

I was born in Solingen, Germany on February 7, 1912.

And did you grow up in Solingen?

I grew up in Solingen. I went to school and to the gymnasium until the age of 19, but I was steadily in Solingen.

When you said you went to the gymnasium, did you hope to study beyond the gymnasium?

Yeah, I mean, that was understood that I would go to university afterwards.

What did you plan to become?

A lawyer. I started to study law.

You started?

I started to study law for about three years. I was just about to pass the first exam when Hitler came. And I could still have passed it at that time, but then there was no use for me to do it because it wouldn't have meant anything. I would have had to go to another country and start again from scratch.

OK. Let's just go back for a minute. While you were growing up, while you were going to school in Solingen, did you have many Jewish friends as well as non-Jewish?

I had no Jewish friends because I went to the gymnasium, which had about 550 students. And for seven years, there was one Jew. There was I. After seven years, we were two. The second one was my brother.

So basically you did not have many Jewish friends.

I did not have any Jewish friends, which I found out later made my outlook on this whole question completely different. Because later on when I was in college, and they started to rush us for the associations, for the students associations, and some of those who accepted Jews and non-Jews came to see us, I remember one such session in a friend's house where we were five boys, and the guy was a very nice fellow, and the conversation just died out, as if there was a wall in between. I couldn't understand it, and the man left.

And then the other says, now, we are among ourselves again. Which is a feeling I absolutely did not know. So in that respect, I was different from the others who grew up in a surrounding where they had Jewish friends of their own age.

How would you describe-- actually, in a way you did, but-- the relationship between yourself and the non-Jews in Solingen?

Well, it was always known that we were Jewish. We all had a first name, the Jew Feist. But that was it. That was like a Mary so-and-so. We did not feel any anti-semitism, as a matter of fact, so little, that in 1932, when Hitler was-- no, that was too late.

In 1930, when Hitler was on the up come, and there were some younger members of the school who ran after me, and I was walking with friends, and called me a Jew, I thought that was so funny that I laughed so heartily they never tried it again.

What type of business was your family in?

We had a cutlery manufacturing factory.

A factory?

Yeah.

Were your father's customers essentially within the area or--

No, there were two. In one, my father-- my stepfather was a partner. And they had mostly domestic German business. And my father's business, who died, was a completely export business.

Now, when you say your father's business, did you carry on your father's business?

No, my mother did for a while, and then she married my stepfather, and then the two of them kept both companies.

Were combined.

Yeah.

The cutlery business was well known in Solingen.

Oh, yes. It was known as an exemplary city. The name Feist was known all over for cutlery, of which even today there is still a certain advantage.

When you say that part of the business was export business, who represented your company in various parts?

A traveling salesman who worked on a salary and commission. Most of them were non-Jewish. And there were some members of the family, in my stepfather's firm, who were cousins of mine, who also traveled. And there was one who traveled in America in my father's business.

You mentioned that the majority of the employees were non-Jewish. About how many employees were there approximately?

Well, the one place had maybe 30, and the other one had maybe 100.

As the oldest boy in a Jewish family, did you consider going into the business?

No, never. I had a bad experience at my father's firm as a young kid, and I decided I wanted no part of it. It was an absolutely emotional thing which, in a way, carries over to today.

Did it have anything to do with the business operation or was it personal?

- Yeah, it's a business-- no, a personal thing. They played a dirty trick on me. As a kid, you like to do what the grownups did, and they played a dirty trick on me, and it hit me the wrong way.

OK. So you decided to go on to study law.

Law, yeah.

All right. You mentioned that in 1933, you were already completing part of your law studies.

Yes.

OK, this was beyond the gymnasium. This was in the university?

Yes. After I left, after the Abitur, I studied for one semester in Geneva, and then I went to Berlin and Munich. And that's about--

To the university.

To the universities there. And then was the time-- it's not three years. It's really three semesters. That was the time when I was supposed to have my first exam. And then I wanted to finish it at the University of Cologne, and that didn't materialize.

Were you in Munich when Hitler came to power?

No, I was in Berlin.

Having grown up in a basically assimilated atmosphere--

Absolutely.

--how did you feel about the Jewish-non-Jewish relationships that you found when you were in the universities at Berlin and Munich?

It bothered me because I couldn't understand why the two of them should keep apart. And that was basically what it was. I found myself all of a sudden with all Jewish friends, and there was like a war when you wanted to contact a non-Jew. And I couldn't understand it because it was a new experience for me. I didn't know that from home.

Did you ever discuss that with the Jewish friends that you met?

Yes, and their answer was absolutely unsatisfactory, and I considered it Jewish chauvinism. That's the way it struck me.

What type of answer? What type of rationale?

Well, the goy, what does he know? And let's not get together with them. They're bad. Whatever. It's this kind of justification, which struck me the wrong way.

Were you aware of how much power Hitler was gaining?

No. No. As a matter of fact, when-- Hitler came to power before my Berlin semester was over. And I remember that I called home and told my mother whether there was a way I could get a room in Cologne because I wanted to continue. And then my mother said, do you think you will be able to? She saw it. I didn't.

What was the first sign that you had that you would not, in fact, be able to continue?

When it was said that Jews would not be allowed to enter colleges anymore or law, not study anymore, and that they those who had started could finish but could then not practice. That was an edict that came out. That's when I realized what was going on.

That must have been quite a disappointment for you.

It was. It was. It was. It struck me as completely out of left field because it absolutely was contrary to any experience that I personally had had in Solingen.

You mentioned that you found this out while you were still in Berlin. I'm just trying to reconstruct in my mind. You went to Munich first before you went to Berlin?

Yeah.

OK. While you were in Munich, did you ever come across the StÄ¼rmer or any of Streicher's--

No, no, no, no. I did the same as most people did. We thought it was a harebrained way out thing, and it'll pass. Don't pay too much attention to it. That was the general attitude.

Did your family feel that way too?

My mother didn't.

Did not?

No, my mother didn't.

How did she feel?

She thought that it was very serious and that this more or less would develop the way it did.

Having lived in Solingen, which was, as you mentioned, basically very much assimilated, why do you think she felt that way?

First of all, she wasn't born there. And besides, she was a very independent spirit who had a different opinion about many things. Isn't that the truth?

Yes.

[LAUGHS] And not kooky.

Oh, no, no.

Oh.

Highly intelligent, rational, and well thought.

Did the boycott in April 1, '33 affect your mother's and stepfather's business at all?

No, no, no.

OK.

But there again, we were in a privileged position because while one of the firms had both domestic and foreign business, Hitler in the beginning put the emphasis on the foreign business. Now, here was one firm that did nothing but bring in foreign currency, and the other one at least for half of it.

So, I, for instance never had any difficulty getting a passport and leaving the country. Because it was always on business. So in the first years, really until the time that I left, in that respect, we were privileged.

Did you, in fact have, a passport before 1933 already?

Sure, sure, sure.

When you found out-- I just want to go back to when you found out that you couldn't become a lawyer. When you got this information, how did you cope with this? How did you-- what decisions did you--

I had very understanding parents, and they arranged to send me to Italy-- no, first to Geneva. So again, that's the second time, to get used-- to get it out of my system, so to speak. So that was more or less three or four months time where I did

very little.

And then they had made arrangements that I could go to Milano and work as a volunteer, as an unpaid learner, so to speak, with one of our customers of the Solingen firm.

In the cutlery business?

Well, in a general business. It was not strictly cutlery. It was somebody who basically had knitting and similar things, but of course needed scissors and things like that and for that reason was a customer of ours.

So I worked there in Milano for about four or five months, and then they still gave me another chance, and they made arrangements with a customer we had in Barcelona. And I spent at least a year in Barcelona, and then I started to travel for the Solingen company in Barcelona.

When you went to Milan and then to Barcelona, was that a more appropriate option for you than, let's say, getting a job within Germany in Solingen?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

How so?

Well, I was young, and for one thing, it was much more fun.

OK.

And the other thing was that since I was not tied to a paying job, there was not the pressure on it which would make me realize how different that life was from what I had wanted. It gave me a chance to get used to it more gradually.

I would say it's like when you break a horse. You can put the stuff in the mouth and tear, and it hurts, or you can do it gradually, and the horse gets used to it slowly. And this second method is that what my parents used. So it was a very gradual--

So you felt that your parents were trying to divert you from the disappointment?

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, at the time I didn't, but looking back, I see the system.

At the time, what did you think?

At the time, I tried not to think and have the best time possible. After all, I was young. I wanted to have a good time. I wasn't different from any youngster today once they have a good time.

When you got word that you couldn't go, that you couldn't finish law school or become a lawyer, did you think that perhaps after Hitler was no longer in power you would return?

I don't know whether I ever gave that a thought. I don't think I did. I didn't look that far ahead, really, at the time, I had that problem in myself, and I lived more or less from day to day.

What was the general consensus among the other Jewish law students, or the discussions?

To get out of it as fast as possible.

Out of it meaning?

Out of Germany, out of what they were doing. It was the reaction of somebody who got hurt. I was reminded of it when

I saw the reaction of many Jewish liberals when the Black population said, we don't need you anymore. We can do it by ourselves.

I thought the reaction was very similar to when Hitler said, you are a sore on the body politic of Germany, and we want to get rid of you. I very much understood how they felt because it was very similar.

When you had to face that-- I'll call it a disappointment. I mean, you had grown up thinking that you were going to become a lawyer, and in Germany law was very much a status position.

Sure, sure.

Did that leave you in a quandary as to what your future plans for yourself would be?

Well, I drifted, I would say. And since the direction was to go into business, I had no objection. I wasn't making up my mind. I drifted. I would say that was really my reaction. I drifted.

So you went then to Milan and then to Barcelona. And in Barcelona, you became a salesman.

After a while, I became a salesman, and I traveled for the company in Spain and North Africa and things like that. There was not too much success and not liking it very much at all.

What type of perspective were you getting while you were in Spain? Was this-- what years was this?

That was-- the year was 1934. I think it was just-- yeah, I think it was '34. It was just before Franco came to power.

That's what I had in mind.

Yeah. I was there. As a matter of fact, I left in June, July of the year. And there was quite a bit of uneasiness and fighting in the country, but that had been going on in Spain for a long time. So I said to my friends, hurry up with the revolution. I want to come back in September. And by that time, I want it nice and quiet. And they said, we're going to wait for you.

And I took the last-- as it happened, my train was the last train towards France out of Spain before Franco really started in earnest.

Were you happy at that time to be out of Germany?

I was-- at that time, I was neither happy nor unhappy. I would say I was drifting. I think that is the best description. I wasn't satisfied. I wasn't dissatisfied. I didn't really know.

What made you go take that train from Spain to France? Because I was more or less through-- this was the period, the transit period. And I had finished working for this man in Spain, and I was going home to get acquainted with the merchandise and go back and sell it. And I did go back after everything was quiet and Franco was there and tried to sell cutlery, and I saw what had happened during--

During the interim.

During interim, during the revolution. It was terrible.

When you went-- in other words, you were going through France to get back to Germany, to get back to Solingen.

Yeah.

All right, when you returned to Solingen, and this is 1934, did you stay there for--

Yeah. I stayed there for a length of time. And this is where this starts what I told you. I stayed there for several months because the war was lasting. And that was the time when the story was those who come back, those Jews who come back to Germany were put into an indoctrination camp.

Indoctrination?

Yeah. In other words, not a concentration. They will be taught how we think nowadays. That was the start. And I came back, and therefore, in Germany, whenever you went from one place to another, you had to register with the police. I didn't register.

But of course, Solingen was not that big, and the firm was known, and the people were known. Everybody knew I was there.

What made you decide not to register?

Because as long as I wasn't registered, I didn't start the sequence of the government knowing and therefore following step by step what was going-- what was supposed or alleged to happen to people who came back. That was the reason why I didn't do it.

You were aware of this?

Yes. Everybody, this was one of the stories that went around.

OK.

So then after more than a month, we got a call from the prefect of the police, the man in charge of the police who wanted to talk to our chief bookkeeper. And when she came to the phone, he said, tell your young Mr. Feist he should come to the police department and register. Nothing is going to happen. And that's exactly what I did, and nothing did happen.

Mhm.

Did you notice a difference in Solingen between the time you left originally, which was, I take it, before Hitler came to power in '33--

Yeah.

--and when you came back now in 1934?

Yes and no. Yes because the terror had started. And people like Jews weren't sure what was going to happen, whether the knock, the famous knock on the door would come at four o'clock in the morning or what. You were careful what you said on the phone because you felt the phone was being listened to.

No because as all the friends that I have had went out of their way to show me that I was still included in their group, to the extent that they picked me up and took me to a public restaurant. And at one time, there was a group of Nazis from my former school sitting at the next table and started to make a remark, and some of my friends there that I was sitting with got up and said, if you don't shut up, we shut you up. And they shut up.

Did you, in fact, know this group of Nazis?

Yeah, sure. They were the kind of people who had called me Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew years before. It was that group. But--

Did you ever have a discussion with your friends, non-Jewish friends that were with you about the political situation?

Well, they thought more or less what most people thought in Germany, that Hitler was good for Germany politically, because he had united the country, and he got the unemployed off the street and the loafers to work, et cetera. But they felt that this was a passing thing, that that wouldn't last.

How did they feel about his anti-Jewish--

That was passing. That wouldn't last.

That was part of the passing phase?

Yeah.

OK. When you were back in Solingen now, your parents business, was that affected at all by 1934?

No. Because the one factory doing nothing but export was, of course, privileged. I mean, they got all the advantages to bring in the foreign currency you can imagine. The other company, because they also brought in export and had of course only non-Jewish salesmen selling in Germany at that time, were doing a good business. This lasted, I think, another year or so. And then the rumble started through these salesmen saying, we can't sell any more. Why don't you sell out?

When these salesmen said that, were they in fact told by customers, even though they were Gentile salesmen, that they were working for a Jewish outfit?

I don't know, but it is possible. And then again, it could also have been a ruse because they were the people who bought the place later on. You see?

OK, yeah.

So--

One question occurs to me. During all this time, did you did your parents understand that bringing in foreign currency was part of Schacht's policies? They understood the reasons?

That they understood, but it was nice to be privileged.

Yeah, I was just wondering if they were aware of it. That made a very interesting difference. My mother was of the opinion she couldn't care less, and she wanted to get out, and she had a very drastic way of expressing herself, right?

Right.

And she would say she would rather sit in a crummy little room in Brussels than in the big house in Solingen. And my father would laugh and say, wait till you sit there, and then you won't like it. Because he liked the privileged situation more.

Was he a veteran of the First World War?

He was also a veteran of the First World War, but that he never considered it as any advantage.

Was it was it ever an advantage to him in terms of--

No, not to him. Not to him. I don't think that made any difference.

How long did you stay in Solingen when you were back now in 1934?



I stayed-- I came here in January '39. I stayed until December of 1937.

In Solingen?

Yeah.

OK. During this time, from '34 through '37, how did you notice that things were getting worse?

Well, you couldn't really see anything to put your hands on. You heard the remarks that somebody had been beaten up, that somebody had been taken away. But this pressure created a situation of tension and terror which made everybody very, very nervous.

I had a cousin in El Paso, the one who worked for one of the factories. And he used to come to Solingen once a year. And I remember the last time he came, he said, I don't know what you want. Everything is unchanged. You live like you always did.

And after three weeks, he said, well, I'll tell you something. We have been told in El Paso from the Jewish organizations when they came to collect money how terrible life here is. And when I came here, I found that everything they said wasn't so, but now I know that it's even worse because of this mental pressure.

How did that mental pressure make itself felt? Because I think that's a very important aspect.

It was done by innuendo, insinuation, and rumor. It was said that the Gestapo would pick up people and would come at four o'clock in the morning. And the story that went around is the knock at the door at four o'clock in the morning, and you are never seen again.

There was the story that so-and-so had disappeared. He was picked up by the police. We don't know where they put him. This one was beaten up. This one has been forced by his people, by his factory to sell out. This one went to a store. They told him to get out.

It was never that you met the person to whom it happened, but you were always told that this had happened.

How was this innuendo disseminated? You know what I mean? How were you told this? Were you told this by--

You were told it by well-meaning Christian friends. You meet someone, and they said, did you hear about what happened to so-and-so? Who lived maybe in Cologne, and you were in Solingen? No, what happened? Well-- and there it went.

If you hear that once or twice, ah, come on. But if you hear it day in and day out for years and years, the accumulation is a terrible pressure.

Did you begin to see signs, "Juden unerwünscht" or "Juden verboten"?

Yes, we saw that too, and we even-- my mother once ran into a thing that a very good acquaintance, let's call it, of hers, where the common interest between them was interest in music and singing, met her in the street and told her she didn't want to talk to my mother anymore because she was Jewish.

And my mother said, all right. How do you know? I can smell it. Things like that happened too. And if that is said to you by people you know, that hurts.

Yeah, yeah. Was anybody in fact prevented from going into stores or going to concerts? You mentioned that your mother was interested in music.

I'm not aware of it. But it was said. It was one of the things that was said, not of course, from Solingen. Then it's said in the music hall. You know what happened.

Were you, in fact, restricted in your movements in any way?

That is just my story. I was never. My personal experience is that I was never, and as I said about the friends that I went to school with who more or less protected me, that is my total experience of the time, and not only in Solingen.

They continued to protect you up to 1937?

Yeah, and the family too, up to the last minute, in business and in private. Now, in business, you were supposed to turn over any foreign currency to the Reichsbank.

Right.

Now, of course, you could bill your merchandise at a certain price and sell it at a higher price and then leave some money in a country. It was a standard thing that, as a Jew, you were under suspicion of doing this. We were never investigated, but the president of the local Reichsbank told us that he had been approached that this was going on, and he, on his own initiative, had said not with those people. They don't do those things, and that had stopped the investigation. Now, this is an unusual thing.

Did the business, in fact, try to get some money into various countries through the--

Of course. But I'm talking about the atmosphere--

Atmosphere in Solingen. You mentioned that your family was well aware of this privileged situation of bringing in foreign currency into Germany.

And being allowed to travel freely.

Yeah. Did you notice any difference between the treatment of your family and the treatment of other Jewish families in Solingen?

Yes, they couldn't leave. They wouldn't get a passport.

But other than-- I mean, other than not being able to freely move about?

No, there was no-- there was no-- how should I say-- persecution going on at all.

By 1937, you mentioned you left. In 1937.

In 1937, it was quite clear, A, that we could not possibly keep the factories, that we would have to sell at any price that the party would allow the buyers to pay, and that there was no future for somebody of my age.

Just before you go on, when you say it became clear that you had to sell, what made that clear, considering that you were bringing in foreign currency and doing a pretty good business?

Because by that time, the rules changed, and it was said that Jewish places would be disadvantaged, would have disadvantages, and that laws were being passed. Now, in a situation like that, you don't have to pass a law. The word that it will be makes people suspicious and you suffer.

You mentioned before that the salesmen were coming back saying that they were not-- that their business was falling off. Was this a continuous thing through 1937?

It was a continuous thing that they said it. And to prove it to this day, we haven't been able to.

In other words, the business volume was constant.

Yes, the business volume was constant because business in Germany as such got better. When Hitler came to power, there was still a depression. And through all his economic actions, this public works program and all this, the economic situation within Germany got better.

So while the business didn't fall off, you could say it didn't increase to the extent that it should have to the betterment of the situation. Besides, we had large store customers like Woolworths in Germany and so on. And of course, it was said they wouldn't buy from us anymore.

It was said, but in fact were they buying?

Yes, of course. But between this and the general situation and the salesmen saying we can't stay here, you have to sell out, and the party putting pressure on, you are in a situation where you then think, well, maybe I better leave. So in 1937, it was quite obvious that the factories would be sold and that there was no future for somebody like me.

And at that point, I reaped the advantage of what the prefect of police had told before, namely that I was registered. Because you couldn't leave Germany without papers saying that it was all right for you to leave the country. And that you couldn't get if you weren't registered.

Now, you made up your mind that you were going to leave, but did you have any destination?

No, my destination was to travel around, since I was still working for the firm, which was still in existence, as a salesman, which was also the easiest way to get out. And then I would then try to get permission to settle in England.

Now, this is where the most striking things came into play. I had to leave, which meant that I had to get permission from the police department to leave and a certification that everything was in order, all taxes had been paid, et cetera, et cetera.

Let me just interrupt for a minute. When you say permission to leave, was this a different leaving than when you had gone to Milan or Barcelona as far as the police headquarters were concerned?

Yeah.

It was an emigration. It was leaving to emigrate.

Yes.

OK. They were aware of that.

They were aware of that. They were supposed to be aware of it. So when I came to the police department to say I am now leaving for good, the guy closed the door and said, Mr. Feist, I want to tell you something. What Hitler is doing to the Jews is a crime.

The Jews are the chosen people of God, and we shall be punished one day for what we are doing to the Jews today. And if that day comes, I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive us. And then he gave me my papers, and I went out.

This was the head of the police department?

That wasn't the head of the police. That was--

An officer.

An officer. Which is an unusual thing.

When you decided to leave, was there ever any discussion within your family of everybody's leaving?

By that time, my parents had made arrangements to get a permit to settle in Belgium. And they were registered, and they had permission from Belgium to settle there.

What made them decide on Belgium?

It was the nearest to Germany.

Did they have any business contacts?

No, no, no. That was just because of this. And there again things happened. One of the friends we had there took the car and drove it to Belgium, and that's why my parents had a car in Belgium.

And they left before everything was settled, and the police came to the house and saw what was in the house and said, these people didn't leave for good. They left everything here. They are on one of their usual trips, which again was a protection by the people. And then from the outside, my parents legitimized the emigration, which had the effect that we were allowed to keep the furniture.

When you say "allowed to keep the furniture," it was all still within the house.

Yeah.

Now, you could only leave with 10 reichsmark. I mean--

Oh, no. We could leave with more money because we were the privileged people. We got permission to take so much money out for living purposes because we were supposed to bring in foreign currency. We were traveling. We never had trouble as far as finances.

I see. So in other words, when you left, even when your parents left, it was still not considered a final emigration. It was just--

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And again-- and again, the local people protected us. Even the police people who came to the house, at that house there was a little bit missing, but the son left.

So then from the outside, we said we want to legitimate. My parents said we want to legitimize it. We want to pay what we have to pay, and we want to straighten it out.

They said, OK, it's fine. You've done it. Now you can pack up. And we had somebody pack up the stuff. And my parents got it still before the war broke out into Belgium.

They went to Brussels?

Yeah, yeah.

Now, you mentioned that you left with the intention of going to England.

Yeah.

How did you proceed to leave?

Well, I mean, the leaving was all right because I left legitimately. I said I've emigrated, and that was fine. But England didn't give me a permit.

Permit to enter or permit to work?

To stay to stay there for good. So I had to leave. And then I started quite a trip. Then I went to Belgium, and there I couldn't stay. And I had to travel, so I had to-- on business, I had to go to Sweden and Norway.

When I left Sweden to go to Norway, the border patrol said that my German passport wasn't good enough anymore for any length of time, that I would have to report to the police in Oslo, and would have to leave the country or they would deport me to Germany.

At that time, my passport was good for maybe two weeks before it expired.

This was still 1937?

That was 1937. So when I came to Oslo, I went to the police, and they told me this. So then I went to the German consul, and the German consul was what we called from the old stock. He was a professional diplomat.

And so I just told him I'm Jewish, because he couldn't see it from my passport. It was still a passport that didn't have the J in it.

Right.

And this is my story. Well, he said, if you are willing to pay for it, I will send a telegram to the Gestapo in Berlin to contact the Gestapo in Solingen to find out whether you can have a new passport.

So I did this, but the answer didn't come by the time that the police in Oslo said I had to leave. So before I went to the police, I went to the German consul and told him. He said, could I see your passport a minute?

So I gave him my passport. He takes the passport, puts it in his drawer, locks the drawer, and said, now you go to the Oslo police. And then I had an idea. And I said to him, well, if you get an answer from the Gestapo-- oh, yeah. Then you get your passport.

So now I went to the Oslo police because now I understood what he did. How can you send a man to Germany and expect him to be accepted if you can't prove that he is German? And what is the proof that he is German?

Passport.

So what did this man do again? So I came to the Oslo police, and they said your passport, please? I said, I don't have it. Where is it? Well, the German consul has it. They didn't know what to do. They told me to come back within two days. But within two days, I had a new passport.

It was OK? Within two days, he got the word.

And so-- but this was a Jewish passport which wasn't good for very long.

This new passport had the J?

Yeah. And it wasn't good for very long. And I didn't know whether with that passport I could get into any other country. Now, in the meantime, my parents had migrated to Belgium. They were living in Belgium.

There the consul was nice enough to give me back the old passport, and there was no more room in it. It was from top to bottom full of visas and things. So I went to the hotel, and the head of the hotel put a brown heavy paper into the

passport, and with that I went to the Belgian authority consulate and said, I want a transit visa through Belgium, because I want to go to Luxembourg, which I could prove because I had been in Luxembourg before I had come to Oslo.

Excuse me. When you say you could prove this, did they ever ask you whether you had customers in these various countries?

No, but they could see that I had been there.

Yeah. But when I mean, when you came to Norway. Or when you came--

No, no, no. They didn't.

This was all legitimate salesman type business.

So the Belgian consul gave me that visa, pasted on that extra piece of paper in the old passport, which didn't have the J. And it still had about five or six days to go. And then I decided to take a tramp ship that left Oslo for Antwerp, where I was about the only passenger.

And as we arrived in Antwerp, I left the boat. There was neither a custom nor passport control. I just walked off the pier, and I was in Belgium. This is how I got into Belgium. And I stayed in Belgium for about six months until I got my visa to go to America.

You stayed in Belgium. At this time, you met your parents.

Yes, but I personally stayed underground because I was illegally in Belgium. I had no permit for Belgium.

When you say you stayed underground, who arranged that?

Well, that was a complicated thing. In the meantime, my brother also had gotten permission to stay in Belgium as a student, and he was registered in a boarding house. Now, when my parents first came to Belgium, before they had their own apartment, they had also stayed at that boarding house. So there were two Feists registered.

Now, my parents had taken the apartment. My brother was still living there. So I moved into that boarding house. And sure enough, the police was advised by I-don't-know-who that I was there.

So they used to come at lunchtime. When we were eating lunch, they wanted to see Mr. Feist, whereupon my brother went out. And then they said, no, no, not you. The other Mr. Feist. And then he would say, oh, he is out. But if you come back tonight, he'll be there. And in the evening, my father was there.

Sorry. Now, during all this time, in order to do all this traveling and everything, you had to have access to money.

Yeah, well, in the meantime--

Were you still able to have access to the money in Germany?

I had access to it because I also got my-- after I emigrated, because I was working for that firm at that time, the Germans even allowed transfer of my salary. I had a drawing account with my firm, and I could get this.

While you were still on the payroll there?

That stopped around the time that I came to Belgium. But in the meantime, my parents were legitimately in Belgium, and they had money in Belgium.

All right. Now, you were in Belgium still when Kristallnacht came about in Germany?

Yeah.

Did the Kristallnacht change anything as far as this kind of arrangement with your business?

By the time the Kristallnacht came, I don't know whether that had anything to do with it. I know that the money stopped after my parents left. And then, of course, they said, this is not your business, really, anymore. Why pay? You see, they stopped payment.

It didn't really have to do with the Kristallnacht.

OK.

Also, the people we had to do it in their attitude really didn't change.

What was the attitude of these? You mentioned these salesmen were the ones that took over the business.

Yeah.

What was their attitude during the time that you were drawing the salary and during the time that your parents were in Belgium conducting--

You remember I said at the beginning there were two firms. The salesmen were all-- the salesmen who worked within Germany were all was the other firm. They had nothing to do with me.

The salesmen who worked for my father's firm were all stationed in foreign countries, like in Spain and Italy and so on, and they traveled from there. Because they traveled in those countries only.

Right.

So there was, as far as the salesmen were concerned and I, there was no--

I meant the salesmen who took over the business.

They put more pressure on to get it settled and to get it cheaper. But basically they had to do what the party told them to do, even if they wanted to pay us more, which I don't know whether they would have or not. They couldn't have because the party told them, you can't pay more than that.

In terms of price, was there any--

The price was too low, and this was recognized afterwards the usual way after the war-- an adjustment was made.

You mean during the Wiedergutmachung.

Yeah.

Yeah. But I mean at the time, was there any relationship at all between the price you got and the value of the business?

No, no, no. That was-- the salesmen undervalued it legitimately. You always do when you buy. So he who buys says it's worth less. He who sells says it's worth more.

But on top of everything else, the party then put pressure on. You cannot pay more than.

Now, when all four of you were in Belgium, did you intend to stay in Belgium?

No, I immediately applied for a visa to the United States.

Under the American-- under the German quota.

Under the quota because I had a cousin in El Paso who could give me an affidavit. So--

You mentioned this cousin before. He had worked for the firm. When did he leave Germany?

'28, '29.

Oh, OK. So he was established in the United States.

He was established. He was an American citizen.

OK, so you applied for a visa to the United States.

To the United States. And then, of course, I had to wait those six months. I applied from Oslo, actually, and then had this transfer to Belgium. And there I had to stay for about six months until the visa came through.

Did your parents have intentions of staying in Belgium?

Yeah, basically, yes. They wanted to stay.

How did this-- how did this-- you then went to the United States, I take it.

Yeah.

Now, how did things progress from there in terms of both you, yourself, and your parents and brother?

Well, I went to the United States. And then two or three months later, my mother brought my brother over. Now, that sounds funny, and I'll explain it to you.

I said at that time I had a stepfather. And my brother was still a minor. That made my mother head of the family.

My mother was born in London, and this is a different story. She had been able to prove that she was English. She had dual nationality-- citizenship. Therefore, my brother, being a minor, could enter America under the English quota. And that's why my mother brought him over. She intended to go back.

How about your mother? Could she enter America?

Oh, yeah.

Under the English quota too.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

But she intended to go back.

She intended to go back to Belgium and to her husband. And within that period, the Germans marched. So my mother was here.

No, that is not right. She did go back, and then the Germans marched. And then my parents were split up. Because the Belgians recognized my mother as English, but my father as German. So he was interned, and he was brought to Gurs.



My mother was brought on an English cruiser to England and came then from England to America.

OK. Now, your mother brought your brother. When did your mother bring your brother to El Paso? Did he come?

No, no, no. To New York. That was the war broke out in '39, didn't it?

September '39.

Yeah, well, that's when she brought him. No, a little before then. She brought him in the summer of '39. Now, at that time--

Well, now it gets a little hazy. Where was I?

You still in El Paso?

No, no. I never was in El Paso. I always stayed in New York.

I see. OK.

And then-- and I don't know exactly anymore at what time-- I went to Dallas.

OK. Let me backtrack just for a minute. When you came here, you had the visas, the sponsor from El Paso.

Yeah.

But when you came here, you came directly to New York.

Yeah.

OK. Your brother also came to New York. We'll come back to that in a minute. Your mother went back to Belgium. And from there, when the Nazis came in May 1940, they were split up.

When the Nazis invaded Belgium, she was still able to go to England?

Oh, yes. On an English cruise.

Yeah, but after the invasion.

Sure.

OK. Did she know your father was interned? Your stepfather was interned in Gurs?

Yes, of course.

Yes, OK. Now, she then was in London, and both of you were in New York.

And then she came to New York.

Then she came to New York. What happened at that point to your stepfather?

He was brought to Gurs in France, into the internment camp. And then my mother, again with the help of this cousin in El Paso, and through connection of his wife's family with Mexico, they made my father a fighter for Polish liberty.

Do you know how they did that?

Yeah.

How did they--

So he got a document. And with this document, he had the right to settle in Mexico. That was one of those freak laws that existed. And on the strength of this permit to go to Mexico, he got permission to travel through the United States to Mexico.

So then he had to get permission to go through from France, through Spain to Portugal. Because I also had a cousin in Portugal. The Portuguese cousin saw to it that he got permission to come to Portugal. And with this permission, the Spaniards gave him permission to go through Spain to Portugal. And this is how he got out.

How did they-- just a question that occurs to me. How did they think that being a Polish-- you said a Polish--

That's a law in Mexico.

Oh, OK.

That was a law in Mexico which these people in Mexico knew that those who had fought for the freedom of Poland-- that was in 1919-- the law said that all these, at all times, could settle in Mexico.

So he got a big document-- we must still have it somewhere-- that he was a fighter for the freedom of Poland.

Did they have to prove? I mean, he had a German passport.

He didn't have to prove anything.

OK.

The proof was there.

The proof was there. OK, in money. OK. Now, when you came to the United States, you were the first.

Yeah.

Who met you at the boat?

Another cousin of mine, who had migrated earlier and who was a little bit established here. And he took me over. And his brother, also a cousin, had a good job in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and I stayed with him for several weeks until I got settled in New York and got a job as a salesman and was a complete flop.

How did you go about getting the job?

By word of mouth. Everybody knew somebody, and finally they found some emigrant person who was willing to give me a chance.

Wait just a second.