

I was born in 1925, the 4th of May, in Aachen, also called Aix-la-Chapelle, in Germany.

Did you grow up in Aachen?

I was in Aachen for approximately three to four years-- five years. And I don't remember too much of it. And afterwards, I moved to Dortmund.

And you grew up and went to school in Dortmund?

Yes. As a matter of fact, I went to school there until I was about 13, at which time was the regulation that you had to go to a Jewish school, at which point I left my local school and went to a school in Dortmund. Actually, I was living in Dortmund Hombruch, which was a suburb of Dortmund.

During all the time that you were going to the regular school, the Volksschule in Dortmund Hombruch, did you have as many non-Jewish as Jewish friends or--

Yes, I would say I had more non-Jewish friends than Jewish friends since the Jewish community was rather small in the area that I lived.

When you say the Jewish community was rather small, you mean in the small suburb or in Dortmund itself?

In the small suburb. Dortmund was a rather large community. And it had several synagogues, one which I remember especially, which I might want to tell you about a little later on.

OK. But in this suburb, in Dortmund Hombruch, did you belong to a congregation there?

Yes, I belonged to a congregation, which, as a matter of fact, happened to be in a different town. And the congregation there was somewhat large, which was comprised of different surrounding communities.

Was this an Orthodox or a Liberal congregation?

It was Liberal.

As you were going to school, from, I guess, 1931, '32 on, you grew up then with mostly non-Jewish friends. How did Hitler's coming to power in '33 affect your relationship with them?

I would say that the friends that I had, it didn't affect it at all, although there were some instances that kind of were surprising to me after Hitler came to power. But the age that I was in, you generally don't expect any special change.

Right. You said there were some things that were surprising to you.

Yeah, well, it has to do with some students that I wasn't especially friends with but kind of shied away from me. And I remember one special instance that sticks in my mind. And that came as a real shock to me.

There was one student that I practically didn't know at all. And one fine day he confronted me at a intersection and, without any provocation, knocked me in the throat and the eye. And this is something that stays with me to this day because, at the time, I didn't really realize why. And later on, of course, came the explanation.

When you say later on came the explanation, who made the explanation?

He did.

He did?

Just because I was Jewish.

After he hit you?

Yes. Yes.

As you were growing up in this school, you mentioned that the friends that you had stayed your friends.

Yes.

What about the teachers? Did they ever cause any problem?

No, no problem.

Children like to belong, especially at that age. Did you begin to notice a great number of them belonging to the Hitler Youth?

Yes, there were some students that I remember belonged to it, although my relationship with them was normal. And I would say that, speaking about belonging, I wanted very badly to belong to an organization in Dortmund, which was a trolley ride away from where I lived. And naturally, my mother and grandmother were kind of protective at that time, and probably with rightful reasons. And they did not especially allow me at that time to go to Dortmund to belong to that organization.

After this incident that you mentioned before where this fellow came and hit you, do you remember going home and telling your parents about it?

I don't quite remember that aspect of it, although I remember it came-- it did hurt quite a bit, but the effect from it, the mental effect from it, was more than the hurt that I had that particular day.

Right. What do you mean by the mental effects?

Well, at that time, I realized that being a Jew in Germany was something special and that, well, we better watch out, you know?

That must have been a very rough feeling for a kid of 11 years old.

Yes. Yes, I was 11, 12 years old at the time. Yes. Yes.

How did you feel about being a Jew in Germany? How did you feel about being a Jew at that point?

Well, being that young, you don't give it that many thoughts about it. And as you grow older, you think back. And you get to be more philosophical as you grow older. But at the time, I didn't give it that much thought. When a young person is in an unusual condition but not especially realizing it, you feel like, well, this is a normal condition and not knowing that it is an unusual condition.

Did any of your other friends come to your aid?

You mean at that particular--

Either at that particular time or at any other time.

Well, I guess the aid consisted in not discontinuing being friends. And that was enough for me.

Were they able to continue being your friend and still belong to the Hitler Youth, if that was the case?

There were one or two instances that I remember faintly where the relationship cooled on account of that. But by and large, the relationship were maintained at the same level, yes.

What type of business was your father in at that time?

My father, at the time, was in the cloth business, the textile business, to sell to different tailors. And he went all over to sell his--

Was he a sales representative?

No, he was in business on his own, but it was a relatively small business. And he went to different tailors in the area to sell textiles.

Was his client-- I used the word, "client." Were his customers mainly Jewish or non-Jewish as well?

I think they were both. But I do remember certain customers that were specifically Jewish, yes.

When Hitler came to power in '33, was his business affected?

Yes.

In what way?

Yes, it diminished.

It did. Markedly so?

Yes.

Do you remember the discussions at home at this point of possible emigration or what to do about the situation?

The thing that somewhat sticks in my mind is my grandfather, who died shortly before Hitler came to power. Approximately half a year before things started rolling, he said, if Hitler comes to power, this will be very bad for the Jews. And unfortunately, his prophecy became true.

Did your family believe after he came to power that [SPEAKING GERMAN] or--

No, we, like, I'd say, 95% of Jews in Germany, underestimated the implications. And I saw this movie, A Ship of Fools. And what sticks in my mind in that particular-- I mean, I remember a lot of different instances, but what specifically sticks in my mind is where this gentleman says, well, you see here? I have the Iron Cross. And nothing is going to happen to me because I fought in the First World War. And when they see this, nothing is going to happen to me. And this was the natural inclination of a lot of Jews.

Did your father fight in the First World War?

Yes. And my father, in a way, happened to have that same opinion, until very drastically on the Crystal Night. He happened to have been in Dortmund selling, and he stayed with somebody. And I only knew about it later that he was beaten. He was unconscious in a gutter for X number of hours, which I don't know.

And it happened that several months later, I would say probably three months after that particular instance, he felt that it would be of no use to stay in Germany, and he illegally went to Holland. And I remember his goodbye. And this is the last time that I saw him.

It is?

Yes.

We'll come back to that in a second. I just would like to go back for a moment to the school. You mentioned

that, in 1938, you had to go to the Jewish school?

Yes.

You were 13, you said, so it would be 1938?

Yes. And in that connection, I would also like to tell you that on this particular Crystal Night, nothing happened to my mother, my grandmother, and myself, who were together at that time. And since it was a small town, there were, I would say, no more than six Jewish families. And we were told later that [SPEAKING GERMAN]. Do you understand?

No harm can come to this--

No harm should come to them whatsoever. They shouldn't be touched, including myself. But this we didn't know until some time thereafter.

And the following morning-- we are not knowing anything of what happened-- I went to school as usual. And that is the Jewish school now, in Dortmund. And no sooner did I arrive that the teacher there said, well, we have to go on a trip, my class. And I, together with my class and possibly another class, went by foot about 10 minutes to the neighboring major Dortmund synagogue.

And one thing I also remember for life, and I see it as if it was yesterday. We went into the major entrance of the Dortmund synagogue. And as I entered, I see at the [INAUDIBLE], the front, I see the stones, the Ten Commandments. And as if on command, it toppled down, and it broke in a hundred pieces. And this is the first thing that I noticed. And I thought it was something unnatural happening because this is something you don't expect.

And of course, then I saw that there were workmen who toppled it down because of the damage done to the Ten Commandments, the stones, as it came down. And this is something I won't forget. And this is the first inclination I had that something unusual was amiss.

When you say there are workmen, there were workmen there destroying the building? Or had it already been destroyed the night--

It had already been destroyed the night before, which I did not realize. But I suppose that the workmen there at the time were there to topple it due to the fact that it would have caused-- there was a hazard. It was already damaged.

What condition was the building in when you came there?

The general condition was not too bad, as I remember. But the religious areas, especially the front, were defaced and destroyed. And we were there specifically-- the reason why we were there is to clean up.

To clean up?

Yes.

This was a teacher from the Jewish school who took you?

Yes, yes.

Was she a Jewish-- she or he a Jewish--

She was a Jewish teacher, yes. Yes.

On whose instructions? Do you know?

No. Apparently they were told to come to the synagogue, and I guess he must have known what happened. But as for myself, this is the first inkling that I had that something was wrong.

How did you feel seeing this synagogue which had been so defaced?

It was a terrific shock.

Was there any discussion among the kids or with the teachers?

Oh, yes. Yes.

What was the line of discussion at the time, if you can remember?

Well, I don't really remember. It was just that we were all very shocked.

It must have been very hard to walk in there and to see what kind of damage.

Well, this is something that will stay with me for life because I am not basically, quote, "that religious." But in certain areas that-- when things happen to the Jewish people, you feel not 100%, but 200% Jewish.

In fact, did that thought come to you at the time, that you felt even more Jewish?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, absolutely. It reinforced my belief in the Jewish religion and Jewishness, yes.

Do you ever remember going home and speaking to your parents about-- I mean, you were a young kid-- about being Jewish and why you were singled out in Germany and the feelings that you were having?

Well, no, not specifically in that vein, but it was enough to read some of the magazines, for example. Gee, this is so long ago. You bring back very, very old memories.

But I remember there was a newspaper section that was built near a street where you could read the latest news. And there was one section that was reserved for Der Stürmer. And out of curiosity, I went there a number of times and read what was written there. And I think, more than anything else, reading the articles in Der Stürmer brought home to me what it was like to be Jewish because of the lies and other propaganda that was written in it.

It's interesting. What you saw in the Stürmer, was that reflected in what you were seeing in your daily life? Or was your daily life different from the-- the Stürmer was-- I'm having trouble with the same word-- was specifically violent and very vociferous in their anti-Jewish--

Well, looking back to it, Der Stürmer, to me, it had the same caricatures like the Americans drew of the Japanese during the Second World War. That's what the caricatures that the Stürmer drew of the Jews and any undesirables that they felt were undesirable. And so the big lie, I think, was very effective in Der Stürmer. And I think it did contribute to the prevailing atmosphere in Germany, yes.

How did your parents try and protect you-- I mean, emotionally-- from all these experiences?

Well, as I had said previously, I wasn't that specially aware of the grand scale of what was going on. But specifically, these two instances that I related to you of this boy punching me and the thing with the synagogue in Germany, and of course, the following revealing nature of what happened to my father-- also, naturally, there were other areas where my uncle made some kind of remark someplace in a restaurant. And the following day, he was taken to the Gestapo, and they did a so-called number on him.

Was this also in Dortmund?

And this was also there, yes.

When you say a so-called number--

Well, he was violated, you know, the atrocity. He had his fingers pressed and things of that nature. But he was released. And naturally, all these additional violations to the human spirit and body contributed to our final decision to leave Germany, naturally.

I have to backtrack just for a minute. At the time that you went to the Jewish school, that was before Kristallnacht?

Yes.

Am I correct?

Yes.

OK. Were you told specifically that you could no longer enter the regular school you had been attending?

Yes, that was the reason. That was the reason why I went to the Jewish school in Dortmund, yes.

Who informed you of this?

This I don't remember.

Do you remember leaving the school that you had gone to for all those years? Do you remember your last day?

No. No, I don't remember my last day. I did go to France by myself. Or should I-- should I--

No, I meant the last day that you were leaving the school, the regular school before you went to the Jewish school.

No, I don't remember that.

Did it bother you to leave all these friends that you had been with?

Naturally, naturally. But being a young person, you're resilient, and you take things in stride normally.

How did you feel about the Jewish school?

I liked it. I liked it. I felt more at ease, I must say, there. When I was in the other school, there was always some kind of a strangeness as it developed. But when I went in the Jewish school, I felt considerably different. That I do remember, yes.

The other school-- Dortmund was-- or that area was predominantly Catholic. Is that--

Yes, yes, Catholic, Protestant.

Did you notice any difference between the Catholic kids and the Protestant kids in terms of their reactions?

No, I wasn't aware of that at the time.

OK. It was just a--

Yeah.

OK. Now, you mentioned on Kristallnacht that your father was in Dortmund?

Yes.

How did you find out what happened to him?

This was about two or three days later when I saw him, when he came to me with a big bandage over his head because he had been hit over the head. And he related to me what had happened.

During those two or three days, you had no idea where he was?

No.

You and your mother and--

No, I had no idea.

Do you remember an atmosphere of being really afraid of what had happened to him?

Well, as a matter of fact, I must also relate that when we became aware of what had happened, at the time, my mother lived with my grandfather and grandmother in their own house, which had been rented by a butcher who now conducted the business that my grandfather had. And when we became aware of what had happened, the parents of the butcher, who also lived now in our house, took me in in Dortmund because we were afraid of-- or rather my mother and grandmother were afraid at the time that something there-- they would pick me up as well, because they picked up-- I remember one friend of mine, a Jewish friend that I had, of whom I have not heard from since, since that particular night. And he was my age.

And he was picked up by the Gestapo?

And he was picked up that particular night. And, gee, these are very old memories that just come down.

Who arranged for you to go to Dortmund, to go to this butcher's parents' house?

The butcher himself with-- my grandmother or my mother asked him whether they would be willing to do that. And when we did know that, that's what happened. I was there for several days.

Did you realize the purpose of your going there?

Yes, yes.

When you were there, were you restricted at all as far as going out or--

Yes. I stayed there. I stayed put.

Inside?

Inside.

These people were non-Jewish, I take it?

They were non-Jewish, yes.

And then you mentioned three days later your father came back, so I assume that you had also come back by then?

Yes.

When your father came back and related what had happened to him on Kristallnacht, how did you--

It was a traumatic experience which is still with me to this day.

It must have been quite traumatic in terms of your father had believed that Hitler would not gain that much strength.

Yes, if anything, that, I am sure, gave him the impetus to leave Germany.

How about your mother? Was she more anxious to leave than your father at an--

Well, you know, this was still rather early during the Hitler regime. And when I went to Dortmund was a rather precautionary measure that I wouldn't be picked up. But still, there was this prevailing belief that women and children would not be touched. And so the desire to leave Germany, of course, was there, but not really as strong as it became subsequently.

Between the time your father came home after Kristallnacht and the time he left for Holland, how would you describe the atmosphere?

Oppressive.

How did that show itself inside your own house?

Well, we were talking more about it. And there was not a day that went by that we didn't talk about the events, the past events. And naturally, I was still in shock from-- not of what happened to me, but of what happened to my father. And we realized that things were rather serious.

Was he still in his business at this time?

Yes.

Was his business--

He did not have an open business. He had a business of going to different tailors and selling his wares.

I see. Did these tailors, were they still buying from him, the non-Jewish ones?

Yes, although the business was drastically curtailed, especially after the 9th of November.

[AUDIO OUT]

Getting a little bit ahead of myself.

No, no, that's all right. What were the possibilities discussed during that time as far as emigration?

Well, there were several possibilities that presented itself. But I would say 90% of it revolved around going to America. And that was the final goal of all of us. Now, I couldn't tell you in a specific time frame, but I'm just recalling as what we were thinking about because another uncle of mine left subsequently, then another uncle, so.

For America?

For America.

How did you go about trying to get to America? Did you have relatives?

We had some very far relatives who were willing, at that point, to give us an affidavit. However, since our number was far removed from the prevailing numbers to leave Germany, that looked, to us, like years ahead. And I must say that my father, as I said, about three months after the Kristallnacht, left for Holland.



How did that come about? How did that decision come about?

That decision came about because I'm sure he felt that men would be in terrific jeopardy and that women were, as of that time, still relatively safe. It was unthinkable that women and children would be touched at all. I mean, that was Germany, the culture, the cultured country. And it's something that a lot of people say, well, how come the Jews didn't realize what was going on? Because things were rather unthinkable.

It was unthinkable to put something on like that on television the way it really was, like this latest series, The Holocaust. I would say it's better to put this on television, even in a watered down form, than not at all. Not for the people that lived through it, but for the coming generation, it is imperative that this shall not be forgotten.

Going back to your father's leaving for Holland, what opportunity presented itself for him to go to--

Yes, now, this was a rather simple, alternate thing for him to do. He, of course, knew-- he had a lot of contacts in Aachen, where I was born. And Aachen is close to Belgium, as well as Holland. As a matter of fact, I remember going there because all the three countries converged in the area.

So he knew several people who knew of certain areas that you could get into either Belgium or Holland, in areas that were not supervised by soldiers that would prevent you from going. So he went. One night, he left. And he went to Holland at that time.

You were still only 13 years old.

Yes.

Were you an only child?

Yes.

That must have been a very difficult thing to--

Yes. And naturally, as I said, I remember him departing. And he practically didn't get his trolley at the time because he wanted to stay with me till the last moment. There are certain things in your life that you never forget. And of course, this is one of them.

So about approximately a half year later, I went on a visitor's pass to France-- not an immigration visa because at the time we did still not get it-- knowing full well that I would never return to Germany. And my mother and my grandmother were still in Germany at the time. And we were hopeful that the immigration number would come up soon so that they would be able to leave to Germany.

They would be able to leave to--

To America, I'm sorry. And there were so many other things that happened, which within the confines of this interview, is rather-- I cannot tell.

Well, when your father left for Holland, how did you plan to reunite, if that was the plan when he left?

The idea at the time was to leave Germany. And he knew that I was going to leave Germany to go to France--

He knew this? OK.

--and eventually, getting the visitor's-- I'm sorry, the visa to go to America. And I had felt that this would be the final destination and that it might take just about two or three months until that would happen. And as it turned out-- I mean, I could talk about it for hours, why this particular thing did not take place. The war

came in between. And maybe I talk a little bit more about it.

Well, when your father left for Holland, did he think he was-- you mentioned that the goal was America.

Yes.

How did he feel about safety in Holland?

Well, since this was pre-war, and since there was no inkling that Germany subsequently would attack Holland, et cetera, et cetera, he must have felt rather safe.

OK. Were you in contact with him after he left?

Yes.

You were in written-- I take it, in written contact and letter?

Yes.

What happened to him after he left that night?

Well, shall I tell you the story of my father as it pertains to him over a period of about three years or so?

Mm-hmm.

[AUDIO OUT]

OK. We were at your father.

Yes.

What happens to him after he leaves?

Well, as I said, about three or four months after he left, I was in France on a visitor's pass, as I said before. And we were staying in-- we were in correspondence. And he, at the time, moved from Holland to Belgium.

Illegally again?

Illegally again, yes. And I arrived in France at Strasbourg. And soon thereafter, Germany-- rather, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. And Strasbourg had to be evacuated because it was right at the border. And so I moved to a different town in France with my-- by the way, I was staying with my-- this is another part of the story, but I would like to concentrate that somewhat later. I just want to concentrate on my father right now.

Anyway, he was then in Belgium at the time that I was in a town called Alencon in France, which I moved further because of events that happened with Germany invading Holland and Belgium.

Alencon is still in Alsace-Lorraine or further into France?

No, Alencon was more in the interior of France. As a matter of fact, it was approximately 100 miles from Paris.

OK. All right, just to--

And subsequently, as the Germans progressed into Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, then France, at that point, I lost touch with him. And later on, I received a letter from him from a camp in the southern part of France called Récébédou. And I was still, at the time, in the northern part of France. And to tell you about

what happened to my father after that, is somewhat disjointed because a lot of things had happened in between.

OK, so maybe we ought to take it--

Come back, OK.

OK?

OK.

Now, your father was then in Holland, and you left for France. What brought about this decision to leave for France for you?

Well, because, at the time, we realized that it would be the best thing to do considering the conditions in Germany at the time.

Did you have a place to go in France?

To my aunt and uncle.

In Strasbourg?

In Strasbourg, who were already in France, residents of France.

They had been German, though? They had left Germany?

They had been German, and they had left Germany, yes.

OK. All right. Now, on the day that-- again, this was 1939, so you were 14, right, when you left?

I was close to being 14, yes.

OK. As a 14-year-old boy, the day that you left-- you mentioned how traumatic it was the day that your father left, but it must have been equally difficult on the day that you left.

Yes, it was difficult knowing that I would go by myself. But naturally, the younger you are, the more hope you have in the future. And I felt that, in due time, I would be reunited with the whole family.

How did you feel about your mother and grandmother?

I felt that, within a relatively short period of time, that they would be able to go straight to America.

Do you remember your mother on the day that you left?

Yes. I remember one specific thing that happened the day that I left, which was rather funny. I was blonde at the time, but apparently I wasn't blonde enough for my mother. And she took some peroxide and made my hair still blonder so that it would appear that I would look like an Aryan when going over the border.

And as a matter of fact, I remember another funny incident. As I went over the border, I made fun of the Germans, not realizing that I was still in German territory. But everything went all right.

Who did you go-- you mentioned that you made fun of them. Did you go with anybody?

No, I went by myself.

You just met people on the train, is that--

No, I--

--when you said you met--

No, when I made fun of the Germans, it was right at the border. It was right to the authorities, to the German authorities themselves. And I didn't realize that I was still in German territory.

[LAUGHS] What was their reaction to that?

Well, I think they were rather non-committal because [LAUGHS] I made several remarks, but apparently nothing happened, so.

The reason I asked you about the-- if you remembered your mother, it must have been quite hard for her. Your father had gone a couple of months earlier.

Yes.

And you, as a 13, 14-year-old boy.

Yes.

Did she ever express the difficulty that she must have been feeling?

Well, it's not necessary for a parent to express a new feeling.

True enough. I was just thinking, I grew up with my grandparents too. And I know that especially, your wife said before, a grandparent can be very indulgent of grandchildren.

Yes, that's right.

Well, you went straight there to your aunt and uncle then, in Strasbourg?

Yes.

OK. How long did you stay in Strasbourg?

Up until the point where Strasbourg was evacuated due to the fact that now that France was in war with Germany.

OK. So this is, what, May 1940, with the invasion? Or you had to get out--

Strasbourg was evacuated probably, oh, I'd say three or four months after France declared war. And there was this so-called-- I think they called it the twilight war, where there was more of a war of words than of guns at the time. It was very static because the French government felt that, as we all know, that the-- they felt very safe behind the Maginot Line. And since the guns were pointed towards Germany, fixed in one position, they felt quite comfortable.

But anyway, just as a precautionary measure, they did evacuate Strasbourg. And if I am at liberty to recall something that happened subsequently, after we moved from Strasbourg, which is also one of the things that you remember for life. And there was an occasion that my aunt had to go back to Strasbourg after Strasbourg was evacuated, and I went along for the ride. And it is a fantastic sight to see a city that was thriving and live to be completely empty, devoid of everything.

The entire city was evacuated?

The entire city. The thing that I remember is that on every street corner there was a little container with

food. And the only thing that you saw moving, except an occasional gendarme and soldier, were dogs and cats. You think that the city was populated by dogs and cats rather than by people. And it was a rather eerie sight to see.

I'm sure that's true, but can I ask what was the purpose of her going back to--

Yes, the purpose was that my aunt and uncle had a haberdashery store, which was a little bit more than that, but-- and they had merchandise therein. And the idea was to save as much of the merchandise as possible towards establishing another store further in the center of France.

France, OK. Now, I have to get back. One more thought occurs to me. When you left, were you able to take any money along or only the 10 reichsmark?

No, I think I took very little money along, whatever it was at the time. 10 reichsmark is possible, yes.

Do you remember when your father left, whether--

No, I don't know of any particulars of what happened to him after he said goodbye to me until the time that he was in Holland.

OK. The reason I ask that is simply in terms of living in Holland, as far as getting--

Oh, what he did take with him that established somewhat his living? He, I believe, had a few diamonds. And yes, he did have diamonds, as I probably can relate to you later. And he must have sold by and large what he had to--

Something convertible.

Into money, yes.

OK. And you were living with this aunt and uncle so that money was not a problem as far as you were concerned?

No.

OK. When you went to Strasbourg, did you go to school there?

Yes.

How did that-- did you speak French?

No, I did not speak French. And within a relatively short period of time-- I would say within about three months-- I was able to converse.

What about the feeling that the French were, at that time, very anti-German? Did you feel any of that in school?

No. No, I did not.

The kids were very--

Yes.

--readily accepting?

Kids are kids the world everywhere.

But kids can sometimes be very cruel.

Yes, it's true, as I had found out, yes.

OK. So after Strasbourg was evacuated, where did you move?

We went to a place called Bourbonne-les-Bains. It's probably not even on the map.

Say it again? Bourbon?

Bourbonne-les-Bains.

Les-Bains, OK. Now I know how to spell it.

[LAUGHTER]

What sticks in my mind about that is, we were living in a really like a castle, with all of its unmodern fixtures, et cetera, et cetera.

How unmodern were the fixtures?

Well, there were outhouses and whatever, but that's the best we could come up with at the time. We were living together there with another family.

How were you able to come up with this? How were you able to find this?

I don't remember. Somebody did. But very shortly after that, we moved to a place called Alencon in France, which was approximately 100 miles away from Paris.

Do you remember your aunt and uncle getting any help in terms of information to move to Bourbonne-les-Bains or Alencon?

No, I don't remember the particulars about that. I do remember that we lived in Strasbourg-- I would say I lived in Strasbourg about a half a year. Bourbonne-les-Bains was about a period of about maybe two months. And Alencon was a period of approximately, I would say, a year.

Now, during all this time, it's about a year and a half, almost two years.

Yes.

Did you have contact with your father as well as your mother?

Yes. During that period of time, there was a idea that my mother and my grandmother would be able to leave Germany by way of Russia.

Trans-Siberian?

Trans-Siberian, but that kind of didn't work out. And in due time, it so happened that they went by way of France through Paris. And my aunt had a pass to go to Paris and happened to see them in Paris, even though I did not. And from there, they went to Portugal, and from there to America. So at that point, I knew that they were safe.

OK. You mentioned that your aunt had a pass. She needed a pass to go from Alencon to--

Oh, yes. At that time, you needed passes wherever you went because this was already in times of war.

This was already occupied?

No. No, Paris was not occupied.

OK. All right. But you did need-- you needed a pass then for--

I might have the time frame somewhat mixed up, but it was a fact that my mother and my grandmother did go from Germany to France through Paris, where my aunt saw them.

Now, when your mother and grandmother got the visa, you had, I take it-- I'm making the assumption that you had applied, the four of you, for the visa?

Yes.

They only were able to get two at that time?

Well, first of all, since my father at that time was already in--

Holland.

--out, that possibility was not open to him at the time because he was illegally in another country. And since I was already in France, that possibility, through some legal technicalities, also was not possible. But later on, it became possible that I was able to get the visa from the United States. But this is somewhat later.

But at that time, when your mother and grandmother went, that was not possible for you to join them?

No, because that was a different set-up for some reason. And they were able to go at that time, yes. And they went at night, when nobody knew that they went. They went also. They didn't leave any message for fear of that they might be stopped.

Be stopped by the German authorities, you mean?

Yes.

I should backtrack. Just one question occurred to me. When your father left, did he just-- what did he do about his business?

Nothing.

He just left?

Period.

OK. All right. The day that your mother and grandmother came through Paris and your aunt went to see them, I would guess that you would have very much liked to have gone--

Yes, naturally.

--to Paris. It was out of the question?

That's right. She was at the time, if I remember correctly, a French citizen at that time. And my aunt at the time also was able to cut some red tape with the authorities because some people could be bribed. And therefore, she was able to go.

Was this your mother's sister?

No, this was my mother's brother's wife.

Had they set up a haberdashery store in Alençon?

Yes.

OK. When your aunt came home that night and you found out that your mother and grandmother were on their way to America, from then on, France-- I'm just trying to get the time frame. France became occupied after that?

Yes, but I would rather relate the story of my being in France from Alençon on.

Oh.

I think that would be the best way to go about it.

OK. All right.

Well, anyway, my mother and my grandmother then, at that time, I knew were safe in America, received letters from them, wrote them letters. I was still in Alençon at the time when my father was in this camp in Southern France.

He had written to you then from Récébédou?

Yes, Récébédou in southern part of France, yes.

OK.

[AUDIO OUT]