

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Harry Markowicz, conducted by Gail Schwartz on May 16, 2012 in Silver Spring, Maryland. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum.

You have been interviewed before by the Steven Spielberg Shoah Foundation. But just to put this interview in a framework, I'm going to summarize where you were during the war and then we will focus on your post-Holocaust experience.

You were born August 9, 1937 in Berlin. Your parents were originally from Poland. And you have an older brother, Manny, and a sister, Rosa, who were eight and nine years older than you. Your family went to Antwerp, Belgium in 1938.

And then in May, 1940, you went to the French border. But you were stateless, because your parents had been from Poland. You went back to Antwerp. And your father was called to work. So your family left Antwerp. And suddenly went to Brussels in 1941.

In the summer of 1942, you went into hiding. You three children were placed with a family, a non-Jewish family whose name was [PERSONAL NAME]. And then later, you and your sister went to the outskirts of the city to a children's home. And then after that, your mother came and got you and placed you with another family, the Vanderlindens.

And then you joined your parents again. And you went to Brussels. And your mother came and got you from the Vanderlindens right before liberation. So we are now up to the time of liberation. Before we go on though, I just wanted to ask you if you had any early, early memories. Because you were so young, born in the summer of '37. For instance, about what happened at Dunkirk. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Yes. That's my very, very first memory. It happened at the border or near the border. We had been refused entry into France because we were stateless. And my memory is of being in a ditch with my mother and other people.

You are three years old now?

Almost.

Almost three, right.

Yes. And on the road next to me, there was a, what I learned later, was a British soldier, part of the British Expeditionary Forces that were stationed in France and Belgium before the war started. And the officer was looking up in the sky with binoculars. And I fell asleep.

When I woke up, he was gone. And I asked my mother where was this soldier. And she told me that the soldiers were gone. And she seemed to be afraid at this point. Later, I learned that the British soldiers were evacuated from Dunkirk, which was just over the border of Belgium and France.

All right. Let's move ahead then to right before liberation. You said your mother came and got you from the family. And do you remember that?

Yes, I remember. Because by this time I was very attached to the Vanderlinden, especially Mrs. Vanderlinden. And she was very attached to me. She treated me like a son. And my mother showed up. She came and visited me occasionally.

This time she came and she wanted to bring me to my parents' hiding place, which was an apartment that looked like it was in a vacant building. And I didn't know why she wanted to come and pick me up. I know I was a little upset, and Mrs. Vanderlinden also. But my mother said that I could come back after the liberation.

So I went with my mother. We took the street car. And at some point at a stop, there was a German truck came by. Was

being pulled by a horse. Apparently, it had run out of gas.

And there was also a soldier lying on top of the truck with a heavy machine gun. But he looked very insecure. He kept looking around, like expecting maybe to be shot at. Which was the case, but I didn't know that. And then my mother said, pointing to that scene, she said, always remember this. Don't forget.

And you still have remembered it very vividly.

Right. I have not forgotten it. So then we went-- I thought we were going to the apartment where my parents were hidden. But in fact, we went around the corner where there was a beauty parlor. And I didn't know this before, but one day my mother had been walking on the street around the corner and some German soldiers came in the opposite direction on the same sidewalk. So she got a little panicky and she went into the beauty parlor.

And once she was inside, she was just standing there. And the woman who ran this beauty parlor told her to come in the back. In many stores there was a living area behind the store and above the store. My mother hesitated to go in the back. She was afraid. So the woman said that her husband was Jewish, which was the case.

And so they became friends. And their backyards were connected because they were at right angles to each other. And there was a wall separating them. But they made arrangements to go over the wall in case some danger would happen to one or the other. In several cases, my parents went over the wall. I don't remember these people's names.

They went over the wall. One time, I know it's because the Germans came to pick up the Jewish family living in the house next door. So they didn't know that it wasn't for them, so they went over the wall. And as it was getting close to liberation, my parents moved in with this couple. And that's where my mother took me also.

By this time, or maybe a day or two later, you could hear the cannon fire in the distance. And so we knew that liberation was very, very soon to come. I remember once I was standing in the entrance of the beauty parlor and on the corner I saw a group of men wearing khaki. But they weren't soldiers. I didn't know who they were.

And they were carrying cases, like wooden cases. And they opened them up. And they were distributing rifles to other men that came along. So I went back in the beauty parlor and I asked, what's going on? Who are these people? They were actually Belgians who were getting ready to join the fight against the Germans.

Then, again, shortly after that-- I don't know how many days went by. It was maybe one day or so. One morning, my mother took me and she said we're going to go to-- it was a park. I didn't know exactly why we were going there. And she said, the English are there. I'm not sure what she said, actually. If she said the English-- she probably did, but I'm not sure I knew what that meant.

And so we started going. And I asked my mother, why isn't my father coming? She tried to explain that he hadn't been outside except to go to the beauty parlor for two years, and he was not ready to face people. So we were walking along. My mother was kind of in a hurry. We were on one street. And we passed a tank that was burning. And I was fascinated. I don't know if it was-- I assume it was a German tank, now looking back at it. And probably a Molotov cocktail had been thrown at it. It was burning on top. And I didn't see any soldiers, just fire.

So I stopped to look. My mother said, let's go, and grabbed me, my hand and continued with a lot of other people. Everybody was rushing to this park. And when we arrived there, there were tanks lined up in all the lanes. And it was all very strange. There were a lot of civilians around the tanks. And everybody was happy and cheering.

And my mother took me towards a tank. There was a soldier standing on it. And we looked at each other and we looked at the soldier. He looked at us. And then he put out his arms downward. And my mother lifted me up, and he grabbed me. And he pulled me up and he held me in his arms.

I looked at my mother and she said, give him a kiss, because we didn't have any way of communicating with them. So I did. And then I looked back down and she was crying. So I couldn't understand-- I was a little distraught that my mother

was crying. And she said, it's all right. And I remember, the soldier kept smiling as if it was OK.

After that, I don't remember all the details. But my mother took me back to the Vanderlindens like she had promised to do. But there was another reason. My brother and sister, by then, they were living in the Ardennes. And my parents wanted to pick them up. Which wasn't easy because you had to go there by train or municipal trams, maybe. But they weren't running. And there was no communication.

So anyway, I went back to the Vanderlindens. And I didn't really know how long I stayed there. I only figured out a few years ago when I went back to the Vanderlindens, every house on the street had a huge flag of the Allies-- American, British, French, Belgian. There was even a red flag. And on these flags, I know how people made them. They were the size of double sheets hanging down in front of the houses.

Then one day I went outside to play as I usually did, but I quickly noticed that there were no flags on the houses. So I went in and asked Mrs. Vanderlinden. She ran a store, sort of a hardware store. And she said that the Germans might be coming back. And she seemed very anxious. Because I didn't know this at the time. It was many years later that I figured out this was the Battle of the Bulge.

So this is the way I know that I spent much more time with the Vanderlindens after the liberation than I originally thought. Because the Battle of the Bulge was in December. The liberation was in September. And so I was still with the Vanderlindens at the time of the Battle of the Bulge, several months after the liberation.

Then, probably a short time of that, I'm not sure, my parents had rented a house. And the apartment where they lived was much too small for the whole family. So then they rented a house, a nice little house. And my brother and sister and I were there. But also my cousin, [? Lottie. ?]

Her father was my mother's brother. And her parents had been deported on the last transport from Belgium. It was transport number 26. They also had a son who had the same name as my brother, Manfred or Manny. And they were together. At some point, they were hidden together by a priest who was well-known for having saved a lot of, hundreds of Jewish children.

It's Father Joseph Andr ©, who has been recognized by Yad Vashem and many other organizations. He placed the kids in convents or orphanages or in private families. But until he found the places, they stayed with him. And both my cousin and my brother were with him when the Germans started watching him, suspecting that he was also involved in the underground. So he had to go in hiding himself, the priest.

And my brother went to live with a family that was not related, but were friends of the family my sister was staying with in the Ardennes. But my cousin didn't have any place to go. And so he went back to his parents' apartment. And they were denounced. There were seen during an air raid, probably going to the shelter. And they were deported. My aunt is the only one who came back. But they had a daughter, [? Lottie, ?] who was hidden someplace else. So my parents took in [? Lottie ?] and she was living with us. We still didn't know the fate of my mother's brother and his wife.

One day, his wife came to the house. I happened to be there alone one afternoon. The doorbell rang and I opened the door. And there was this strange woman, somebody I didn't know. And she also looked strange, a little bit. And she didn't say anything for a long time. And I didn't know what to do. I knew I wasn't supposed to let in strangers in the house. And she didn't say anything.

And finally, she said I'm your aunt, Tante [PERSONAL NAME]. And I didn't recognize her. Of course, two years had gone by since we had gone in hiding. But also she had been in Auschwitz during that time and on a death march. So when she told me her name, I let her. And then my parents came home.

That evening after dinner, my aunt kind of spilled her guts, told the whole story from beginning to end. And we were all very, very quiet listening to her. I remember also at some point she pulled up her sleeve. We all kind of leaned over to see what was on her arm. It was a number tattooed on her arm.

I had started going back to school. Actually, I was going to school already when I was living with the Vanderlindens. At first, when they were living out in the country, it was a Flemish area. And the school was a Catholic school that was Flemish, which I didn't know. So that didn't help me very much. Then later when they moved into the city I went to a French-speaking school. But there were some gaps there.

So when I moved in with my parents again, I started school but I was a year behind. And later I caught up. It was a very small neighborhood school. And the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade were in the same room. So I could hear and see what this class ahead of me was doing. So by the end of the fifth year of school, the teacher said I could go on to seventh grade. Which is in-- what do they call it here? --junior high school. So I caught up there.

In '49, my brother got his visa to come to the States. Since my brother and sister and I were born in Germany but our parents were born in Poland, we, the kids, got visas earlier because the quota was shorter for Germans than it was for Poles. So my brother got his visa first. My parents were not that interested in moving to the States. They got established again in Belgium.

They were happy there. But my brother wanted to go to the States. And shortly after that-- that was in 1949. Shortly after that, my sister got her visa and she joined him. They went to Seattle, Washington. And then in 1951, my parents got their visas. I guess I could have gone to the States before, but I was only 11 when my brother left. So they didn't want me to go without them. So we came to the States, arrived in New York on the Queen Mary. And then--

Yeah, before-- we'll come to that in a minute. I just wanted to ask you some questions though. Was your family a very religious family?

Not at all.

They assimilated or secular?

They were secular. We observed the High Holidays. I didn't have-- well, I had my bar mitzvah and I had--

Well, that was later. No, I was talking about while you were still in Europe.

Yeah. Well, I had my bar mitzvah in Europe. I was 15. Just before. No. I mean, I would say they were a little religious, but not very. My mother didn't keep kosher. What was before, I don't know. My brother thinks that when they were in Germany, they were a little more, maybe a little more religious.

What kind of work did your father do?

He was in a tanning business.

A leather and hides?

Leather and hides, yes. Exactly.

And then you talked about your aunt and uncle. Did you know or did your parents know or did they talk about what was happening during the 1940s to the Jews in Europe? Did they have any idea? And did they share that with you?

We never--

At the time.

At the time itself?

Yeah.

They didn't talk to me about it. I don't know what they knew.

So what did you know as a young child about-- you knew you were Jewish?

Yes.

Did you know why you were hiding?

I sort of knew that we were being-- that the Germans were looking for us, and that something-- I don't know if they ever said what would happen. Maybe they didn't know at first. But it was not a good thing.

Yeah. Was it something that you talked, as a young child, over with either the Vanderlindens or your parents?

No. The one thing that my parents told me-- I remember the scene, even. They said that I should be very careful not to urinate in front of anybody in school or outside, not to show my penis. And I said, why? It was very strange. And they told me, well, it's because the penis is different because you were Jewish.

Did you know what that meant?

No, I didn't know what Jewish meant. But I knew it was different from others.

And as far as the other extended family, do you know what happened to them? And if so, what it was? You talked about your aunt and uncle.

They were in Belgium.

Any other extended family?

Yes, there was-- on my father's side, his two brothers had left Poland too. One was in Paris with his wife. And he joined the French Foreign Legion and was sent to North Africa. And his other brother went to Tangier with his family, with his wife.

And there was another sister who was also living in Paris with her husband and children. Their daughter's the same age and I am. And after the war started, they were able to get out of France. Go to Spain and, I guess, maybe Portugal. And they caught this ship. They didn't have visas for any country. But when they got to Venezuela, they were allowed to get off the ship. So they are the ones that survived.

They survived.

My father two or three-- I don't know-- other sisters and his parents, they perished. They didn't survive. They were in Poland. On my mother's side, there were 11 children. She had 10 siblings. Her father had died before the war, of natural causes. So there's her grandmother and all her siblings that were still in Poland. And of those-- no, I shouldn't say they were all in Poland. One aunt and husband, they were in Hungary. And then from Hungary, they got to England. He was a [INAUDIBLE]. And so he got a job in-- not in England, in Ireland first. And so they were safe.

And my mother's youngest brother, he and his wife went east. When Germany invaded the Russian part of Poland, they went that way. And they ended up in Siberia. And then later, after Germany attacked Russia, the conditions got better. And there were many other Polish Jews were allowed to join the Polish division in the Russian army. And they were sent to Iran, Persia for the oil fields. But on the way, they deserted and went to Palestine, along with many others, including the former President of Israel, Begin.

When you were staying at the Vanderlindens as a young child, were you able to lead any kind of a normal life? And do you remember it as being a particularly fearful time?

No. Living with the Vanderlindens was a normal life. I went out with them. You know, we went to movies. We occasionally had an ice cream in the park or something. And as I said, I went to school.

When you saw a German soldier, did that elicit any responses?

Well, I think were kind of told-- I have sort of the back of my mind something like, don't look up. Don't draw attention.

Just keep walking, yeah.

I'd seen German soldiers in the street, but you know.

But you had freedom of movement and you were able to play with other children.

Yes.

You were speaking French.

Yes, I spoke French. I was not supposed to speak German, which I knew, because I spoke it with my parents.

Oh, you spoke German with your parents.

Yes. Since they didn't even know French. They had lived in Germany for 20 years. So the language is an important thing. There were some secrets that I was able to keep.

And did you take the Vanderlindens' last name?

Yes. Actually, I had a new name.

What was your name?

[INAUDIBLE] Harry is not only British or American, it's also a German name. But it's definitely not Belgian or French. So I was Henry Vanderlinden.

--Was your name.

And I had a whole new identity. I was this little Belgian boy, son of Adele and [? Adolphe ?] Vanderlinden. And I had an older sister named Florence. They were not religious at all. And so that was not an issue at all.

Why do you think I took you in?

Well, you know, I never asked. But when I went to live in France to work, actually in 1976, I went to see them. And my then girlfriend, American girlfriend who's now my wife, came to visit me. And we went to Brussels to see the Vanderlindens. By this time, I think her husband had died already. And Arlene, my wife, asked why she took us in-- my sister and I. And that was the first time. I don't know why it never occurred to me to ask.

What she said was that somebody knocked at the door and asked if she would be willing to take in a child. She didn't say Jewish. She wasn't told that it was a Jewish child. And it wasn't-- obviously, it wasn't my sister and I. It was a young teenage girl. And she stayed with them for a while. And then they became concerned because she had a boyfriend and they were not very careful. They wrote to each other and revealed a lot of things which probably would have endangered them all if somebody had looked into it. There was censorship of mail. But so they asked the organization to take the girl back. And so my sister and I were traded.

All right, let's move to after the war before the '45 to 1951 era. You said you went to school. Was this a joyous time for you? You were eight years old at the end of the war and, as you said, going to junior high and so forth.

I was not unhappy, I know that.

But did you talk to your parents about the previous years? No.

We never talked.

They never talked, yeah. And your father was able to start his business again?

Yes. Yes, he was. But no, we never talked.

Did you talk with other friends about it?

We never-- no. It's amazing. Where we lived was not a Jewish neighborhood. So in the neighborhood, I had no Jewish friends. But then when I went to junior high, there was a Jewish boy. And it happened that his parents and my parents were friends. But it was like, when the war-- no, when we were liberated and we all got together again as a family, I remember very distinctly my sister saying nothing happened to us. We were not caught and we didn't starve.

So whatever we went through was the same as everybody else, except we were Jewish so there were some more complication. But we never-- even though the word survivor didn't exist, wasn't used like it is now. But you would consider people who were in concentration camps to have survived something. We didn't survive anything. We're just nothing.

So we never talked about it. We never inquired about us. But after a while, my mother learned that other siblings and grandmother-- I'm sorry, and her mother were dead. And the same with my father. I don't remember them ever talking about it or crying.

With you?

With me. Or showing anything. I was even a little surprised, maybe. How come-- I don't know when I started feeling that it was strange that they never talked about or showed emotions about it. Like, they didn't even cry.

What did America mean to you at that point, now you were going to be going to the United States? Did America of any meaning for you?

Well, yes.

As a child?

As a child. As I said, we were liberated by British. But then, soon American troops came. And--

Did you know any English?

I didn't. My brother knew some English and he'd like to practice it. And so he'd hang around with soldiers. And when he met Jewish soldiers, he'd invited them home for dinner. I didn't-- I only learned this maybe a year ago, so I thought it was my father who would invite them. But it was my brother. And so we had a lot of soldiers.

And also, my mother had a cousin who was in the Jewish Brigade. He would come to our house with a British truck and give me a ride. I remember there was a round sunroof and I would stand up on the seat. And I didn't know then, of course, that he was using-- the truck was used for bringing refugees to, I think, Italy from where they departed for Palestine.

And then, even before the war ended, an American came into our lives. It was my cousin in Ireland had married an American officer, a dentist. Her brother was a dentist too. So they met in the same way. Her father had invited this

young American officer, whose father was a rabbi, for dinner. And they got married.

And then he was sent to Belgium. He worked in a field hospital in Liege, which is quite close to Brussels. Belgium is very small. And he started coming to our house every weekend or whenever he was off. And he was able to do everything, like fix things. Things that my father would never be able to do. And so I was always happy to be around him.

One thing, he used to be a great storyteller. But he also had a very loud voice. So we spoke German because we didn't know English. And he knew-- he had learned German in school. At least, [INAUDIBLE] in school. I don't know where else. He spoke it quite well. And sometimes we'd go out in public, like to a restaurant or a cafe. And he would talk. But it was always in this booming voice in German.

Oh, dear.

I didn't know where to hide. I'd keep my distance because everybody would start staring.

Right. So did you feel very Belgian at that time?

No, I didn't feel-- I always felt like an outsider. But I still do. Anywhere I am, almost.

So when your folks said you were going to the United States?

I was happy.

You were happy. Why?

Well--

You're a teenager now.

Yeah, pre-teenager. I'd say 12 or 13 when we came. So I don't know. My brother was already here. And also, I guess-- I know that with my friends, we had arguments who were, like, for example, who was the best soldier? Well, first of all, the Germans were the best soldiers. Then the British were next. And I mean, that was my friends' arguments. And then, then came the American soldiers. But like, one of my friends said-- his family was communist-- General Motors won the war. I had no idea what General Motors was. [LAUGHS]

Who he was, right.

Who is General Motors? And since then, I have. But in a way, that's been confirmed. I mean, the fact that the United States had such an output of material that was able to continue while the Germans couldn't produce. So anyway, I was always liked the Americans better than the others. And so I was prepared to come here. I was happy to come here. I liked American things.

You did?

Well, my friends probably did too. But there was a--

By the time you came here, did you know any English?

I knew a little. In the eighth grade, we started learning English in school. The teacher had a British accent. And for maybe the last six months-- or after my parents got the visa, there was a period of time before we came. During that period, they hired a tutor. But in reality, I knew very little.

I remember we arrived in London. We went to visit my uncle and aunt who lived in London. And crossed on the ship.



And then we took the train. And we're at the train station. And we didn't know where we were or where to go. So this man came up to us and asked if we could help. All I could think of saying was, no, thank you. [LAUGHS] In fact, we could have used help.

Now, you said you took the Queen Mary.

Yes.

How did that come about?

Well, my parents had money. And we traveled second class, unfortunately for me. I mean, they always used to-- when we travel-- every summer, we went to the coast in Belgium and we stayed in nice hotels or rented villas. So my parents were well-off. [INAUDIBLE] Not me. Not wealthy, but well-off. And so then, let's say, they felt it didn't suit them to go third class, tourist class. So we went second class on the Queen Mary. The front of the ship is first class. And the back of the ship is the tourist class. And second class is the whole length of this huge ship.

But there were very, very few passengers in second class. If you can afford it, you go first class. And there were no children. I was all by myself. I did meet a reporter for the Saturday Evening Post. Of course, he didn't speak French and I didn't speak English. And he-- I don't know if it was his girlfriend or what. There was a Chinese woman. And by coincidence, his sister had lived for some time on the same street where we lived in Brussels. And so they took me around and sort of entertained me.

When you docked in New York, was that anything special? Do you have memories of that?

Yes. Because this is even embarrassing. I didn't know much, I guess. I didn't know about the Statue of Liberty, or I didn't know it was such a big deal. So one morning, the reporter came and knocked on our cabin. And said, we're going to go by the Statue of Liberty. We're arriving. And at first I didn't know what it was that we were going to see. But I went with him, and with a lot of people on the side of the ship looking towards the Statue of Liberty. And he said to me, aren't you excited? And I got embarrassed because the French word excited is sexual. [LAUGHS]

Oh, OK. Sexually excited. So I didn't know--

How to answer. [LAUGHS]

So I was looking forward to arriving in New York. And we were met by friends of my parents. They took us to a hotel. But I was really disappointed by New York. It was so noisy, so dirty. I remember the first morning or very early in the morning, the garbage trucks picking up garbage cans, and the smell on the subway. It was all very unpleasant. Of course, not knowing any English didn't help.

Right, right. And then how long did it take to get-- did you go directly to Seattle?

We spent a few days. There were other friends that my parents-- they were planning to live in New York. We were just going to see my brother and sister.

Oh, I see. To visit, yeah.

And we went to LA because my parents had some friends there too. And they had round-- we bought round trip tickets, flying. And when we arrived in Seattle, we found out that my brother was being drafted. The process had started with the Korean War. And--

You're now 14?

No, I'm still 13. It was March.

Oh, it was March.

'51, so I was still 13.

You're 13. You had mentioned about a bar mitzvah. Did you--

I had my bar mitzvah in Brussels.

What was that like?

Well, I didn't like the whole process. How I had the tutor also who came to the house. First, it was a young woman, a pretty young woman. But for some reason, after a while, it was a man. And in either case, I didn't like having to learn to read Hebrew and prepare for the bar mitzvah. It was all quite strange to me because we didn't live in [INAUDIBLE]. So it was a relatively small bar mitzvah. My parents invited their friends. Oh, we did have relatives. Yes, we had cousins who then lived in-- they're still in Los Angeles. But he has Alzheimer's now. And there was only one friend. One friend, the boy who was in my class when I started junior high. And my cousin. A cousin from who came from Paris.

And this was post-war, so there was no danger.

Yes.

So you could be relaxed.

Yes. I was with my parents. Later, I found out this woman who made a film called As If It Was Yesterday, I think it's the title. And it's about Belgian children being hidden in Belgium. And her parents were at my bar mitzvah. I never met them and I've never met her. She lives in New York. My sister has met her, I think.

Interesting. Well, now you're visiting your family in Seattle.

And we're going to stay just, I don't know, 10 days or so and then go back to New York. And so this was quite a shock to my parents. My brother, he had tried to stay out of the army by saying that he was my parents' support. But my parents came with enough money that they decide, the draft board decided that they didn't need to be supported by my brother. So he was drafted. And went to basic training. And then he got ready to go to Korea.

And this is really strange, but my father's hair turned white, I think, overnight. I've heard that it happens. So then we decided, my parents decided to stay in Seattle because my brother had a business there. It was the food vending machines. That it's [INAUDIBLE] was the cousin, the American cousin, [PERSONAL NAME] is his name. His brother had a business, this vending machine business, in Tacoma, Washington. And he wanted to expand it to Seattle. So my brother became a partner with my father's money. [LAUGHS]

And you went on to school.

I started school. Which was strange because, as I said, we arrived in March. So maybe we arrived in Seattle at the beginning of April. And we're staying with my brother and sister in an apartment. And I don't know, it doesn't matter that they had an apartment. And after I'd been there for a while, the neighbors told my sister and my brother I should go to school. So my brother inquired where the nearest school was. And it was a high school. And I was still in the eighth grade. In this high school, they start in ninth grade. We went to talk-- my brother took me to talk to the principal.

And the principal asked me what I'd studied. My brother translated. And since I had studied many things that they weren't doing an eighth grade in America, like studying Latin and algebra, geometry, the principal very wisely said, well, he can stay here. Normally, they would have had to send me to junior high school. But he said, he can stay here. The year's almost finished, and you'll use the time to learn English. So he put me in a French class and a German class and a couple of English classes. And then by the fall, I could speak English.

You could speak English.

With an accent.

Right. And so you completed high school in Seattle.

Yes. It was a high school where there a lot of Jewish--

And then what did you do?

I went to University of Washington and studied there for four years.

So you got a degree?

I got a degree in French.

Did you talk about your childhood at all? Did people ask you?

No, never talked about it.

Never talked about it, OK.

But one thing happened. I was having trouble writing, like, for English classes. And my advisor-- we had advisors. I remember his name, Otis, Mr. Otis. He said, oh, in Belgium they teach writing very well. I didn't know how he knew. So he said, well, that shouldn't be a problem.

And he said, why don't you go see a counselor at the counseling center. So I did. And for some reason, there were two people. I think they were psychologists. And they were sitting across from me. And one of them said, well, tell us about yourself, your background. And that was the first time I started talking about myself. And I started crying.

Were they sympathetic?

Yes.

Yeah, good.

Yes, they were sympathetic. They said that I needed counseling, but it would be long-term and they only offered short-term there. So they recommended I see a psychiatrist. So I told my parents, and said, why should you see a psychiatrist? You're not crazy. [LAUGHS]

Right.

So I didn't go to a psychologist until many years later, in my late 20s. And a friend of mine said he was seeing somebody. And he said it was very good. He was Jewish and he was very good. I didn't know exactly what that meant. But I kind of thought maybe I could see him. So I called his office. And told me he is all booked up. He couldn't see me. He wasn't taking any new patients. But there was somebody in the same suite of offices who might. And so I went. Made an appointment with this other psychiatrist who was traditional. He was Freudian, I guess.

Freudian.

Yes. He never said anything. He had me talk and he wrote notes. Except one time, he reacted. I don't remember what I told him. It's something like, I'm lucky. And I don't know what I was referring to. Maybe I met a girl or something. And all of a sudden, he blew up. He said, you're lucky? You think you're lucky? You think you're special, don't you?

I couldn't respond. I mean, he didn't know anything about me because he had never asked. And I never talked about my past. And if he look at my early childhood, yeah, I was lucky. I had-- let's see, in Belgium I had a 50-50 chance of surviving. Maybe less because I was a child. But see, if I'd been caught, it would have been less.

So definitely I would say, yes, I was lucky. But for some reason he reacted this way. Shortly after that, I quit. When he raises his rate, I took the opportunity of quitting. And this happened, again, like when I-- did I say I lived in Vancouver?

No. You did your four years at Seattle.

OK. Then I went to work for a year. I wanted to save my money so I could go to Paris. I had read the Razor's Edge, Somerset Maugham. And [INAUDIBLE] later, when I was with my sister when she was dying and she was-- we had this more intimate kind of conversation, said my mother, who by that time was dead, said that that book changed my life. I didn't even know that my mother was aware. But anyway, I wanted to go to Paris. So I worked for a year and then I went to Paris for a year.

What did you do in Paris?

I went to a school. Well, it was [INAUDIBLE]. But it was a special institute for teachers of French abroad. And so I got a certificate there. And then I wanted to go to Israel to a kibbutz. And I had gone to a party. A Jewish professor had invited me to a party.

In Paris?

In Paris. Which is sort of unusual because professors and students, at least at that time, didn't mix. But she invited another student from the class, a Jamaican girl. And at that party, I met an employee of the embassy. I don't know what he did. But I told them I wanted to go to a kibbutz but I didn't know how to arrange it.

So he suggested that I go to kibbutz, which has an old [INAUDIBLE] where they teach you Hebrew. So you work half a day, and you study Hebrew half a day. And he told me about one. And I just followed what he told me. And I don't remember what steps I took. But I arranged to go to a kibbutz in a [NON-ENGLISH]. And so that's what I did after the summer.

So you went from Paris to Israel.

Yeah. I traveled in Europe, in Greece and Turkey.

Did you go back to Brussels?

While I was--

In Paris.

Yes, I went to visit the Vanderlindens.

You did?

Yes. I was always very--

You kept up a connection with them.

I kept, yes. What I was going to stay, in Brussels, I always felt kind of sad, a little bit depressed. Everything was gray. Well, did I say Paris? I meant Brussels. Brussels is gray. And other parts of Belgium I liked, like the coast and the Ardennes. But in Brussels, I always felt, as I said, not well. But I would go to see the Vanderlindens.

And how long did you stay on the kibbutz? A year?

A half a year. And then I moved to Tel Aviv and taught English in a language school. Meanwhile, in the kibbutz, I had met an Israeli-born girl whose parents, her family had moved from Israel to Turkey when she was nine years old.

To Turkey?

Yeah, they had-- her father was Austrian. But his whole family lived in Turkey. And the mother was of Greek background, Sephardic. And they had lived in Istanbul. And so they went back because the father had problems with his eyes and with the light in Israel. So when her mother was 16, her mother died. I said that incorrectly. When she was 16, her mother died. So then her aunts were pushing her to get married. And so she, to escape, she and her younger brother came to Israel. She was 18. He was 17. And I met them. They were at the kibbutz. And so we started a relationship.

After I'd been in Israel a year, I'd applied to go to graduate school at the University of Washington. And so I was accepted. Then since-- the girl's name was Tilda. She couldn't come without being married. And because we wanted to, we got married. She was 18. I was 24.

And we went back to-- we went to Seattle. She had never been there. She didn't speak English. She spoke five languages. We spoke French with each other because that's a minority language in Turkey. She had gone to French schools also.

So we were married three years. And then she was not happy. I mean, it was a difficult adjustment for her. Meanwhile, her father and her other brother-- actually, she had two brothers. Two brothers came to the States. And they went to live in Los Angeles. And then she went to Los Angeles after we'd been married three years.