

We are recording in Haifa, Israel, on April 15, 1979. Jack Bark, interviewing his mother on a variety of events that took place many years ago that we have failed, for one reason or another, to record properly. And we want to ensure that these events are not forgotten and are well remembered by the family.

The first area we're going to cover is the time of the German occupation of France, in 1941. Mom, tell us what took place during that period.

Yes-- what you must be interested-- our situation during the German occupation and our escape from the Germans. Well, it so happened that my older child, Maurice, got polio in August 1940. And I thought I'll need remain there with my parents, in Vichy, during the German occupation, with my children. In the meantime, I wanted to settle everything in Paris.

Then, as my child got sick. had polio, I took him-- kept him home in Paris. I tried to do something. Somehow, people helped me-- non-Jews-- Jews, non-Jews-- very few Jews remained in Paris, at that time.

The first one was Professor [NON-ENGLISH]. When I called him up, right away he came up-- took cares of the child-- took him to his hospital-- pediatrician. He was called the "God of the children of France." He was a very famous pediatrician.

And he tried everything to help me, but he saw that the situation is getting bad, difficult, for a Jew-- for a Jewish child. So he thought I should rather take back the child home.

And then I heard, that in the United States of America, it happened a lot of children had polio. And they're treating it there. So I decided to do whatever possible-- be able to get out and to get to the United States, where my child will be treated like all the other children and will get back to health.

Well, the first thing, I had to get an American visa. It was impossible. This was impossible. But there were machers, and I was-- I was introduced to them. And they asked me--

They told me, for \$2,000, I may get an American transit visa. Once I get to New York, I will remain there. So I said, all right, but I would like to meet that American man that will help to get my visa.

They introduced me to that man. And we had a talk. I gave him my address-- my telephone number. And I told him, I hope that he will be able to get my visa and help me. And he--

Do you remember his name? Do you remember his name?

Well, is it important? Well, he's Puff, Mr. Puff-- Monsieur Puff.

That's his name.

--was his name, yes. So then the two, those two Jews came up, and I gave them the \$2,000. And they said, well, in a few days, you will get your visa.

The visa was going to cost \$2,000

\$2,000, yes.

And how did you get to meet these two Jews that were going to arrange it?

They were brought to me.

Who brought them to you? Who arranged the--

People-- they always--

Friends? Friends of yours--

Well, it's people that I knew. Because I told people that I must-- I must get away to America, to the United States of America, because there they treat polio.

So the word got out that you were interested--

Yes.

--in getting to America, and these two men--

--that I'm interested-- I'm looking for a way to get a visa.

And that you're willing to pay.

And I'm willing to pay, certainly.

So they introduced you to Mr. Puff, and--

But I wanted-- I didn't want-- I did not believe them, to give them the money without seeing that American that will-- really is interested to help me.

--supposed to get the money.

No. I don't know if he was supposed to get the money. But I gave them the-- after I met Mr. Puff, and I saw-- the next day, I gave them the money, the \$2,000. And they said, within a few days I probably will get an American visa.

But a few days elapsed, and I didn't hear from them. Then Mr. Puff calls me up and says, Mme. Bark, you don't want anymore the American visa? I said, yes, I want. I even paid the two men \$2,000.

So he says, what? They told me that you don't want anymore. Well, I will get in touch with them, and we'll see that they should give you back the \$2,000. And I will get the visa for you.

So they were trying to steal the money, those two men.

They tried to steal the money. He called them. They came to see him, and they told-- he said, you took \$2,000 from Mrs. Bark. They said yes. We-- we will share it. All right, and we'll give you a part of it.

He says, I don't want a part of it. I don't want anything. You just give back the \$2,000 to Mme. Bark, and that's all. And I don't want to see you anymore. If you don't do it, I will deliver to the Germans.

They brought me back to \$2,000. And Mr. Puff came up. He took my passport. He got me a visa to Honduras.

He came with that visa, Honduras visa, and told me that this visa cost \$10, but it's worthless. It's not a-- it's just a fictitious visa that the consul gave it to me as a favor, that you should be able to get the American transit.

And that means what? It means you're allowed to stop in America on the way to Honduras.

So-- for two weeks. I was supposed to get the American transit visa for two weeks, to stop in America for two weeks. In two weeks, I didn't have-- I could have refused to move farther.

Is that a common thing to do, to give someone a transit visa? Is that usually given for business purposes or what?

No, it's given sometimes, for people that have to transit. To go to Honduras, you probably had to transit through the States of America.

I see.

Yeah.

There were no ships direct to Honduras.

Who was Puff working for, now, Mr. Puff?

Mr. Puff was-- he was in the American intelligence.

He was an American.

He was an American, born from Indian parents. And his parents were real Americans-- Indians.

--American Indians.

American Indians.

I see.

Yeah.

So he didn't want to charge you anything.

And he didn't charge me anything.

OK. And that's just the beginning. How do you get out, though, once you have--

That's the-- yes.

Once you have a visa, does that mean--

No, it's not-- it's not so easy-- it wasn't so easy, to get American-- then he went to the American consul.

Yeah.

He had free entrance, because he was part of the American staff there--

Right.

--and applied with my passport. He was my protekcja, no? He helped me. And I was promised the-- I was called days, a few days later, I think, to the American consul. And I started to fill out papers and so on.

And while I was sitting there, I saw a young-- a man, about, oh, perhaps 40 years old came down with papers in his hand. He was looking at me from head to toes. I didn't pay attention. But this was the consul-- the American consul.

He was looking at me and judged me, if he should trust me to give me a transit visa-- if I warrant it. And--

More than one way.

Huh? If I found grace in his eyes. [LAUGHS]

You weren't a schlep.

If I wasn't a schlepper. Yeah.

OK.

And I received American transit visa for two weeks. All right, now I had American transit visa. But from Paris, I couldn't get out with any visa. I had to get a pass from a German Kommandatur-- German commander-- commandant. And this was almost impossible, for a Jew.

There were machers, for money, but it wasn't so easy. And I didn't have time. I had to have it right away.

All right, I had a Polish passport, with my children on my passport. And this was also a miracle. Because if I would have been a French woman, I couldn't have gotten out with my children, without permission from my husband. And I had no contact with my husband. But, as a Polish woman, I had the same right as the men, and I could get out with the children.

But now it was the question, to get that pass from that American. Somehow--

The Germans.

From the Germans. And somehow I tried-- I said, I will try by myself. I went to the Kommandatur at 8 o'clock in the morning-- before 8:00, yet. There was a big line, waiting there-- hundreds of people already. So I saw, if I would stay in the line, I will never get in-- impossible.

So I looked around-- side doors, as possible somewhere to get in. But at every door there was a policeman. So I approached one of the policemen, and I told them my story-- that my parents are in Vichy, and my child got so sick, and I must get to there to a professor, but I need a pass and I must get in today.

What language were you speaking?

French. A French policeman.

Oh, a French policeman.

French policeman was standing there. And he said, your parents are in Vichy? Say, yes. Well, my wife is from [FRENCH]. Then we are neighbors. You know what? I will help you. I will let you get in-- but on one condition, that you must not tell that I let you in-- that you came in through that door.

Say, I promise you. He let me in. As I came in and went over then after I went over to the lieutenant-- he didn't know that I didn't come in from the line.

I spoke to him already in German and told him that I wish two passes on. He said, you can't get a pass. And yet, to the lieutenant, I did not tell that I'm Jewish.

He thought I'm French. You can't get a pass. But I remained there. He said no. I went to a corner and was waiting there while and he went back to the lieutenant. Again he said no, and again I did the same thing.

I thought, I must not get out from here, because it's impossible to get in. So later-- it was already 1 o'clock in the afternoon-- I went over again to him, to that lieutenant. He said, in German-- we spoke in German-- said, you are still here? Why don't you get away?

I say, I must have a pass. I can't get away without a pass. You will not get a pass. So I again went to a corner and was waiting.

And so it was going on till 4 o'clock. 4 o'clock comes-- I don't know which way he came in-- a sergeant, a German sergeant-- comes over to me. I was very nervous, from the morning, without even a drink of water-- nothing. He came over to me-- asked me what's the matter-- what I'm doing there. And I told him that I need a pass, and the lieutenant refuses a pass, and I can't get out without a pass.

So he says, leave the lieutenant alone. Forget him. You go directly to the commandant. He is up one floor up-- that-and-that door is his office. Go straight to him. He's a very fine man. He will get you a pass.

I thanked him. And I tried to get up somehow to let me walk through to watches there. They were watching the steps, so to say. Somehow they let me pass through, and I arrived to the commandant's office door.

But before I knocked at the door, I heard voices there-- man, woman, drinking, talking loud, and on. So I said, in such a [INAUDIBLE], I cannot get in.

I went back down again. But then the sergeant wasn't there anymore. I waited for half an hour, perhaps. I went up again. I listened at the door. It was quiet.

I say, I hope the commander didn't go away yet. So I knocked at the door. Oh, [GERMAN]. I opened the door-- went inside.

The lieutenant looked at me. He couldn't understand who is that woman that could get through and come up to his office. And he got up and came toward me.

I was very elegantly dressed-- my gray fur coat and gray fur hat. And so he gave me-- he greeted me. And I told him-- in German, of course-- to excuse me, that I allowed myself to go into this office, but I need his help.

Please, help me. I am a Jewess, and I have a sick child. He had polio, and I have to get out-- I would like to go to a professor in the other side of France. I was told there is a good professor there.

So he looks at me. And then he said that loaded word, in German-- what am I doing here? I have a wife and four children at home. I will help you. You will get the pass right away, your pass.

And he calls this, from the next room, his secretary and told her to write out the pass for me and to bring him to sign. He says and I thanked him. I went with the secretary to her room-- to her office. And when she looked at my identity card, which was marked in red "Juif," "Jew," she said, this is impossible! A Jew cannot get a pass. The commandant probably didn't know that you are a Jewess. You didn't tell him.

I said, yes, I told him. He knew. And I told him.

Impossible. And she picks up my card and papers and goes more to go back to the commandant. She knocks at the door, and the commandant is at the door-- opens the door and says, Fraulein-- which means-- let me say-- how do you say, in English--

"Madame"--

"Miss"-- --no-- "Miss"--

"Mrs."

"Miss" I told you to write out the pass for this lady and bring it to me to sign. No questions, please.

She didn't answer, went back to her table, and wrote out the pass, went in. He signed it. I was given the pass.

I came down. The sergeant is there. He's there. And he comes towards me. He says, well? Did you do as I told you?

I say, yes, I did, and I have the pass. You see? I told you he's a fine man. He will give you a pass. I say, yes.

Now you need a railroad card-- a ticket. I say, yes, I will go into Cook, here. Place de la Madeleine was Cook's office. Do you think they will give you a ticket-- they will sell you a ticket? It's so easy? I go with you. And I will see that you get your ticket for-- today is Thursday-- for tomorrow night.

So he went with me to Cook's. And I came in there, and I asked for a ticket, they says, there is none. Everything is sold out-- none. They don't know when they will have.

So the sergeant approached. He knocked at the table and said-- in German, of course-- said, I'm telling you, right away you should get tickets for that lady. She has to go away with two children-- and demanded there at Cook's got so scared for that German, a sergeant.

He says, excuse me, excuse me, I'm going to ask the chief if he has something. He went in the back, there, where the chief's office was-- came back. He says, well, I could give you one sleeper for the sick child, and for you and the second child first class. Said, all right, I accept.

But he gave me a cabin a sleeper cabin, with one bed-- one cabin and one bed. So Maurice was in the bed, and Jackie was on the other side of the bed-- although we had first-class ticket-- and I was sitting on the floor, lying on the bundles there, on the train.

Mhm. Where was this train going?

The train was going to Vichy.

Vichy.

To Vichy. And when the ambulance came to, there were no taxis, I had to call an ambulance to take us to the railroad station. When the ambulance came, neighbors there tried to persuade me-- this was the end of November-- winter-- tried to persuade me I should not go away with two children and a sick child and in wintertime, that I don't know where I may land up and so on. I didn't listen to no one, but I was happy to get in the ambulance with the children-- went to the station.

We had our tickets. We got on the train. And the next morning, we were in Vichy.

All right. So I got out of a different occupation land. This was free France.

One question I want to ask you. I seem to remember a soldier taking us in his car somewhere.

Oh, yes, this was before--

What was that all about?

--when I was-- when I received-- someone wrote a note and put under our door that Maurice got sick. Remember?

Yes.

And I didn't know where to go-- where is the Kommandatur-- nothing. So when that German officer stopped his car-- he brought a lady there, to her home--

Near our house.

--so I approached him and asked them to help me somehow and advise me how to do-- what to do. So he gave me some ticket-- I don't know-- some card, with a mark, and said I should go there tomorrow morning. This was at 7 o'clock in the evening already-- and they will already help me.

What were you trying to do?

I was trying to get a pass, at that time, first to go and get Maurice.

Oh, just to find out what had happened to him.

To find out what happened to him.

Oh, I see. This was the first time you found out Maurice was sick. And you were--

I was told he is sick.

And you were in Paris.

[CROSS TALK], I was--

And he was in Vichy.

He was in Vichy.

I see. OK, so now--

You, too-- I and you, and I took you along, when I went back to Paris, to settle there a few things. In the meantime, Maurice got sick there.

OK. So now we're in--

Now, we arrived at Vichy-- went to my parents' home, there. And the child was taken to the hospital in Vichy.

So I started to see what I-- what I have to do farther, to get out of France-- to get to New York.

Right.

So I needed a French-- first, a visa sortie from the French. Then I needed a visa from the Spanish-- transit visa from the Spanish, and a transit visa from the Portuguese.

That was the way to get out of--

And in Portugal, in Lisbon, I could get on a boat.

Was that the only way to leave, at the time?

The only way, at that time, to leave.

OK.

Yeah. Well, I went to the prÃ©fecture, first, for that sortie-- visa se sortie. The secretary-- I was talking with her a little

bit, and she told me her story. Her son is in Africa, with Daladier, and they are treated-- have very little to eat, and so on. And-- told me about her troubles. And tomorrow I should come and see if that visa de sortie.

So while I left, that afternoon, I went to the market, where a black-- whatever was selling on black market-- a lot of things. And I bought a kilo of chocolate. And the next day, I took that kilo chocolate to that secretary of the prefecture. And I told her, I bought you this. You should send it to your son.

She was so happy. She said, how could you get that chocolate? I said, I got it from friends. And--

She didn't know what to do with me. She got me the visa. I went to the French-- to the Spanish consul, after.

The Spanish consul was such a mean-- he treated so meanly the Jews. He didn't care. He preferred they should land up in German hands. I said, get out.

So I was there-- was told someone, some, that he wants money. So-- was introduced to someone that would take the money and get me the visa. But I didn't want to trust that man, a few thousand francs. I said I would deposit that money to someone that I would know also. And when I get the visa, that man will pay you the money.

Two weeks elapsed, and I didn't-- it was understood that in two weeks I have to get the visa. Two weeks elapsed. I didn't get the visa.

I got back the money from that man that I deposited. I went back to Vichy, to see what the children are doing, and went back to Marseilles, because the consul, the Spanish consul, was in Marseilles.

Went back to Marseilles, to the consul, Spanish consul, and request again my visa. He said, not yet. Not yet. Not yet.

But somehow I was-- this was a week, again, a week that I was in Marseilles.

Were we in Vichy still?

And you were with my parents and Maurice in the hospital.

In hospital.

Yes.

[INAUDIBLE] before or this is after Maurice got sick?

No, this was later. This was already five months later, when Maurice got polio. But he had to be in a hospital. My mother couldn't take care of him.

Mhm?

How could she?

And the French consul was in Vichy. That, you took care of in Vichy?

No. No. The prefecture was also in Marseilles.

Oh, you had to do that in Marseilles--

Also in Marseilles. And the Portuguese consul, also in Marseilles. And the Spanish consul in Marseilles. And I went to the Portuguese consul. Somehow, they gave me right away the visa. I didn't--

I went there, also. I requested the visa and signed papers. And the secretary there, I brought her a big bottle of eau de cologne-- a present. And right away I got my visa-- also transit visa, Portugal.

But they were-- I'm afraid that they thought I will never get the Spanish visa. So what do they lose if they give me the Portuguese visa? If I can't transit to Spain, I will never get to Portugal anyway.

And even from the consul, the secretary sent a man from the consul with me to the Spanish consul-- i he wouldn't listen to no one. But a miracle happened.

One day, a lady came in-- an older lady-- requesting her visa to go to Spain. And he threw her out. And she happened to be the mother of the American ambassador in Madrid.

She called up her son and told him the story. She was thrown out, he didn't want to give her a visa, and he wants only money, and she will not give money. Of course, her son went right away to the foreign ministry in Madrid-- made a complaint. His mother got, the next day, her visa.

But this-- Rafael was his name, that consul. He was already on the complain, and that he's taken money. And he was in danger. The next day, when I came for my visa, requesting again-- I was going daily. I was going to the Spanish consul.

So he says, ah, Mme. Park, you got your visa. And my visa was there already more than a week, but he just didn't want to give it to me. So I said, fine, thank you. But you have to do something for me, too. What do I have to do for you?

You shall come with me to the ambassador-- Spanish ambassador-- to his office and tell him-- no, first he tells me, here's your visa. Did you pay for that visa? I say, no, I didn't. Because I had my money back anyway. So I didn't pay anything.

He say, you didn't pay? Well, I wish you should come with me to the office--