphan children, you know, to give them a little bit of a family, a little bit of that type of experience. So a woman volunteered to have me, you know, that she would be -- okay, she was unmarried, that I would be her, you know, like big brother, so to speak, you know, that idea. And she turned out to be a

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wonderful Jewish woman. By some choice of the Almighty, maybe, it turned out she was a Jewish French woman, and I was to be her little boy. So she treated me, obviously with tremendous love.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Okay. And I said that -- that I would not continue to come unless my brother came.

Q: Oh.

A: And she didn't want to, but she agreed. And so then we spent time with her. And I remember when I was leaving her, and she was talking to another woman in my presence, and the other woman was complaining to her that here she had cared for this child, a child, and that child had never written to her. And so this woman who cared for me, she said, I bet you will do the same. Oh no, no, no, I promise, I promise, I won't forget you. I will write to you. But I didn't. I never did. And that's one of my many regrets, you know. This was a wonderful, wonderful woman.

Q: What was her name?

A: Ah, God knows, I don't, you know. But again, you know, maybe children are more blessed and maybe they are protected and -- and babies and little children, of course, are loved by everybody. But I had all these privileges, you know, in different time, and I have to say, you know, throughout my story, it's a human story.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: It's a human story of survival of children who, not by their own doings are able to physically survive, but by their own doing emotionally, psychologically survive. And what is the price? What is the price of people who didn't do it? Who saw it, who remained passive.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Or -- actively or inactively. And this story of survival, right, has to record all of these people's attitude, cause nothing happened here in a vacuum.

Q: Right.

A: Nothing happened in isolation, nothing happened by itself. There was always cause and effect, right. And -- so here is this magnificent woman. Here is this magnificent priest, here is this magnificent nun. Here are these -- these heroes to our people, who save these few Jewish children and move them from moment to moment to moment, throughout **France**, right, from southwest **France**, right, to somewhere between **Creuse** and -- and **Ault Sevoir**, and then from there to the **Ault Sevoir** right on top of this plateau, on this plateau where they hid us, right, and it's way up in the mountain. That's where the -- the French resistance his. And then the German soldiers, right, came, right, I learned later, of course, years later when I [**indecipherable**] to fight with this resistance [**indecipherable**]

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Q: Yeah.

A: But they hid there because it was considered safe.

Q: Di -- di -- de --

A: That's where they -- they hid us.

Q: But you do not know which organizations were behind all this. Do -- you can't remember --

A: Well, look --

Q: The **OSE**, you said that --

A: -- the -- look, the French historian, this woman that I told you, whose book I have, right, and to whom I've contributed some of my memories. Certainly not as much as I'm doing here, but some, she records what happened in -- in **Lot-et-Garonne**, right, the apartment. And she, in chapter 12 for example, speaks of the organization, the Jewish organization that were in [**indecipherable**], that -- who did, you know, the different work, okay. Now, chapter 12 deals with it, chapter 13 deals with it and there are several organizations, many of them funded by American Jews.

Q: Yeah.

A: Right, and that's who is behind, you know, these acts. And I have to add --

Q: But my point is you never heard while you were --



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A: Exactly the -- which organization, I don't, but I have to make a point here, that deals with what happened to us. How is it that American Jews knew and contributed money to these organization in 1942 to save Jews, and that the rest of **America** claimed to have no knowledge of what was happening? No, I mean, th-th-this is monstrous. I mean, I was saved by American money with -- with French Jewish lives who were willing to do it. This was in '42 - '43 - '44.

Q: Right.

A: And th -- the -- the **Roosevelt** administration, the -- the -- the -- the -- the newspapers here and the media claimed ignorance?

Q: So you were in **Lourdes** and then as a -- when your mother go -- were you in **Lourdes** when you --

A: No --

Q: -- reunited with your mother?

A: -- no, no. From **Lourdes**, I -- we remained there until the liberation. Then a Jewish organization took over our camp, after the liberation of the south of **France**. Now we're in the very southwest, you know, we're -- we're in **Lourdes** next to the Spanish -- Spanish border. We are then placed, **Herb** and I, in a Catholic family in the town of **Tarbes, T-a-r-b-e-s**, which is close to **Lourdes**.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: And they become our foster parents, so to speak, right, for a time. My brother recalls that they were mean to me, but they were nice to him. And in that sense, obviously, the effect of all this longing for my parents, the abandonment, or the separation from my parents, obviously in me created a difference of personality for me and my brother.

**End of Tape Three, Side B**

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**Beginning Tape Four, Side A**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Lakritz**. This is tape number four, side **A**, and you had left **Lourdes** and you were in **Tarbes**.

A: **Tarbes**, right. In **Tarbes**, my brother and I are ne -- housed with this family of fa -- French Christians. I know this is not a pleasant time for me, and my brother, he remembers very well that they didn't treat me very well, but they treated him okay. One day I remember an event I can never forget. This woman from a Jewish agency comes to visit and she has me sit down with her and she looks in my eyes ... is a moment I never, never, never, never, never could forget. She looks in my eyes and she says, we have found your mother.

Q: Mm.

A: I tell you, no human being can have greater, you know, pain and -- and joy at the same moment. The obvious i-is that obviously I had despaired for two, say two and a half years. Obviously I had prayed and hoped, and now this hope was bringing this moment and this news. Now this was in the context that other children or other people had told me that they planned on shipping us to **Palestine**. That they were going to ship us to **Palestine**, which meant, obviously, that they all assumed that we were orphans and that our parents had been killed. And I knew that. And now this

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woman brought this news. This was the first word I had on my parents for two and a half years, almost. And I tell you, I told the story to these two French journalists, and I know one of them published it in his newspaper as the lead, you know, in his article and they reported when I came to thank the Italian farmers, I didn't talk about yet, about my mother, what happened to my mother. Well, they had hidden her for th -- a lot of that two and a half year period. And I went to publicly thank this family that I visited many, many, many times. I consider myself a part of their family, they consider me and my brother part of their family, certainly. They consider my mother part of their family. Anyway, I told these newsmen this, and -- and newspaper men and they considered that to be what I consider it, th -- not fully appreciating the content. Anyway, so shortly after that, by this Jewish organization we were taken and reunited with my mother. And I remember my mother there on the same platform of the same railroad station, standing just about exactly the same spot that I last saw her, say two and a half years before, with her close friend that she developed, this Madame **Rozinsky**, and her son, who became my close friend. And they were Jews of -- from **Alsace-Lorraine** and they were spared. They were spared in the town of ma -- **Marmande**, and two doors down was another Jewish family by the name of **Alco**, all of these were our friends after the war, and they were spared because they were French born. So in **France** that's another thing that happened.

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There was a very, very, very, you know, factual difference of who survived and who was not allowed to survive. And we, the refugees Jews in **France** were the ones that were handed for slaughter. Knowingly, obligingly by the French. And the other one, they spared.

Q: Tell me what it was like when you saw your mother.

A: Well, it was a shock, because she had gained weight and I was conscious of that, but it was my mother, and that I recognized, and there was no problem from that moment. That's it, I will tell you.

Q: Do you remember what she said to you, right away?

A: No, I'm sure she cried. I'm sure I cried.

Q: What about your brother?

A: My brother was a different number, you know. He left her and I don't think he recog --

Q: He didn't remember --

A: -- a-and he did not recognize her, he did not. And I think my mother said that, you know, that he didn't recognize --

Q: He was too little when he left, yeah.

A: Yeah, he was too little. And he had no memory of his father either.

Q: Right.

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A: You know. I had two years on him, and I have very, very strong, you know, very, very strong memories of my parents, you know. And so I don't think we needed to say any words.

Q: Right. And then where --

A: Now -- I don't think there were any words.

Q: Words.

A: No.

Q: And then where did you go with her?

A: Well, she had gotten this apartment. She was allocated by the city, right, through the **Secretaire Generale**, the -- th-the administrative chief of the city hall, who administered that apartment that I referred to --

Q: Right.

A: -- where my father had performed the -- the high holiday services, and we stayed there. And I remember being in that apartment when the liberation of **Paris** came, and I remember making little flags of **America** and so for -- and **Britain** and -- and **France**, you know, and I hung them on the window, and I remember that. You know, we, as opposed to children today who have everything handed to them and made for them, right, they have to use their talents in different ways. I was a creator.

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I created my own toys, right, and the flag was my la -- you know, and so yes,

**France** was there in a very happy state at that moment.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And so was I. And so after we stayed there a -- you know a short time, you know, in that apartment, then we were given the apartment I said on the **Boulevard de Marie**, opposite the warehouse and there we lived. And my brother and I went to school, and he became a closest friend to a boy named **Saresh Guyaux**, whose father was **Gerard Guyaux**, that man -- they lived just down the street, the side street. And he helped us to survive, you know. And my mother's story is an important story. She was left with my father and they struggled, right, until -- together after they were released from the camp at **Casanuri**. Then they lived in that same mud chicken coop, as my wife calls it. And one day the police came, as expected, and they arrested my father. And his arrest is also recorded in the books that I have. I mean, I have every evidence of why he was arrested on the orders of **Eichmann**, for the -- as a r -- act of ret -- retribution against the killing of two German officer in **Paris**. And **Eichmann** declared that there should be a punishment for this, 2000 Jews were to be arrested throughout **France** and turned over to them at **Drancy**, and the French complied. My father was one of those who was arrested and he was put in the camp of **Gurs, G-u-r-s**, and for transportation to **Drancy**, and

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from **Drancy** at fra -- **Drancy** on the night that he was being shipped out to go to his destiny, he didn't know where, but anyway went from **Auschwitz** to **Majdanek**, and he was allowed one goodbye, farewell postcard, that he mailed to my mother. And this I have, and it's dated March the third, 1943, and instead -- instead of saying **au revoir**, or instead of saying something else, he misspelled but says the word, **adieu** with an exclamation mark, underscored twice, in big letters. He knew he was headed for death. And he said that we should have **bon courage**, you know, strength to deal with it, and he sent us his love.

Q: How old was he at that time? 19 --

A: He was born in 1907.

Q: So he was 30 si --

A: In 19 --

Q: -- he was 36.

A: He was not 36, he was 35, to be 36.

Q: Yeah.

A: His birthday is in June, like mine, like my son.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: All born in June.

Q: June.



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A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And his card is there and I have it in --

Q: You have the original card?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you?

A: Yeah, oh yeah. I have the original card, I have the original letters that he wrote, of abandonment. **[indecipherable]**

Q: Right, right.

A: -- the information. I have the original. I have an original copy or I have the original affidavit of my grandfather, right. These are original documents, yes.

Q: Tell me about your mother's story.

A: Her story is -- and I will tell you now, because a story -- history should know not just what she endured, but how I look at how she endured. I consider her about as great a woman, a mother as there can be, in fact, I call her an angel. After my father's arrest in February, at the end of February, 1943, she is left alone. She has no idea if her children are alive or dead, except th-there are a few photographs that are given to her. And she, of course, knows nothing of what happened to her husband. And so she is left there alone, right. And she speaks the language cause she picks up

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the language fast. She's a seamstress, she is known by the farming families, you know, who use her. And one day she is asked by this Italian farmer's family, the **Ros** family, **R-o-s** to make a wedding dress for their one -- their second oldest daughter. So my mother makes this wedding dress for her, and she did, I guess, a reasonably good job. Then they ask her to make the suit for the groom. So she makes that. And from then on they are totally connected, and they become her protectors. So, they take her away, she is all alone, right, obviously a woman in tremendous pain and they give her a family and a home and a place. So this is two people who had immigrated from **Italy** when things were bad in northern **Italy** in the early 30's. And they became tenant farmers in -- in the southwest of **France** at a chateau called **LeCook**, and -- by a woman who was Madame **deFerrier**, a noble lady of -- not noble in act, of course she was noble in act, but her name was of the nobility. And the tenant farmers that they have is this family, **Ros**. And this couple, the **Ros'** are two magnificent -- magnificent human beings. They are farmers with a little education. They have six or seven children, right now I'm not counting them, and they have this farm. And so they take her in and from time to time, you know, one of their son, you know transports my mother by bicycle to their farm, which is up on this hill, at the **mas dejeuner**. And she is all alone so they adopt her and they hide her. Their oldest son is ordered into **Germany** as part of the -- the -- the -- the

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German orders, it takes one child from certain families, you know, to -- as laborers in **Germany**, and he is one of them, and he's not there. So I guess in the sense they consoled themselves because they have some connect in that sense. Anyway, she spends a lot of time there, and they even hide her. One time I was taken through when I returned. When I was a child growing up there I wasn't interested in any of this, but when I returned with my wife and -- and children to **LeCook**, **LeCook** had been sold to a German couple, but they were -- they allowed us to come and visit that site. And I was then taken through the chateau, as I had been as a child, we used to play there all the time after the war. But I was shown a room in this chateau that had a secret wall, and my mother was hidden in that wall. So when police came to **LeCook** to check what's what, and so forth, so forth, they would hide her in this wall, you know, which was a fake wall. So, in my family so many things happened that happened to other Jews in other places and so on, even that happened. Anyway, these wonderful people kept her, nourished her, gave her support, moral and physical in that sense and helped her over this period. A photograph that I have of my mother shows her extreme pain. And she is in one picture shown, that's all I have, when she is with her sewing machine [**indecipherable**]. Then the next picture I have of her is two and a half years later when we're reunited with her. And she takes us with joy and pride, you know, to visit this family, to bring her sons. And the

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pain in her eyes is so clear and her pride is so clear. And I have two photographs, you know, of that particular event, where she even made the clothes that we wear. And she is bringing her boys. And this family that I went and thanked and -- and so forth, called just two or three weeks ago. We haven't heard from you, where are you, what's happening? Why aren't you here, you know? And -- a-a-anyway --

Q: So you stayed --

A: These people, we would go during -- we, of course immediately applied to emigrate to the **United States** with the help of my uncle --

Q: Yeah. Mm-hm.

A: -- now, not -- not my great-uncle, but my uncle.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Right. And as fate has tha -- an-and justice not, we -- presumably one of the reasons that the **United States of America** went to war against **Hitler** was about the horror that he was committing against the Jews. We, who already had been given entry into th -- **America** in 1935 --

Q: Right.

A: -- when my mother applied, that was an unrecalled event. We were then placed in the quota, the most extreme quota that **United States** immigrant quotas had established. And that was in 1945 --

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Q: Where were you living then?

A: I was then living in **Marmande**. I -- we left it --

Q: So you stayed in **Marmande**.

A: We -- we stayed in **Marmande** until we emigrated to **United States** in 1950.

Q: Oh, oh, okay.

A: So for those five years we lived in **Marmande**. Well, my mother applied immediately for -- a-after the war was over, she applied immediately for pro -- visa, with the -- of course with the sponsorship of my uncle, and we were placed in the quota of **Poland**, which was then behind the Iron Curtain --

Q: Right.

A: -- that they had raised, and now instead of being in the favored status, we were in the most un-favored status and we had to wait five years to a -- be allowed to emigrate to the **United States**. Now, on the ship that we took to emigrate, were Germans. Germans who had applied for the right to live in the **United States** six months ago. And I, the victim of the Holocaust, the horror for which this country supposedly went to war, I had to wait five years. Now that same crime was repeated over and over since that time, to now. People are allowed on fantasy, and made up and so forth, so forth, I'm being persecuted, I am -- so therefore all the Iranians, the Cubans, the Vietnamese, the -- anybody anywhere in the world is allowed to enter

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the **United States** on the say-so, violating their tourist visa, you understand, and so forth. We, who were the absolute victims of the war, right, from whom everything was taken, the property, the inheritance, the families, the rights, our father, everything. We were treated in the most, right, abject, the most rejected. We had to wait five years for the privilege and the right to emigrate to this country, right, this country to whom we had been sponsored, and this country had already, right, granted us entry in 1935. That promise was broken. Now, I love this country and I condemn this country. You know, I have one understanding, you know, in the recent political thing that's going on and they're condemning this Reverend **Wright**, right? And I do, I condemn him too, for what he said. I don't think he has a right to say what he said. On the other hand, there is a level of understanding on my part. And that is, when a person, right, is part of an environment where this country denies to one group the rights and privileges guaranteed under the Constitution and the law, and it denies them indirectly or otherwise, by use of the law, then somebody has a right to be angry. I am angry. I truly resent the fact that Mexican and others from **Latin America** daily, you know, cross our borders without any permission, any permits, anything. I had to go through every demands. We had to prove we were honest, healthy, able people, that we would be able to survive in this country without charity. We had to swear at the point of entry in **New York** -- I remember my

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mother had to sign an affidavit she didn't come here to kill the president. I thought then, I'm 16 years old, this is a joke. How can that be a demand, you know, on somebody who's entering here? Yet it was. So, as wonderful as this place is, it was the promised land to me from the time I was one years old, that's where I wanted to go. **Germany** was no longer my home, I had no home. **France** was not my home, I never accepted it, right. I knew I didn't fit there. I didn't belong there. They hadn't offered, they hadn't extended, you know. Yeah, they were tolerating us, and they didn't persecute us and they didn't harm us, other than what they did, right. But this wasn't my home, and it wasn't my mother's home. My brother wanted to be -- h-he wanted it to be his home, cause he had grown up there. He didn't know anything else. And he was doing good in school and I wasn't. I had no interest in going to school.

Q: You're talking about now in the **United States** --

A: No, no, no, no, no, in the -- when --

Q: -- or your talking about **[indecipherable]**

A: -- in **France**.

Q: In **France**.

A: Yeah, when we're reunited with our mother.

Q: **[indecipherable]** so then you -- yeah.

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A: Yeah, and so I went to school.

Q: Right.

A: This is now, right --

Q: Your 10 - 11 years old? You were ta --

A: Well, I enter school, I remember --

Q: You were reunited with your mother in the fall of '44, right?

A: Right, so --

Q: So you were 10.

A: -- in -- i-i-in -- in the spring, I suppose, of '45 --

Q: '45, yeah. [indecipherable]

A: I'm not so sure now. It must have been the fall of '45 --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- that I went to school --

Q: To school, okay.

A: -- right. And this is my first bit of education.

Q: Right.

A: Now how old am I? This is --

Q: You're 11, right.



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A: Yeah, di -- isn't that wonderful? I missed five years of education. I had no education. And I am 11 years old, all right, and I go to school. And I only won -- and I only went til I was 13, because that is the required mandatory, and I was not interested in going further, because this wasn't my place, I didn't belong there. I didn't belong in **France**. This wasn't my -- I didn't want to go to school. I wanted to go to **America**, that's all, right. And then I waited [**indecipherable**] my mother says, okay, you got to learn a trade, you -- no matter what you do in **America**, you know, you have to learn a trade to survive, and God knows what's going to happen. This could happen again. I remember my mother telling me. So I want you to become an apprentice tailor. So for two years I became an apprentice tailor. I hated that. I never picked up a -- a needle since. I know nothing about sewing. I reject that as I rejected the German language. Oh yeah, oh absolutely, and --

Q: So she would talk to you in French, then?

A: Who, my mother?

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh, our conversation were only in French. Oh yeah, only, only. I never -- I don't speak German, I don't understand German. Sure, I understand a few words, I understand, you know, after all, I heard her speak to others. But when we were together it was strictly in French.

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Q: Did that upset her, or did she -- did she want to speak to you in German?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I mean, she was about as good a mother as the world ever created.

Q: Well no, I just didn't know, cause when you were little --

A: No, my mother --

Q: No, when you were little --

A: The only time she was upset with me was one time I was walking home from school in **France**, in **Marmande** with a girl. Oh, my God, she -- she -- she went berserk and she hit me with a broom, that I was not to associate with a **shiksa**.

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah, I was what, 12 - 13 years old.

Q: Sure, right. But I remember, because I specifically asked you what language did your parents speak to you when you were little, and you said German.

A: Well, when we were little it was German.

Q: That -- that's what I'm saying. But she --

A: Right, but once we were in **France**, it was a matter of survival.

Q: Right.

A: It was --

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Q: But then when you got tic -- back together again, it was still French.

A: In French, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: But when we were in -- in -- in **Marmande** --

Q: It was --

A: -- and in -- in -- in **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil** with our parents --

Q: Yes, yes.

A: -- it was in French.

Q: -- French, yeah.

A: They learned it quickly, I learned it quickly.

Q: Mm.

A: We only spoke French, that was a matter of security.

Q: Security, right.

A: Yeah, thi -- in fact, my father, what he did is he changed his appearance from the way he was before the war --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- because he was afraid that the German soldiers, somebody would recognize him.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

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A: So yeah. So no, no, now in -- that was one of the -- incidentally, when I returned to ma -- **Marmande** and **Saint-Pardoux-du-Breuil**, and I have to say this, the **Berny** family says, I have something of yours. And they brought me a little envelope which had the shredded pieces of my father's prayer book.

Q: Mm.

A: My father was not allowed take his prayer book and it was left there when my mother on -- on one of her times, it was left there, and I don't know exactly why. And so they gave me this envelope with these pieces, and some of them I have. And they told me that what they did is, they knew that he had been killed, or at least they premised that it was, so they distributed among them, the Catholic habits, as an omen of good, and so this prayer book was torn by them, right, and only certain pieces remained, and they gave them to me. I tell you that that is one time I cried, a lot.

**End of Tape Four, Side A**

**Beginning Tape Four, Side B**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Lakritz**. This is tape number four, side **B.** And --

A: Okay, I wanted -- I wanted to say one thing --

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Q: Yeah?

A: -- before I do, because I don't know how much time we're going to spend, that I'm available. But one thing I want to say is this, because it ties into the first part, before I get to what happens here. One time I went to **Jerusalem**, to the **Yad Vashem**, again to find my roots. And this was 20 years ago, I think. It was -- well, it was on the anniversary of the state of **Israel**, so thi -- I know that. And I -- I think it was 20 years ago, but anyway -- and I went to the **Yad Vashem** to ask -- you know, to apply for -- I-I wanted to connect to my family, to my roots. And so I filled out a card and I went to hand it to the man at the counter, and the man looked at it and he said to me, the information for you isn't here. So I looked. He says, I have the information that you need. So I said, yeah? He says, I'm going to bring it to you. In a little while he came back with these two gigantic books, and he says, there is what happened to your family. I didn't know what it was. I open the book and it's called **Gedanta** volume one and two, the collection of the Jews of **West Germany** killed by the Nazis as reported and recorded by the Nazi -- I mean, post-war by -- and in this book I looked under **Lakritz** and I don't find my father. So I decided to go under **Weber**, and I will tell you, if you would have exploded an atomic bomb, I don't think I would have been more shocked, more surprised, more in a state of total emotional disconnect and connect, ya -- total. I opened the book, I go to **Weber**, and

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the first thing I read is the name of **Mirel Weber, geb Lakritz**, from **Kiel**. That's my grandmother. So I run down, the next name I find is **Simon**, initial **S**, **Lakritz Weber**. And they put his place of residence and where he died, **Majdanek, Lublin**, sometime in '43. How in the world they restored to him his name of **Weber** as a memorial to him is -- I -- I totally without any comprehension. How they went through the records and restored to him his name, is unbelievable. So the connection to my pursuit of my name, my identity, my roots, here it is confirmed in the **Gedanta** book, handed to me in the **Yad Vashem**. And so I said -- and I looked then for the other relatives, the **Weizmanns**, and they're all recorded, anyway, everybody in the **Weizner** is in, they are recorded. Aunts and uncles and cousins whose deaths are recorded. Anyway, so now let me come to what happens in **United States of America**.

Q: Yeah.

A: We come to **Oakland**, right, and we stayed with my Uncle **M-Mike** and my Aunt **Eda** and her -- her three children. They're my cousins, these are my uncle and aunt. We are welcomed in **New York** by an -- a niece, a cousin of mine, **Friedel Knesh**.

Q: What was it like to step down on American soil?

A: I will tell you. Imagine for a moment that a child has a dream, that **California** in

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**America** is the dream. I remember docking -- well, no, first I remember coming -- entering into the port of **New York**.

Q: What boat were you on?

A: I don't know. It was a port that left -- m-my mother arranged for us, before we left **Europe** that she wanted to see **Paris**. She hadn't seen -- we hadn't been there, and she wanted to go to **Rome**. And so she arranged to -- from a -- through a Jewish agency, right, that we could have these periods. Remember, we didn't have much of anything, everything was taken from us. And we were not poor people in **Germany**, but we didn't own the -- th-the -- the -- the -- the retail store, you know. We owned a wholesale **schmutter**, okay. Well, we were good anyway, not rich. And here we are and so she's getting help, you know, for us to immigrate to **United States**. So we leave from **Naples**. What was it you asked me?

Q: The name of the boat. That's okay.

A: Yeah, I -- I knew the name of the boat.

Q: That's okay.

A: Anyway, it was an ordinary commercial boat.

Q: Yeah, I get it

A: Okay.

Q: And I asked you then what it was like to put your foot down on American soil.

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A: Right. So I remember docking, but before docking, we passed by the Statue of Liberty. And when we were in **Paris**, before we left, and we were sightseeing and so forth, we found the replica of the Statue of Liberty, you know, by the guy who -- who made th-the thing. So I saw it, and mm, look at that thing, huh? Yeah, it's not so big. Anyway, but it was nice, an-and you know, and gave you that umph, you know, hope, you know. Next time I see you, I'll see your big sister. And there I was, I saw the big sister. You know, here was the promised land, you know. Here was my life, all right. A boy who had very little given to him by **France**, right, and everything hoped for in the **United States**. So the Statue of Liberty was a moment I cried. When we docked, then we disembarked and there were people crowded around and whate -- and behind the fence, you know, and my mother found her brother and her sister-in-law, who were there. And of course I didn't know them, but of course I found out right away who they were. Anyway, so after we -- we cleared the -- everything else, I think I had to go to the bathroom. And so somebody, you understand, it was **Friedel's** husband, who was -- the husband is a -- was a taxi driver, I remember in -- in **Brooklyn**. They lived in **Brooklyn**. My aunt and uncle had come from **Oakland** across the **United States**. I know those four people were there. And it must have been him, he took me to a bar to go to the toilet. And I saw a jukebox in this -- I had never seen a jukebox. I was amazed. This thing plays music.



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I was totally amazed. The only thing I knew about music was the phonograph, you know, so forth, you -- okay, so that was one thing. Then I saw them selling **Frosties**, you know, that ice cream. So, he bought me one. I tasted it; it was so rich, so wonderful, so magnificent. In **France** the ice cream is sort of watery and -- an-and icy, but here was -- it's so rich. So they had a boy, wha -- we stayed with them for a week, and this boy was a little fat, and we were thin. And I saw the amount of food that they had, of milk and butter and cheese and -- and a [indecipherable] I said, no wonder he's fat.

Q: Did you speak English at that point?

A: Not a word. And I had done something in preparation of coming here. I had written to the embassy in **Paris**, right, the French embassy -- I mean the American embassy and I'd say we're going to immigrate, you know, an-and I wanted something cause in -- in **Marmande** there was nothing about learning English. There was no book in the library, there was nothing. I had French books, you know, yeah. And so they sent me a book, right, nice they were, to learn about English. So on my own, you know, I learned a few words in the little thing, but on my own I couldn't do anything, I couldn't learn anything, I ma -- it was -- so that's the beginning, right, so, where -- with -- with **Friedel** and -- and -- and so forth, so forth. That fat little boy, he's a lawyer in **New Jersey**. Anyway, and he's one -- and he is

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the one who finally, my other relatives that were looking for me, right, for this trip to **Germany**, he's the one who connected with me and found me, you know, cause he -- they knew I was a lawyer, and he's a lawyer, so he said, I -- I can find him. He did that. Anyway --

Q: So how long did you stay in **New York**?

A: I think we stayed just a week.

Q: Oh, then you went out --

A: And then -- then my mother wanted to cross the country, you know, and see the country, you know, and so for five days we went by train.

Q: Train.

A: On this train, again, you know, we meet all these wonderful people. And so we met this guy and he befriended, you know, **Herb** and I. And, you know, he -- he would talk to us. But on that train, something happened. So my mother sent us to the -- to the cart, you know, th -- to the car, the food car, whatever it's called. The catering tru -- the catering --

Q: The dining car.

A: The dining car. And so he and I are in the dining car. Here it is the **United States**, they bring us a menu and we're looking at this menu and we cannot understand anything, nothing. But there is one thing I understood, because my aunt and uncle

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would send us a food parcel, you know, during the time that we were in **France** after the -- you know, the war ended, they would send us these wonderful packages, you know?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And one of the things they had -- they shipped us, was corned beef. You know **[indecipherable]**. So I saw the word corn, so I pointed to the waiter, black guy, I remember, or maybe he was white, any -- whatever. And I pointed this word corn, okay? So I figure we're --

Q: Right.

A: -- ordering corned beef.

Q: Right.

A: And that we knew we liked. So here comes the waiter with two plates and on each plate is an ear of corn. We look at this, what is this? This is a joke. In **France** the only people who ate corn were pigs.

Q: Oh.

A: It was raised strictly for feeding of pigs and geese, right, that you fatten up for their livers in the southwest of **France**.

Q: Right.

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A: Right. An -- no, this is like an insult, you know. I mean, this is terrible, you understand? And obviously no harm was ever intended. But it's one of the moments, you know, that somebody who doesn't speak the language and -- and -- and, you know, when I meet people like that --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, and they don't know, and they don't comprehend, you know. I say well, I went through that --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know. Okay, I didn't know a word of English. I mean, blue and you know, okay, I knew the word corn. Okay, anyway, we went across the **United States** -- I mean across the **United States** by train and befriended this guy. When we came to **Oakland** he was visiting his family, it was across the bay and he wanted to take us there, but my mother wouldn't allow our -- cause she -- you know. So he took us out for dinner anyway, in **Oakland**. And that my mother will allow, that's all, she wouldn't allow any more besides. Anyway, so in **Oakland** we lived with my uncle -  
-

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- until my mother got a job.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: And she got a job working for **I. Magnin**, which was the high culture department store in **San Francisco**. And she became a -- a simst -- a seamstress there, and she worked there until she retired, you know. And they loved her and everybody who worked there loved her, cause she was a -- a ma -- I mean, really, everybody loved my mother. She was gentle and soft-spoken, you know. She didn't parade her pain or her suffering, you know. She was just, I me -- I mean, a hundred percent good, in every sense.

Q: So you went to high school and college?

A: So we were in **Oakland**, okay. So now my cousins, you know, who are very active and graduated, you know, from the **Oakland** schools, you know, th-they tried to enroll us, okay. And so they got us enrolled in **Oakland** Technical High School. And the high school is trying to figure out what to do with us, cause we don't speak English and there's nobody there, no tutors, nothing. The only person who speaks French in the whole school is the French teacher. Obviously she wasn't about to, you know, be our full time teacher about anything. So what they decide to do, my brother is two years younger than me, so what they did is they put us together --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- right, and me a year behind whatever is th-the required age and him a year ahead. So they were -- okay, so we had somebody to talk to. So here we entered high

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school at the same time, okay. He and I learned the English language within six months.

Q: Mm.

A: And that is for sure.

Q: Mm.

A: Within that time period I got a job working in the market, right in the par -- in a grocery store, taking out groceries. We graduated -- I became the head yell leader of my high school. I was on the board, of course, the student board. I was in other club, I was on the swimming team. We were both admitted to University of **California at Berkeley**. We both graduated and then I went to law school at the University of **California Berkeley, Bolt Hall**, which is about as -- as premier a law school as **Harvard**, right. At the time they were the premier law schools in the **United States**. My brother became a **CPA**, he went to work for the **IRS**, then he got tired of that and he opened his practice and he owns now a **Toyota** agency that he bought from one of his clients many, many years ago. He has got three sons, one is a par -- pair of twins. They run that agency, they're about to enlarge it now, and so he is in the city called **Novato**, which is in **Marin County**, just a little ways between **San Rafael** and **Petaluma**, you know, very close to the wine country, **Napa**, okay. That's where he lives and to my regret I had to move down south to **L.A.** because while I was in

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law school I met my wife and there was my downfall, I stopped studying. But anyway, I made the grades anyway to graduate, and suddenly, you know, I had regular food, and regular living and I had a wonderful wife and everything was great.

Q: When you were in high school and college --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and law school, did people ask you about your childhood and your experiences?

A: Well, we really did not share this.

Q: You did not.

A: Okay, no.

Q: You did not share th --

A: The only thing that the chi -- no, all the things that the children -- and that's one of the things I included in my book. The children with whom we associated became the leaders and were the leaders of the school, okay, we were in the elite group in high school. That's how I got to be assistant yell leader, then I became the head yell le --

Q: Yell? You said yell?

A: Yeah, yell --

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Q: What's that?

A: -- yell lead --

Q: Cheer -- is that a cheerleader?

A: Th-That's -- yeah, but it was called a yell leader then, and he was the guy, you know, who led the -- the -- the yells at the basketball game and the -- and the football games and the cheers, you know, and I had two assistant -- four assistant, I mean, two on each side. I had four assistant, you know. I was one of the important guys in the school. All the -- all the -- all th-the --

Q: But you didn't talk about your childhood?

A: No.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Other -- they all -- the only thing they knew about us was that we were immigrants from **France**. And they treated us -- and they loved us, and they called me **Frenchie**, right. And then they -- then they -- once I involved in the school then they didn't call me **Frenchie** any more, they called me **Al**, and everybody called me **Al**. Anyway, so we did not talk about the war experience. We didn't talk about what we were, who we were, what happened to us, none of that. We had such a desire, a drive, to mingle, to -- to be accepted, to conform, to -- all right, this is the 1950's, you know. Th-The whole society, you know, was a society of conformists. We -- we



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all wanted, from 1950 -- I graduated in high school '53, we both in June of '53. This was a time when this country was going through the -- the -- the immediate post-war experience that wa -- suddenly the **United States** was th-the leader of the world. The most productive, the richest country. Everything th -- everybody saw everything just going upw -- upward. I-I-It was only one direction for this country. It was u-upward. And we were the only foreigners in the -- in the whole high school of say more than 3,000 students. There were four or five Jewish kids in the school. We were totally accepted, right, even though we were Jewish. And I -- I -- I had -- I had no problem becoming the head yell leader, being elected. As I said, we were friends to the, you know, elite students of the school, th-the -- the -- the students --

Q: What about when you were in college or law school, did people ask you about your background?

A: Well, there it was different, okay. Incidentally, I want you to know, I sent a thank you, you know, to the students of my -- of our s -- class, through the reunion, and they published that thank you. And for the first time, they learned that we had been victim of the Holocaust. They had no idea. And close friends, th-the head of the -- the -- the -- the reunion committee, I mean, she had a long talk with me on the phone. She couldn't believe it, because I thanked them, you know, for integrating us, allowing us -- this the front of my high school. This is the article that I wrote, on this

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book. This was reproduced by a subsequent y-y-year, you know. Sharing memory, a special thank you to **Tech**, which was **Oakland Tech**, you know, that they recopy with my -- with my thanks, I mean, you know, I was happy they did. And here is -- was the article an-and in -- in the news, you know, when we had this school reunion. That's the first time they ever learned of this.

Q: And you didn't have the desire to tell them?

A: No, no, no. My mother did not talk of that time. She --

Q: Well, that was going to be my next question.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you all talk at home?

A: No. Of that time? No way. No, no. This was not a subject of discussion. That's one of the things that it's difficult to understand maybe, but we wanted to survive, we wanted to adapt.

Q: Yeah.

A: We wanted to become integrated in this land where we were -- were we belong. We belong here. We didn't belong in **Germany**, we didn't belong in **France**, okay?

Q: Did you still feel very Jewish?

A: Oh yeah. Oh, that absolutely. Oh, very, very Jewish. Right.

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Q: Were you ever angry when you were younger that you were Jewish, that these terrible things happened to your family because you were Jewish?

A: No. I was never angry, or regretted --

Q: I'm saying as a child.

A: -- as a child, I was never angry that a-a -- that I don't think ever, ever crossed my mind. I was -- always felt -- m-made to feel good about being a Jewish boy. I was -- I-I had nothing but pride in being a Jew.

Q: Yeah, but terrible things happened because of that.

A: I -- I understand, I understand. Remember, my grandfather had his own synagogue.

Q: Right.

A: My father was a very observant Jew. I mean he -- he -- he put on the Tefillin every day. They kept kosher. They kept kosher in **France** during the occupation when we had nothing to eat. When there was no meat, you understand and the only available meat was pork, they gave it to my brother and I, but not -- they wouldn't eat it, okay. To the extent that she could -- my mother could keep kosher, you understand, in -- in this kind of horrible, you know, living conditions, you know, certainly no -- no way you can, you know, maintain dietary laws, but anyway -- but as soon as we came to **America**, she did. And so did my Uncle **Mike** and **Eda**, they

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were here -- they came here in our place, I mean -- no, I did not feel a sense of either shame or resentment about being a Jew, right. And th-that speaks to the -- to the -- to the attitude and feelings that you have. Now, was I glad to be a target and a -- and a - - and a victim? No. I mean, obviously that made me very angry. And when I came to understand how the process had happened to my family and to me and to so forth, so forth, no, I became very angry.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But -- and then I learned more and more, even about the complicity of the **United States** and I call it what it is because it is a complexa -- complicity in the murder of six million Jews, and I say it now, forever it should be remembered that they -- the Germans were complicit, the French were complicit, so was **America**. **FDR** was complicit. The State Department was complicit. And not -- they didn't stop their complicity with this monstrous period of crime. They didn't even redeem it by honor us, you understand, to -- to allow us to immigrate the **United States** before the worst quota imposed. I can't forgive that. I can't forget that. This can never be forgotten, all right. And so people -- when I , you know, speak of -- of the intolerance, you know, oh -- and -- and the dysfunctional treatment of -- of millions of Mexicans and Latin Americans, of the Cubans and -- and the Vietnamese and th -- all these immigrants from everywhere, why is it that Jews were treated differently? And it

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seems -- and you can take that view, that Jews always have to be the ones who have to pierce whatever it is. They are in front. They are the -- the target. And maybe that's it, again. We are the chosen ones.

Q: Did --

A: And we're not only chosen for what we would want to be chosen for, but we were. And I use the word describing what the **United States** did, and this comes from a person who loves his country, this is my dream. This is a place where no human being, right, could have -- could have expected more than I got out of it. This is a country I would kiss the ground. I kissed the ground when I landed in **New York**, I kissed the ground on the [indecipherable]. I kissed the dra -- on my knees I kissed it. But I also kissed the ground of **Sather Gate** which is the entrance port of - - to the University of **California, Berkeley**. And every time I walk under that gate and every time I answer -- enter the grounds of that university, I thank God, I thank **America**, I thank **California** for having allowed me and given me this unbelievable privilege that I never, never would have had in **France** or **Germany**. I and my brother were allowed with nothing, not even speaking the language, but at the end of three years of residence in this country, we were admitted to the University of **California** at **Berkeley**, the most pra -- predominant public institution in the world, right, and certainly predominant against an -- a-at that time against any university in

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the country. We were allowed to go there and to attend and to graduate. And he would have, if he wanted to, he would have gone the di -- post-graduate school, as I did. I went to **Berkeley**, to **Bolt Hall**. We were treated totally equally, fairly, justly. So in every sense the **United States** gave to -- every opportunity to us. We owe every bit of gratitude, you know, and thanks to the **United States**. I mean, look, we came here with nothing, with hope. And this beautiful land, this beautiful country, right, gave us every opportunity. But we had to earn it. And we lived through three years of high school without tutors, without aid, without assistance. We had to earn it. We earned it. And you know what, the rest of the way also we earned, without assistance, without help, right. This is a sink or swim society. Well, we survived. Thank God. But it is only in this beautiful land, right, that gives opportunity to so many people, and has, and does, you know. So I make a judgment on this country. I condemn for what happened during the war and the immediate post-war period, and I praise this country for the period since then.

**End of Tape Four, Side B**

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**Beginning Tape Five, Side A**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Lakritz**. This is tape number five, side

**A.** How did your experience of your childhood and your life affect the raising of your children? Or did it?

A: It a -- and I would tell you in truth two things. I was a very caring and -- and loving father. I am still, but I had my faults. And part of my fault was that I grew up with a certain amount of insecurity and that insecurity strived for security to counterbalance. And as I evolve there was a mixture as a person, both of striving for certain security in terms of at least economic security, and striving to deal with anger. Throughout my life I think that the experience of my childhood has affected my personality in the sense that I am much more explosive or ex -- more explosive than I would have been otherwise. I'm easy to get upset and I am -- once I explode, which is -- doesn't happen often, cause I -- I control it, or it doesn't give me rise to anger. But when I do explode, I explode. And so I was a father who was loving and caring and -- and -- and they could depend on. But if something went wrong or something was not right, they would hear about it plenty. And so in that sense my children have a certain amount of resentment to when I wasn't as kind or as considerate or as sensitive or as -- you know, I -- as I should have been. On the other

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hand, my children see -- at least my daughter does, because her two sons, our grandsons live close to us and we see them often, once a week at least, and we take them on vacation and so forth, so on. Then I'm probably one of their best grandfathers that there is. So as much as I, in my pursuit of s -- trying to strive for security for them, once I achieved that, I also was the greatest -- oh -- th -- I -- what am I talking about with my **[tape break]**. Hold on, let's start over, cause I --

Q: No, you can keep talking. Oh --

A: All right. In any event, so the question you ask is did it affect me as I grew up and matured, and it definitely does. As a trial lawyer I also see it, you know, that I can easily fire up and take intellectual insult or attack, you understand, by somebody's -- I think -- and I do it -- once I am attacked in that way, I become very feraci -- ferocious, I become like the bulldog who -- at your ankle. And I will have the last word. So, yes, in one sense, you understand, I have this anger. One thing that has helped me, truly, is many years ago I started to write some of my history, some of my memories, and that became a -- like a psychological therapy for me, in many ways. To recount for myself -- this is strictly, you know, me, some of these events, some of these experiences, some of those feelings, you know, that I have. And part of retelling and reminding myself and crying along the story, I think has helped me to -- to reconcile myself with the injustices that happened to my family. And I will



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say that I believe the reason I became a lawyer was to spend my life, to ensure to whatever degree I had, in capability of opportunity, to make sure that other people are treated fairly, according to deeds, not according to religion or not according to fate or chance. And after 47 years of -- as a lawyer, continuous practice of law in the state of **California**, I think I have done that with honor and -- so the aftereffect of the experience of the war is I haven't gone out and -- and -- and get a gun and shoot the Nazis or the Germans. I have not taken retaliation against them or others. I have accepted the fate that we had, never to forgive, never to forget. And that's an absolute. And I remember having lunch with this nun who was the as -- who was the assistant of the Cardinal **Mahoney**, the guy who is the Cardinal of all of southern **California**, one of the preeminent Cardinals in this country, and they had selected me for their -- I was the poster child for the 2000 -- the year 2000 of the reunification, or the year redemption between the Catholics and the Jews. And they had one edition that was devoted, and I was the centerfold story, in full color, in full everything. And a -- after it was done, she came and visited me in my office and we went to lunch together, and I expressed some of this feeling of my anger. My anger at what Pope **Pius 12<sup>th</sup>** didn't do. What the Catholic archdi -- hierarchy did not do. The choices they made, and other Catholics eminence and nuns and -- and **[indecipherable]** you know. Sheltered and hid, saved Jews and the others did the

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opposite. And I told her about these, you know, these mixed feelings. And she says -  
- and I said never to forgive, never to forget. She said, of course you should never  
forget. But she says, for your own soul, for yourself, you should forgive. So I have  
to say that between my own therapy in writing about it and talking about it and  
myself and -- and so forth, and the message that she gave to me, somehow I matured  
and so I could bring myself to go back and accept the invitation of the state I was  
born, the city where I was born, to visit. And I did it. I was very curious to see where  
I was born, where I come from, you know, this part of my trip, you know, to get my  
roots. And I got it and I was very happy. I had no resentment, on the contrary. The  
mayor was a perfect English speaking person, who had married an English girl. All  
the people there spoke English perfectly.

Q: Did you feel very German when you were there?

A: No, not at all. No, no, no, no, I didn't feel German at all. This was my birthplace,  
I am honored that I was born there, in a university town that my grandfather  
selected. It's a beautiful town, I just went to my granddaughter's **Bat Mitzvah**, and  
among the guests there is her -- h-her -- one of her uncles, and he works for the  
Pentagon, you know, in a secret, secret job. And he s-said he didn't know where I  
was born, and I told him, you know, cause I showed him this book, they all wanted  
to see it. So he said, **Kiel**, I was in **Kiel**. You know, as part of the Pentagon, the -- he

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visited, and he was th -- you know, toured everywhere and he was taken everywhere. He says -- he said to me, that's a beautiful city. I said yeah. And it's a university city. I said yeah. You know, anyway, I am amazed that many other survivors of the Holocaust that I have met over this period of my life survive what happened to them, and instead of quitting, instead of crying, instead of feeling sorry for themselves, they picked up, right, and said I'm going forward, I'm gonna live, I have to live. Right. They, you know, perished, you know, not by choice but by the hands of criminals and monsters. You know, whether they were the complicit one or the active one, but I'm going to live. And so I met a number of them, including one who survived **Auschwitz** in the -- in a -- that Nazi symbol that was carved on his forehead, and he became one of the early establisher in **Australia** of the -- the mini-shopping malls. A very rich guy. And many others. They survived. They -- they somehow adjusted, you know, and they became husbands and fathers and uncles and -- and grandfathers. I think I have the best of all relationship with my grandsons. My children love me and so forth, but they remember times when I was not too kind to them, right, when I got angry.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: Two.

Q: Two.

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A: A boy and a girl and they each have two. My daughter has two boys and my son, who lives in **New Jersey** has two girls. So all we're doing, us Jews, is reproducing ourselves. And --

Q: When your children were the age that you were when things got difficult, did that bring back more memories for you?

A: No, no. I was living to provide them a living, you know, a middle class, you know, living. I was, you know, striving as a lawyer --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- to support a wife and two children, cause that was the custom in those days, the women didn't work.

Q: Right.

A: And -- and I worked hard and they -- they lived a very norm -- normal life, like the other kids.

Q: Are there --

A: And they did very well. They both went to **UCLA**, they both graduated, right, tremendously. My -- my son was a -- the token white in th -- in -- at **UCLA**, in the school of engineering. All the others were Orientals, and he went and went to **Carnegie Mellon** to get his **M.B.A.**, right. He was one of the applauded students when he graduated. [indecipherable] They are absolutely active with their children.

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My son is the president of the school board in his city. My daughter is the president or head of the -- the **PTA** in all the schools of her children.

Q: Are they --

A: We are all participants, but we are not complainers. We're not -- we don't seek handouts, we don't seek s -- other people's sympathy. We don't need that. We create our own environment. And that is what's to be remembered, right? That we the victim do not accept ourselves as victim, cause we are stronger and better than those who persecuted us. They were criminals but we are the righteous ones. And the ones who helped to save us are the righteous ones. And yes, maybe a miracle saved us. Maybe God did, or maybe he forgot us, but in any event, we didn't quit, and my children haven't quit and my grandchildren will not quit. I wish they were a little bit more religious.

Q: Did you become more religious because of your experiences --

A: No.

Q: -- religious --

A: No.

Q: Same?

A: I am -- I am far, far less religious than my parents.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: My wife, when I married my wife, she told me, I will not keep kosher. If you want that, don't marry me. Okay, cause she was not raised in a Jewish -- she comes from Jewish parents, but they were not active, religious Jews. They were Jews, yes, but not observant Jews. So she complies with my requirement, the minimum requirement. We are Conservative Jews, we go synagogue, right, twice or three times a year, and our children are **Bar Mitzvah** and **Bat Mitzvah**, so are my grandchildren. We are proud to be Jews, we are educated on what Judaism is about and our history and our heritage. At least I profoundly honor our people. I profoundly proclaim, you know, our history. We are second class to nobody.

Q: Are there any sounds or sights or smells that you come across during the day that remind you of your childhood?

A: No.

Q: Doesn't trigger, nothing triggers?

A: No. The only thing that triggers my feeling, my anger or my sadness is, you know, talking about it, or thinking about what happened to my father, what happened to my mother. The years of pain and suffering that she endured, you know. That, you understand, I -- I -- I can never forgive what they did to her, or what they did to him. He -- he died in the -- in the -- in the daith -- death labor camp. **Majdanek** was built, designed, devised, operated for one purpose, to kill.

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Q: Do you -- as you --

A: And I have the records of deportation, I mean, I have the shipment. **Cumberland** number 50, right, from **Drancy** to **Majdanek** in these listed -- do you understand on -- on the -- on the -- on the -- the shipment, right? I mean, I have everything.

Q: Do you think more about your childhood as you've gotten older?

A: No, no. Okay, let me put this in -- in the context. I think that I grew up and developed very normally in the sense that --

Q: You don't feel you've lost your childhood?

A: Well, i-i-i-i -- le -- let me explain something. When I say normally, I say it in the -- in the context that all I overcame, whatever disadvantages, pain and suffering I went through; for example, the fact that I was not educated for many years, right? For some reason, whatever happened, in high school I applied myself to the extent necessary to be able to get grades to get into **Berkeley**. Okay, it came. And in **Berkeley** I became very enthusiastic about the discovery of real education, and I became in love with learning, I became in love with the libraries, I -- I became -- I -- the best time I have is when I go to law library. You know, I -- I love it. But I am an extrovert, you know, I'm out there, you know. And I'm not in pain from the experience, and yet I am. So I am in this balance, you understand, but I am holding it in equilibrium. And it's only certain time when I get angry and pushed, you know,

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or I allow myself to, that I lose that equilibrium. But even if I do, once I express it, it's out of me, right, that's one of the things, the attributes of my personality. That once I let out -- I have to let things out. I'm not an introvert, I'm an extrovert, and so once I let it out, it's gone. I'm past whatever, you know, the moment is. So yes, I am susceptible to get attacked or angry, and to become defensive, I think faster than most people. I react trigger-like, you understand, to certain attacks. More ferociously than most people, and most trial lawyers. I am not an easy adversary. If you attack -- as long as you're civil and professional, hallelujah, **[indecipherable]**. I may even become meek in the process. But once you attack, **psshht**.

Q: Speaking of trials, what was your thoughts during the **Eichmann** trial?

A: Well, okay, you know -- cause this doesn't evoke just **Eichmann**. At the time he was tried I didn't know that it was o-on his order, I mean, his direct order that my father was arrested and incarcerated -- I did not know that. I only knew that he apartami -- epetta -- ep --

Q: Epitomized.

A: Epitomize, you understand, for **Israel**, for the Jews, you know. Here is a living symbol of all our hate and anger and need for revenge, okay. I -- I fully shared whatever was going on. I full shared everything **Israel** did. I commend them, I praise them, they are heroes to the world. In the manner that they did it, in the



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fairness and justice that was handed to the man, right, who again, with the use and abuse of the law, right, who had ordered the arrest, the incarceration, the liquidation of six million Jews. He, right, who did all that, was accorded just the opposite. Every courtesy, every legal rights, every right to defense, everything. So I am, on that sense, I felt justice was done. Just as much he denied justice to my father. But to him justice was done. So I -- you know, I don't -- I know -- no, thank God they -- they found him, they caught him, they tried him, they -- they gave him every chance and the guy confessed, with his damn set of excuses. You know, it's the same with the Germans today. When I was invited to **Kiel** with my cousins and I -- we were the guests of honor of **Kiel [indecipherable]** for seven or eight days, the time the -- the time that they invite thousands, I believe, of people who man different -- the ships, what are they called? With the -- sailboats, they come to regatta in -- in **Kiel**. **Kiel** is the, you know, so we were there during the whole week, the guest of honor. We were taken to every function, to meet everybody. And -- okay. When we had the reception there with the mayor and we had dinner with him, we had several things with him, and all -- all the other. So I was asked to, like my cousin, you know, we all were invited to write in the book, the city. There's pictures of me writing. When I was done writing, both good and bad, the mayor turned to me and he says, I want to give you something. And he went and got out of a drawer, a picture. And the picture

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is part of the aftermath of the war to the city of **Kiel**, and it shows, you know, a very -- I have a copy I have included here -- a destroyed city during the winter in a very heavy snow, and you've got a bunch of people who are walking on foot in this desolate, terrible, abysmal area of the remains of the city of **Kiel**. Well, of course, the whole city was not destroyed by the British and the American bombers. The access to the port were -- the property of my grandfather it was. But he gave me that so that I would get the other side of the coin, to which I'm very sensitive. Well, we had dinner one night, he and I and my cousin. I asked him, why did you people invite us? And he says, because when we have done it in the past, the goodwill that happened paid for whatever happened on both sides. But when we went, the newspaper reported our visit and I -- again, I did not read the whole thing, but the Christian couple who were responsible for bringing attention to us and getting the city and the state to invite us and to give us what I could say is a hundred and five percent, 10 percent, you know, anything that you could expect. I mean, I was -- it was magnificent. We had interpreter. The -- the Jewish historian **Kristina Goldberg** who is a professor there interviewed us and she wrote a whole thesis on it. She had written the history of our family, which is recorded in these books, right, my grandfather and -- and -- and the rest of us are all part of -- of -- you know, thesis and -- and -- and research that she did. But the newspaper wrote an article that the

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Christian couple, right, begrudge the expenditure by the city and the state for such a lavish state for us. So, you know, the Jewish people are very honored in the sense that we have survived by our own means and our own ability to survive. Mentally, emotionally, economically, my family did not ask for money --

Q: Reparations?

A: Reparation. **France** paid her some money. We received my inheritance of my grandparents, you know, I mean the property was evaluated 1950 or '51. The seven of us all received the then appraised value of the land. That land is one of the most expensive, income producing land in the city of **Kiel**. Today the stadium was being rebuilt, you know, on that land. Of course, other land too, because it's very big and our property wasn't that big. And it is a place in **Kiel**, which is in the northern part of **Germany**, it's very cold. And all of the sports activity, conventions, or -- everything of income producing to the city occurs in that -- in that plaza. So we received an appraised value of 1950, of raw land. Thirty years later, 40 years later, as a lawyer I wanted to know. I wasn't interested then of the money, in fact, I hated them. I don't hate them more, you know, those who live in **Germany** today. I hate those who -- who sit back, committed all these crimes, yeah, I hated them. But not these that are here. And I ask because my cousins wanted to know, aren't we entitled to a proper inheritance, given the value of our property that was taken from us? And

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I asked attorneys for a Jewish, so forth, to advise me as to whether not we had rights. And I asked through the Christian couple for a set of lawyers in **Kiel**. I was willing to pay whatever it costs. And I had these meetings and I had these reviews and they told me to -- you waited too long. The Statute of Limitation barred any -- but we did inherit, so -- not much, but it helped to pay for our education.

**End of Tape Five, Side A**

**Beginning Tape Five, Side B**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Alfred Lakritz**. This is tape number five, side **B**, and you were talking about your property in **Kiel**.

A: Okay, I -- I wanted to add something. I have collected in these 20 years, with some help, with this Christian couple and also some luck, the confirmation of the events that I have related. Everything I have related in terms of factual event is confirmed by documents, records that I've collected and I'm sure others, by French historian, by German historian, by the work of -- the records of the German government, of the French government. And I want at least the future to understand that what I have stated is the truth. Part of that is in this collection of documents and copies of confirmation by these historians and the acts of the state of **Germany** and the Republic of **France**.

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Q: What is the title of the book you've been referring to?

A: Well, I'm referring to not one, I'm referring to a number.

Q: Okay.

A: The book that I am referring to, which is my collection that I put together so far, which is a work in progress, I have entitled, "**Holocaust documentation to the suffering of the Lakritz - Weber family, 1934 to 1945.**" On the cover is a page of my family, my father, my mother, my brother and I on the beach in the city of **Kiel, Germany** when I was a little over two years old and my brother was a -- a few months old. I have very few pictures of my family because my mother and my father were afraid that when they would be searched, arrested, that their identity as Jews would be discovered, well -- in this collection that I'm going to leave with the Holocaust Museum, I intend to supplement it by an index of each page and each document and each photograph and each so forth. But I do want to say this, that the cover of the book, some of the books made by the city of **Kiel**, and the state that I was born in, **Germany**, recites and refers and relates the history of my family, my grandfather in particular. The -- **Kristina Goldberg** is a -- who is a professor over there outside of **Kiel**, or in **Kiel**, or by the other town, I've forgotten which, but anyway, it's written about, incited about our family and **Kiel** and what happened to us. She interviewed also after she did it, then she found out we were coming. So she,

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with the permission of the city and the state went along with us, interviewed us and then she wrote another --

Q: What -- what year did you go back to **Kiel**?

A: **Kiel** we went -- was it 2001?

Q: Okay, okay.

A: I went back to **France**, I mean, on the thank you trip to the nuns and to the **Ros** family and to the **Guyaux** family and the **Rozinsky** family. I went to thank them. I made a -- a decision to do it. The Catholic archdiocese of southern **California** helped me to locate this -- these -- these nuns, this order of -- turned out to be the order where **Bernadette** was a member, and they utilized the Catholic archives in **France** and elsewhere. Incidentally, that congregation was th-the congregation of nuns in **La Soeur de la Charité [speaks French]**. Well, I'm sure nobody will translate that properly. Anyway, they have acknowledged my -- my -- my being hidden by them. They have included me in their -- in their archive. Now, everything I have said, all right, the arrest and -- and detention and death of my father is recorded by the French government. It is recorded by the German government. It is attested to by **[indecipherable]** in his research, including the very shipment that he was in, and his death, ultimate death in -- in **Majdanek**, by **Lublin**. The fact that I recited, that I was honored by the Catholic archdiocese to be their poster child, right,

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is a recorded event. It was published in their distributed publication called, "**The Tidings**", and this was published in January 2001, because of the second Vatican and because of Pope pi -- Pope **Pius -- John Paul** th-the -- the -- the second. I have included m-many of the pages of the -- the i -- the historical research done by the French historian that I referred to in -- of the Jews of ther -- **Lot-et-Garonne**, which confirms that what happened to my parents an-and to me. The German state where I was born, not only did acknowledge what happened to us, but they also acknowledge the -- the death of my grandfather, my paternal grandfather and the -- the -- the last of my uncles, where they were sent and they were killed, at **Riga**. And the memorial is there, they are listed i-in the deaths of that camp, right, and I was sent all that documentation and th-the -- the efforts that they -- they are -- the city of **Kiel** is one of the sponsor of that particular monument and maintenance, in perpetuity they told me. As I said, the city of **Kiel**, at my request created finally, a memorial to the Jews which basically I have to say that all of these efforts, throughout, that what's happened in **Kiel** has centered basically on my family, because the museum in **Kiel** is center -- as I said, of -- of memorial and photos and so forth, which ha-has my -- my cousins, my family in it. So, I have to say that my family is honored. It's sad to have that as an inheritance, but we don't feel sorry for ourselves. We move forward, we prevail, all right. We -- we meet the challenges,

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and I -- I say that not as a s -- matter of speech, but this is a matter of absolute fact. So in what you ask, you know, the question of how did you emotionally, as I understand, I mean, cope with different thing? Well, I'll give you the proof. The proof of the pudding is what is the bottom of the balance sheet, right. What is it that you did with your life? What is it that your brother did? What is it your mother did? Well, I'll tell you what my mother did. She sacrificed everything for her two sons. She worked like hell. Every day she would travel, you understand, by the bus, you know, from **Oakland** to **San Francisco**. Every day of her life, right, until she retired. Every day she worked to earn enough money, right, so we could go to school, you know? Not depend on -- on charity, on poverty, or anything, you know. We -- she did it. Now sure, we had a little bit of help from my inheritance, we had a little help that was given to her in-in -- in some reparation, you know, by the German government. Some by a pension of **France**, right, cause they were absolutely guilty of complicity, you know, to the murder of my father. I mean, that's absolute. I condemn them as total accomplices, okay. The fact that my father's name is on the memorial of the dead in my town, right, the only Jew that is so honored, you know, i-is -- is a -- is -- is a proof of the fact that some French people recognized the enormity of their complicity. But to some degree, we have to understand, you know, they had limited choices. They could only act at the peril of



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their own life, and they had to depend on everybody else. So, you know, in this whole ballgame, right, who are the only real, real monster? Of course, it's the German. This educated, right, most advanced culture of all became induced and seduced by these -- these -- these monsters. So they're all accomplices, they're all murderers. Under the laws the way we have it in the **United States**, if you are an accomplice before the fact or after the fact to a murder, you are guilty of murder. They are guilty of murder, period. All of them. That's it. Now, again, the -- the -- the importance of my statement here is that there is balance. And those who survived, some of them have survived that they can see, still see the evil and the dark of what happened, and yet live a beautiful life, without forgiving, without forgetting. I will never forget the murderers of my father. Never forget the pain and suffering they inflicted on my mother. And it would be a dishonor to me or anybody who lived through what I lived through, not to honor their mother and father, or their relatives, right, for their horrible, horrible death, you know. And that is the legacy. And I ask myself, why was I allowed to live? You know, why was I spared? Well, I believe this is one of the reasons. This collection of work, my testimony here, right. I didn't give it earlier because I didn't have all the documents that I wanted, right. Now I have it. Now I give it, and I give my judgments, too. I answer your inquiry, but I'm willing to give it to you in a sense of saying I condemn what should be condemned.

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Okay, there is one other point that I need to make. The **United States of America**, to its credit, has learned from the serious, horrible injustices that were done to the Jews of **Europe**. And in its greatness and kindness and generosity, as was true in the past but not to the Jew, they became very generous to others. And that is a credit, because in the **United States**, after they recognized what they had done wrong or been complicit with, they were among the first, if not the first to recognize the state of **Israel**. They are, and stood, often alone between 1945 and -- and now -- or '48, to be more correct, and now, to stand and protect **Israel**, provide them arms and money and -- and support, politi -- many, many, many time the lone country, the lone voice. Many, many time **France** and **England**, right, who should have supported, right, **Israel**, they voted the other way or they remained silent. The **United States of America**, to its great credit, also grew up and learned. And the fact that we today even consider that a black could be president of the **United States**, or a woman become president of the **United States** finally, I think in great part is the lessons that were learned by the **United States** to the wrongs that they committed to the Jews. So the generosity of this country, and it is a generous country, I think in part, is a debt of repayment to what they didn't do to the Jews. But that doesn't diminish my love for this country.

Q: In closing, is there any short message you wanted to give to your grandchildren?

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A: Study, learn, but respect your history and your people.

Q: That's an important --

A: Thank you for this opportunity, thank you. I thank the **United States** Holocaust Museum. I am happy and proud and we are blessed to have this museum. May it succeed forever.

Q: What a nice note to end on.

A: Of course.

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

**End of Tape Five, Side B**

**Conclusion of Interview**