

Could you tell me your name, please, and where you were born?

Rene Lichtman, and I was born Paris, France.

When?

December 4, 1937.

So you were just a child when the war started?

Right. I was 2 and 1/2 the Germans invaded in June of 1940, and I was born in December of 1937.

Tell me a little bit about this circumstances that led to your experience during the war.

Well, I don't know a lot of the details because it's only recently that I've really become interested in those types of details, but evidently, prior to the war, my mother and father had an arrangement with you might call her a foster mother. It was someone who lived just outside a half hour outside of Paris who took care of kids. And that was-- her name was Anne Lepage.

My parents had come from Poland-- from Lubartow, Poland, which is northeast of Lublin, and evidently, my dad had come in 1936-- excuse me, 1933. They were married in Poland. He came to Paris to work in 1933, and 1936, my mother came from Poland. And in 1937, I was born. So they were essentially Polish immigrants, and they both worked in Paris.

And they had this woman on the outskirts of Paris who took care of me. According to her, she said she started seeing me when I was six months old. I remember her telling me that at one time. It just kind of-- I thought, oh, that was kind of early. But didn't make-- didn't have much meaning for me.

But I could see where they would put me in her care while they were working. It was a pretty common thing for working families to do, and she always took care of a number of kids. In all the photographs that I have and even my childhood memories, I always remember other kids hanging out-- hanging around, coming and going, type of thing. So it was like a daycare center, you might say.

But then when the war broke out, for some reason, my father decided to join the French army which was very unusual for Jews. And he approached her, and he had a relationship-- he had a warmer relationship, a better, friendly relationship with her than she had with my mother. Because for one thing, my mother didn't speak French very well. And my father had been there longer, so he spoke French better.

And my [NON-ENGLISH], my guardian liked him. And he said to her, he said, if something's going to happen-- now, this is already the war period, or the beginning of the war. And I don't know exactly what year. If something's going to happen, would you take care of Rene? Would you-- if something happened to me and my wife, would you let him stay?

And so she agreed to that. In essence, I spent those years with her at her house. At the beginning of the war, when Jews could still travel, my mother came to see me a couple of times. But I don't remember her very clearly. I remember this young woman who wore perfume who came to see me, but I don't even really-- I don't even remember her holding me or anything. I remember kind of looking at her from a certain distance.

And then, of course, as the war progressed and the laws got more strict, she went into hiding herself in Paris. So I didn't see her until the war was over.

Was Anne Lepage, was she married?

Anne Lepage was married, and to Papa Paul, my guardian. They had no children. Animals and other people's kids, they were always-- they were big into animals. And we had a nice vegetable garden, et cetera, et cetera.

But she also had a nephew. And he was an interesting guy, and he had a son, Polo, who I have pictures of with Polo, who was in the military by the time I went back to see them in the 19 late '50s. He was always a few years older than me, And I remember him kind of going and coming.

But my guardian's nephew, I remember him as-- he's the guy, at times, when my mother would come to see me when it was dangerous-- because she did come to see me after when it was illegal, actually, to travel at certain times-- he went into Paris and got her-- you know, would bring her to see me, and then take her back. And so I thought of him as a pretty courageous guy, and he turned out to be one-- he turned out to be in the underground later on, I found out. Yeah.

And was the-- there was a farm, basically. Was it a village?

It was a small village, and I went back there recently a couple of years ago.

What was the name of the village?

It's called [FRENCH], and it's just northeast of Paris, maybe a half hour by train. It's not considered part of the suburbs because it's so close now because Paris has expanded. But the house is still there, and it looks the same. And in those days, it was just a very small town, and most of the people were still partially farmers and worked in the city.

For example, Papa Paul I'm sure came from some kind of farming background. He was not a professional, but he worked as a bank clerk in Paris. He was a clerk in a bank. Very debonair, very kind of sophisticated, strict gentleman, and she was extremely warm, extremely loving. And they had a wonderful relationship.

And then in the back, the farming aspect was that they had-- there was a big vegetable garden in the back. And we always had a chicken, and rabbits, and turkeys that we were raising-- ducks and all kinds of things floating around, and stuff like that.

Just so we can clarify this, they were not Jews?

They were not Jews, no. They were French Catholics. As a matter of fact, there were crosses all over the house.

And again, you kind of wonder how much of this-- how much do I really know the details? But I was baptized at one point. And I don't know if my father, you know, went along. I assumed he knew that was going to be happening. But if she was going to protect me and protect themselves, then I had to be baptized.

And I've always been curious. I've always wanted to get my baptism certificate. But I don't clearly remember going to church, and I think that had more to do with not being seen.

Interestingly enough, I mean, essentially, I was in hiding. I did not participate in any kind of social activities, or birthday parties, or school, or day care center, or going to the swimming pool in the summer, or anything like that. And we lived-- by sheer coincidence, geographically we lived, if you can imagine a town being a square, the bottom part was the railroad track. And this part of it was at the beginning of a forest. So we lived right on the corner right down here, terribly isolated.

And then there was this big forest, and there was a railroad track here. So we really didn't have much contact with people. It's not like we were in the middle of town. And it was such an interesting location because of the railroad track in the forest that the Germans, as soon as they showed up, that's where they put their foxholes, right across the street from us. And they would come to our house for water. I remember that one image.

You were 3-- 2 and 1/2 when the war started?

Yes.

Do you remember some of the war experience?

No, very little. Because I was shielded from there. Because in some of the things that I know occurred occurred because I asked my guardian afterwards. For example, people were suspicious that she was hiding Jews. And at one time, you had to register all your Jews.

And she was going, and she didn't register me. And she was going to a barber shop, and the barber was-- the male barber was friendly to her, but the woman was not. And the woman made a crack about, aren't you-- don't you have a Jewish kid in your house? And shouldn't you be registered, or something like that.

And she said, no, he's not. He-- I don't know exactly how she described me, but you know, I was like the son of a niece or something like that, or someone like that.

What would have happened if they had been--

Well, I think the law in-- I mean, you know, it was different, but I think in France, certainly I would have been taken away. And in terms of I don't know if they had the death penalty for her. I know Eastern Europe they did for hiding Jews, but they had-- I think in France, there was some kind of penalty for her for hiding me.

So she was fully aware of the danger?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. She was-- yeah. She was aware, yeah.

And let's go back a little bit. And your father is now in the war in the French army?

Yeah.

And?

My father, interestingly enough, well, he gets killed right away. Why does he get killed? Because they put him-- they had a lot of foreigners. It's very similar-- it was similar then to what it is now in France. They have a huge amount of foreigners, and escaping fascism from all over Europe. They have a lot of Jews.

And so-- as a matter of fact, I was just reading in this book that it said-- there was a letter written to, and this occurred a lot, from someone in Vichy, from the Vichy government saying to these people up north, saying, look, we're sending you a transport of the [SPEAKING FRENCH], foreign Jews, as opposed to French Jews. The French Jews who had been there for generations, the French tried to protect them as long as they could. In the end, they weren't successful.

But the first ones they wanted to go were these foreign Jews. My father coming from Poland was a foreign Jew. So he joined the military, and I've been told he did it because that was a quick way for me to become a citizen. He wanted me to become a French citizen.

For you to become a citizen, not for him to become a citizen?

Right, for me. And so he joined the French army, and he was put in with these units of foreigners. And he was killed right away because they were the ones sent up to meet the Germans. You don't want to spill French blood.

And there's a little interesting story about that. My uncle, Moishe, when I went back to visit in '64, I went to visit. And I was beginning to wonder about who my father was because my mother had-- could not tell me anything about him except that he was tall and handsome.

And so I asked Moishe, I said-- and Tante Rose was there, my aunt. And I said, look, here's a guy, he goes and joins the army. You know, where does that come from? Because everybody else was going south. He decides-- now I want to know, what kind of politics did he have in Poland?

So right away, my Uncle Moishe says, [NON-ENGLISH], he was a communist, you know, which means anything. He's a leftist. And then my Tante Rose right away says, she says, yes, but he stopped all that nonsense when he came to France. So why my father joined the military I'm not quite sure, but one thing that my uncle told me at the time, which was very significant, he said, look, your dad came home on leave one time before he was supposed to really go up to the front. He was very sick.

I said to him-- this is Moishe talking, my uncle. He says, look, we're all going south. What the heck are you doing going back up there? Come back. You're sick. You shouldn't be going back to your unit area. Go south with us.

And for some reason, my father felt he had an obligation to go back to his unit. And he was killed.

Which left your mother alone.

Which left my mother alone-- completely alone. No language skills, no-- fortunately, there were two women, righteous Gentiles. And Madame Gaby and her mother in Paris who lived above my mother. And they knew my mother, and they liked my mother.

Her mother's name, Madame-- Gaby's mother's name?

No, I don't. If it--

Lily?

Lily. Madame Lily, yes. And Gaby I remember more clearly because we actually went to visit her in '57. And she was the manager of the Cafe la Paix in Paris, which was this big cafe. And she was the manager, and she ran the place.

But what happened with my mom is that the Germans-- and now I guess this is starting in 1942, and they were really implementing the Final Solution, and rounding people up, and going door to door. So my mother received word that they were be coming to her building. We lived in a very nice six story building in Paris on the third floor, and she was warned that the Germans would be coming.

And so these two ladies said to her, why don't you come upstairs and stay with us? Something to that effect. They had a room way up on the top. They had space. So my mother the next day was actually on the fourth floor with them when the Germans came in. And we lived on the third floor.

And they broke the door down, and they went through the apartment. Now, my mother and father had a business at home, which was very common. And they were seamstressing. They did clothes-- custom made clothing. This was before automation and everything else.

So they had lots of sewing machines in all these rooms, and people worked for them. And they all worked together kind of thing. And so the Germans went through and destroyed all those sewing machines.

And then when they left, they barricaded the door. And they put up their sign saying that this apartment is no longer-- can no longer be habitated, and essentially preventing my mother from returning there. And this was their standard operating procedure. There was nothing personal, you know.

And so she spent the last two years with these women. And how she did it, how she reimbursed them, paid them, given the fact that she had no job, no-- I've never found out.

Did she pay Anne Lepage?

You know, my mother says she did. At one point, my mother was very jealous of my guardian-- of my feelings for my guardians because I loved these people and missed them a lot when I had to go back. But so my mother would always

make statements like-- she said, you know, I did pay them. But then to me, it was always kind of a joke because I-- how would she pay? They were poor. My parents had no money. And so I have no idea how she would have reimbursed, but she was in hiding. So--

What do you remember about the life on the farm?

Well, it was-- it's interesting. I mean, in retrospect, I was really in hiding. I didn't go out. The one thing that I-- I had no playmates except these kids who came in, and I don't remember much about them because they didn't stay too long. I stayed there, and I knew I was the favorite. That was the other thing. I was very-- I felt very loved and cared for.

I remember the Christmas holidays, things like that. I remember being with them in the garden a lot outside, but it was kind of a fenced in. And again, remember it was in the corner of that town. But I don't remember going to the grocery store with her or anything like that. I do remember when the Germans came that one time, and there was kind of an interesting because I don't think we had too many visitors.

And I remember being in the back room or something, and they came for water. And I don't remember being fearful or anything. I don't remember that. But I just remember that being kind of strange that we had some strangers.

I also remember when the Americans came in and took over the same foxholes. And they came over to actually get-- she washed the feet of one of the soldiers one time because he was having some problems. But the extent-- one of the things that I did was I drew pictures.

And if you think-- if you want someone to be quiet and not rambunctious, et cetera, and they like drawing pictures, that's an ideal situation. So I was really encouraged to draw pictures. And my guardian saved those pictures. And when I went back to see her in '70-- I think it was '74 last time I went back to see her. By that time, she was living in the South of France, she had those drawings, some of them.

And they were very interesting because they were always-- they were very political. It was the FFE, the Free French Forces of the Interior, which was which was de Gaulle's people, you know, fighting the Nazis. But I think that helped me a lot, the drawing piece, you know.

Do you think it's where you were first inspired to begin thinking about being an artist?

Yeah. What happened is it led to-- I mean, it's the only thing that I did that I knew I had to do. When the war ended and I went back to my mother, in Paris, and then I realized I was Jewish. That was very, very traumatic, certainly, in terms of identity shift. And--

You didn't know before?

I didn't know. I had no inkling. I didn't know what it was. There was no reason for me to know. The less I knew, the better in terms of security, safety issues.

I had my ring with my Virgin Mary on it. I had my little book of prayers, and I remember some of the prayers. You know, I was helped-- if you're going to be Christian, you might as well know some of the prayers if some people are going to stop by and ask. So--

What prayers did you learn?

Oh, there was-- [NON-ENGLISH]. I mean, if it came back to me, there was this-- you know, there's all these prayers, and there's these books with all these beautiful pictures of saints.

The catechism?

Is it catechism? I don't know. It was--

Do you remember them?

No, no. But if they-- if somebody-- I mean, there was a certain rhythm to them, you know, and all that. And what I also remember were the books. The prayer books were-- always had all these saints, and they were all very beautiful. So visually, aesthetically, I kind of liked looking at all that stuff, you know.

Did you sing them for your mother?

No, I don't think so. I may have at some point, but my mother was pretty jealous of that relationship. And I realized that, so I tried not to-- I mean, I tried, but I really did antagonize my mother quite a bit. Because when I went back to her after 1945, in Paris, and we went back to our old apartment. It was just the two of us. I was a difficult kid.

And so whenever we had problems, I would say to her, I want to go back to Mama Nana, and she-- and she would--

What did you call her?

Mama Nana. Nana is like a [NON-ENGLISH], which is a foster parent. When you say they put you on [NON-ENGLISH], mean like a daycare center or foster parent. So she was Mama Nana, and then I had Mama Elaine, which was my real mother.

Now, let me just recap this. You're 2 and 1/2 years old, and in fact, your mother gives you over to new parents-- a new mother. They take care of you for the duration of the war, five years, until you're seven. Is that right? And then what happens?

Well, then the sad part starts. Because I didn't want to leave them, and I didn't-- I wasn't comfortable with my own mother. Because she was-- she was so different. And-- I mean, she was-- she wasn't French. She had a thick accent.

And then I learned about being a [NON-ENGLISH], a Jew when I started going to school. And she was a Jew. And wherever we went, she had such an accent that it was obvious she was-- that she was Jewish.

And I wanted to go back to my Mama Nana, my Papa. But I knew I couldn't. I knew that she was my mother, and I remember saying to her when we had fights in Paris-- we had fights a lot because I think I was a screwed-up kid. And I would say, you know, if Papa Jack-- I had two fathers also. Papa Jack, which was Jacob, my real father who died, and had Papa Paul.

So I would say to her, if Papa Jack was here, this wouldn't occur. He would be protect me from you and all that kind of thing. But I was not happy. Those five years were not happy years. And my cousins who were a few years older than me-- I have three or four girl cousins. One of them is in Israel right now, and the other two are in Paris. And one of them passed away young.

But they told me-- I would spend a lot of time with them. I would go and visit with them, and with my aunt. And they said I was just-- that I was a very difficult kid. And the only thing that cooled me out was if they put a piece of paper in front of me.

To draw?

To draw.

But in five years, you had lost-- in fact, you had lost two families, plus a father.

That was-- yeah. I used to use the expression that when my parents-- when my father gave me away, and I've had shrinks say, that's an interesting expression, they gave you away. But, you know, abandonment. Yeah, and I-- yeah, I lost all of that during those early years. Although I felt-- with my guardians, I really felt love and security, I would say.

But it's hard to tell. You know, I was so isolated that I didn't experience too much of a social nature.

These other children that appeared on occasion in the Lepage's home, you think they were Jewish children?

I have no idea. I have no idea. I met a few years ago a guy-- I went to one of these national conferences, and they sat me down at a table with French people. And the guy next to me says, where were you hidden? And I hadn't thought-- I never thought about that town hiding. I mean, I didn't-- didn't think about those things too much.

He says, where were you? I said, I was outside of Paris. He said, well, where? I said, well a little town. He said, what's the name? I said, [FRENCH]. He says, oh, OK.

He goes outside, comes back with a book full of documents. He turns to a page, and there it was, [FRENCH], where he, too, had been in hiding. Yeah, Jack Fine, who just called me two nights ago. And except-- so I started saying, I said, well, look, I want to know, was there a roundup at the school? Because I think that's one of the reasons I was told that I couldn't go to any kind of school because they were rounding up to Jewish kids there.

And he said he didn't know because he was one of those kids that kind of went through. And he didn't remember too much about his stay at [FRENCH]. But you know, I'm sure it was so close to Paris, it was an ideal place for other Jewish kids to be there, including in the schools, and including in the roundup. That's why I've always been curious about finding out from the schools-- you know, finding out the history of that town. I mean, I'd be very interested to find out.

Do you think the resistance was involved in it?

Well, my father's-- my guardian's nephew, I think, was in the resistance, yeah. He was-- they said he was a communist.

When did you find out about your father?

That my father was dead? You know, I don't know how that stuff happens. You know, it's like your real father is dead. Well, I think when I went back to my mother, you know, I found out that she was my real mother. And that my father was actually missing in combat. And--

So it was after the war?

So it was-- so actually, for another two or three years, we were hoping that he would come back. Because the definition of missing in action, missing in combat is seven years, something to that effect. So the French government was waiting for seven years before they actually pronounced him dead.

But I heard, you know, they have records of his unit. And evidently, his unit was blown up. I found this out later. It was blown up outside of Paris as the Germans were coming in, and they were crossing this bridge at night. And the bridge was blown up.

Did you ever see any Germans?

Not really, except I think the ones that came in and I kind of took a look. But it wasn't-- and those guys were not-- they were relatively polite. They came in for water, and they-- I don't think they scared anybody. And they went back to their foxholes. They were not rounding up the Jews.

This is Wehrmacht-- the Wehrmacht soldiers?

I suppose, yeah, yeah.

And you said you heard-- you could hear the shooting?

At one point, yeah. What happened was as the Americans, of course-- and of course, there were-- I mean, these were the

days of the v-1s and v-2s, the rockets that were flying in from Germany to England. But they felt short, including in our town. Oh yeah, we had a v-2 explode right down the street.

And I was a pretty good sleeper because my guardian I remember saying, you know, this V-2 is down the street, and you slept right through it. And then I remember going for a walk with them, and we walked by where it had landed accidentally. It was on its way to London. But then-- so I was aware of the war and those types of things.

And then at one point, there was this big firefight in the-- big fight in the forest. Because we were right there, so there was all this shooting in the forest. And there was a road parallel to the forest which kind of perpendicular to the railroad track, and one time, I recall there were these tanks and people were yelling out, the Germans are coming back. The Germans are coming back. And then somebody-- I mean, we were outside. I remember going outside to the edge and looking.

And then somebody said, no, that's the Americans. That's the Americans. And to me-- but I could tell that it was good news. And--

You really had no sense of what the war was about?

I had no sense, no, no. I didn't have any--

Any discussions in the house?

No, no. No discussions that I was any part of. I think they were-- I think it was very clear that you were not to hide Jews. And I think there was a certain element of fear in the family that your next door neighbor, you know, there were-- first of all, there was a lot of collaborators. And you really just didn't know. And so things-- the less that I knew about anything, the safer it was.

But is it possible that other people in the village knew you were there?

Oh yeah, I think so. I think that some people might have known, but it's the kind of thing you don't-- that those types of people wouldn't have talked about. I mean, if they were sympathetic. If they were not sympathetic, they would try, like this woman did, to provoke my guardian into saying, shouldn't you register this kid? You know, initially it was just registration, and then eventually, they took this information from registration and rounded up people.

Tell me a little bit more about your guardian. She sounds like she was a very caring--

She was truly-- yeah, she was truly a righteous Gentile. And I'm sure a lot of it has to do with the fact that she was childless, and she did want me to stay with her. She wanted me-- but it was-- I mean, she was so good that she realized that the right thing to do was to give me back to my Jewish mother, whereas some other people-- Abe Foxman's people, they didn't want to give them up.

So she gave me back. But she always had hopes, I mean, even when I visited her, and-- I mean, I visited them back-- I went back to see them twice in 1957, I think, after I got out of high school. And then I was there in the 1960-- well, no, was it '64, '74? I'm not sure. No, it was '64, '65 I went back to see her with-- I was traveling through Europe.

And especially the second time that I went to see her, I asked her questions, you know. And she had-- if something was going to happen to my mother, she had made plans so that-- because I was so interested in drawing, for me to go into some kind of illustration type work, you know. And she really saw me-- and there she was getting much older. And by that time, she was living in the south of France, and getting frail.

And I felt-- I remember that. I remember thinking, well, maybe I should stay with her now. She's getting old. And thinking-- and my mother's back, and I hadn't seen-- my relationship with my mother remained strained. But my mother was in New York, and here I said, you know, I felt torn. I felt guilty that she had sacrificed so much, and here she was going to be dying by herself. Because by that time, her husband had already--



He'd already died?

He'd already died, and he was buried like one block away in this little town in Morbecque way in the south. And so she and I went to visit his grave. So she was all alone now, and--

Did you think about bringing her back to the United States?

You know, I didn't think about that because I was-- my life was pretty chaotic at the time. And it's not like my mother would have welcomed her or anything like that. No, it didn't even enter-- no, what I thought about was staying with her. And then I thought--

You said she sacrificed a lot for you. What do you remember about her? Did she tell you you were in danger if somebody [CROSS TALK]

No.

You never knew that?

I never knew that I was in danger. So there was no fear that I was conscious of. I was just conscious of restrictions. And even that's an unconscious-- if you don't know, if you have no comparison of what it's like-- I mean, we had no TV. I don't think we even-- I don't even recall we didn't listen to the radio. I think we had magazines and stuff like that that would come-- romance type magazines that she read, but I have-- I was really, really quite isolated.

That's why the shock, and that's, really, I think, the trauma for me was when I had to suddenly go into Paris and become-- you know, and take on a new identity. Because I certainly-- to be a Jew with a different mother, and to have these people around me expect certain things of me, and that lasted five years. And then I came to the United States. And that was another--

Another new event.

Oh, that was another trauma with a religious Jewish stepfather who was horrible.

Was your mother religious?

No. She wasn't religious. She was very-- she knew this stuff from Poland. She knew what to do as a Jewish woman, you know. But she never imparted it to me. I mean, I had-- the Jewish identity I had in Paris was more cultural, and we had Jewish friends. And that was kind of interesting because my mother was part of a group of young Jewish people, and they liked to party. And they liked to sing at somebody's house, and sing the old Yiddish songs, you know.

And that was very beautiful for me. And she had a beautiful voice. So that part of Judaism, the cultural aspects and the social aspects, I really liked that. And--

Your mother was not religious, but she wound up marrying a Hasid?

Not quite. An Orthodox Jew, but he wasn't Hasidic. But he lived in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which is still Hasidic territory. I mean, very briefly, my mother had a sister in Brighton Beach, New York, who was a secular woman, a leftist, a poet, and raised her kids to be artists and theater people and all that kind of stuff. But somehow, my aunt chose this guy who was-- I should say-- he's dead now, so-- but you know, he was terrible for my mother because he was much older and he was very pious. He just liked to-- really kind of a nothing.

He had grown children. He had grandchildren himself. It was the most mismatched. Why my mother, I don't-- and interesting enough, my mother had a very active social life in Paris. She had boyfriends and very-- I mean, they really enjoyed themselves. They went to the French club. It was essentially a kind of a French culture, and here she comes--

And I remember when she came to the United States, and I was with my guardian. I was staying with my guardian at that time. Because when my mother did anything--

In France?

--in France, I would stay with my guardian. Like during vacation, I would go back to my guardian. So I kept seeing her, and my mother, you know, accepted that. I mean, it was-- I was going back to a foster parent. So the relationship continued.

And in 1950 when my mother came for a visit to the United States, I was with my guardian. And I remember the mail coming, and my guardian opening it up outside in our front yard, which was all vegetables, and flowers, and all this summertime. And she's reading this letter, and she's saying-- she says, Rene, she says, your mother went to New York, and she married a man in New York.

How long before-- how long was she away?

How long was she away? I don't know. Hardly any time, you know? I mean, it was like-- I guess by that time I was in school, so it was summer vacation, I assume, in the summer. And so she's coming back, and she's going to take you back to New York with her. And I went nuts.

What did you do?

I started screaming, and crying, and just-- I just-- I remember that very clearly. And she was-- she played the role of, again, to do what's right, you know, you're going to do what Mama Elaine-- there was always Mama Elaine and Mama Nana. I mean, I always had these-- and so I did what I'm supposed to do.

And then as soon as I got there, I got an ulcer. And--

In New York?

Yeah. That's what I was told later that for years I'd had duodenal ulcer.

Let me take you just before we move to New York a couple more things about the about the war years. Did you ever encounter any American soldiers?

There was-- oh yeah, well, yeah. There was one-- as a matter of fact, I've got some very interesting pictures of the soldiers. But after that fight in the woods, and after the Americans came in and took over those same foxholes across the street, one of them came-- as a matter of fact, you know, it was interesting because both my-- well, my guardian had a cousin or someone next door. And even we weren't even close to her. I mean, that's how-- we didn't socialize that much. But she had hidden a American soldier. I don't know if he was the same one who came over.

But one time I remember very clearly coming into-- the space-- the house was designed in such a way, the upstairs was very nicely furnished. And that's where we spent the winters upstairs. When the summertime, we would go downstairs and eat downstairs because there was a separate kitchen down there, and downstairs is where we also kept all of our animals-- all of our chickens, and our rabbits. And you know, that was the farm aspects, and we always had cats and dogs. My guardian love cats and dogs.

I was raised with animals. I mean, I had my own cat, and he slept with me. And I think that was very important to this day. But bring me back on track. You asked about American soldiers.

So I came down to the space that we used in the summertime, and there she was with this big American soldier sitting there. And he had a big pail of water, and she was on the floor washing his hands-- washing his feet. And it was one of those Christian, you know, Jesus or something-- Jesus having his feet washed or something. I mean, it was some kind of

religious-- it was a strange sight.

And it was very beautiful. I remember it that way.

What was he doing there?

Well, he was, I guess, one of these guys. I don't know if he got lost because I guess some of them got lost. That's why my guardian was-- my guardian's, I think, cousin or niece was hiding someone. We learned that there had been a few American soldiers that were hiding in that area before the Americans won, before they came over and, you know, knocked the Germans out.

And then he-- I'm not sure if he just came out of the foxhole. But anyway, he had problems with his feet, and he wanted to feet-- you know, they were in bad shape, and he had to get new socks, and all that kind of stuff.

You don't think he was an escaped POW?

No because he had a uniform. I remember definitely the uniform-- the smell, the uniform, GI. And I think he gave us chocolate, or-- but where he came from exactly-- but I knew they had a foxhole right-- as a matter of fact, we were the ones who had at one point started to dig the holes. And then the Germans came and took it over. And so it had a little bit of history.

But that was my first impression. Then when I went back in terms of relationship with American GIs, when I went back to Paris, we had all these Jewish American GIs that became friends. So I've got all these pictures, these very formal pictures and actual portraits of my mother and some of her friends, and they had husbands. I mean, we all became friends. And some of the women did not have husbands because there was always someone who perished.

But they took these pictures together, and I guess it was the Jewish connection. So that was my--

Was this in your home they were doing this?

Yeah. And they went to formal portrait studios, and then there were some shots of me by the main [NON-ENGLISH] in front of the souvenir shop. And my mother had a particular boyfriend.

A soldier?

Soldier, who was a married guy from Jersey, you know. And she knew he was-- so of course, it was not permanent. But yeah, they took pictures. It was very interesting relationship, you know. It was very open, and casual, and non-uptight, you know. It was--

Wartime.

It was wartime, yeah. It was close. You know, there was a close, warm relationship to the point where they would take these formal portraits together. I mean, it's not like they were hiding anything, you know? It was kind of interesting.

Why don't you tell me about the ring that you got.

Well, the ring was kind of interesting. It was a-- it had the Virgin Mary on it. And it was a gift, I suppose. And it had a kind of interesting story to it because I would take it out, and I would suck on it at night, or something. And one time, I swallowed it. And that became a big episode.

And my guardian was-- she would try to find it when I went to the bathroom. So eventually, she found it.

She did find it.

She had it. You know, it was a great-- [CHEERING], you know. It was a big thing.

When did she give it to you? Was it during the war?

It was during the-- yeah. How I got that ring I don't know, but you know, the Virgin Mary was all around me. It was on all the crosses. But they were French-- you know, I don't think they went to church in that respect. Well, we had a church right down the street. I mean, one of the warm memories that I have is the church bells, you know?

But you never went to church?

Not that I'm aware of. I went back-- when we went back a couple of years ago, my wife, and Risa, and I, and I went back to the-- I went by myself to the town, [NON-ENGLISH]. And I went to look at my house, and I went to-- and I was trying to get information. But it almost looked abandoned where somebody hadn't been taken care of it, and the people were not-- they had been-- they were on vacation or something.

And then I went to look for the church because I was interested in baptism records. And I wanted to know how to find out about the wartime history of the town. And it turned out the priest was not around, and it was-- it was kind of a dead end. And it was really too bad. I'm not sure how to pursue all that.

And I don't want to dwell too much on the ring, though it's a funny story in the end, I suppose. But do you think she gave it to you as a good luck ring, as something to remember her by?

Yeah, I don't know-- you know, I think it's all those things, and a religious-- I mean, if you're trying to be Christian, it's nice to have-- people would notice that. And it was probably pretty common for kids to be wearing something with. But there was one thing that occurred that was kind of interesting which-- and I never talk about that very much at all.

Evidently, I was pretty sick a few times, and I don't know how she was able to get these doctors to come over and take care of me. Because I do remember one doctor coming over. I remember there was one time I woke up, and I couldn't open my eyes because both my eyes were full of pus. I mean, caked all my eyes. And that was one instance where I just remember her kind of gently-- each morning, I had some kind of infection or something.

And then there was something more serious where the doctor came over and took care of me. And then one thing that occurred was I always-- which was kind of disturbing-- and I'm not 100% sure about that. But I always had a lazy eye, and I was never treated for that because I never went to a doctor over there. You know, I didn't go-- I mean, I know I remember doctors coming to see me, and I don't know whether it was at night or who these people were.

But when I went back to-- so I was 7 and 1/2, 8 years old, I went back to Paris. And there, they tried to-- they realized that I was losing the vision in my eye. And they tried to patch it. For some reason, I was really against that because it was just one more thing.

What do you mean patch it? They gave you a patch to it?

They would give you a patch to strengthen the bad eye.

So you wear the patch on the good eye?

Yes, to force the bad eye to work. And so I rebelled against that, and my mother couldn't deal with me. And what happens is I essentially lost the vision in my left eye.

At age eight?

Yeah. And usually, it's-- you know, the same thing almost happened to David in some ways. That's kind of freaked me out-- yeah, almost. But I've always felt-- you know, I always said, you know what, if I'd had a normal childhood, that could have been picked up. And then as soon as I came to New York, right away in the public schools, they wanted--

they couldn't do anything to save the vision. But they could do cosmetic surgery to straighten out the eye so it wouldn't look so strange. But to this day, legally I'm blind in my left eye.

You said you wondered what happened if you had a normal childhood. Those five years as you're describing them sound like they may have been-- given there's a war on, they may have been normal to some extent. It's the sandwich that doesn't seem normal. It's the beginning and the end of it. You think that you would-- that maybe Madame Lepage gave you a foundation of some sort of--

Oh, yeah. Yeah, she gave me a foundation of security, yeah. But it wasn't normal in the sense of making me a social being. I don't know where I learned that, but I learned. Yep, I learned it. Because when I got to New York, right away, I knew how to blend in, and make friends, and be popular, and belong to the right gangs, et cetera.

But no, I think she gave me love, and security, and she gave me a kind of, you might say, they were wonderful role models for what parents could be like-- very loving, very forgiving. He was the strong, tough guy, you know, and she was able to-- she taught me negotiating skills. She says, OK, you do what Papa Paul says because he always had the last word. He was the authority, you know. And even though it may-- then we'll discuss it later. You can tell Mama Nana if you have any problems with it.

So that was the tactic that we used. So I learned a great deal. Plus I was a kid. I was loved, you know. I just felt just-- I felt OK there.

And in all this time, you don't think that there was ever any proselytizing?

No. They weren't-- they weren't those types of Christians. They were what I think of French Catholics. You know, French Catholics, they like Catholicism, but they don't--

They don't voice it.

They don't-- no, they don't take it too seriously.

You know, when you had these doctors.

Yeah. I never understood that.

Do you think that they realized, the doctors realized that you were Jewish?

You know, I don't know. And there's no way of knowing that. And I would assume that my guardian would have chosen someone who was sympathetic to her situation, or would keep their mouth shut, you know. I mean, I don't think-- I think in those days they knew who the pro-fascists were, who the right wingers, the pro-German elements, the French fascists. There was French fascists who were anti-German. They were just French fascists.

So I think people knew who they were dealing with. And I think also maybe that my guardian's nephew had contacts. And I have a picture of him also. He was an interesting guy.

But you never felt in danger?

I never felt in danger, no. I think for me, the Holocaust was-- the fact that you think. well, people experienced the Holocaust, and they come home. And then you go back to school. Like Fred says, you know, OK, let's just start all over again.

And I think the Holocaust didn't stop in 1945. That the repercussions sometimes were as, if not more severe. Because, I mean, I've heard a lot of stories where people were hidden in a somewhat safe environment, and suddenly they had to become Jewish again. And that whole trauma, that whole identity, well, what the heck am I now? And then suddenly I was-- one minute I'm French, and then five years later, I'm going to live in America.

And you know, I don't feel terribly American. I don't feel terribly French. I'm not Catholic, but I don't feel much like a Jew.

Why don't we stop for a minute, and then we'll come back and we'll talk about this?

Let's talk a little bit about your mother again. Do you know what happened to her while she was in hiding during the war?

You know, it's embarrassing, but I really don't. And for a variety of reasons. One having to do with the fact that when the thing was over, you didn't talk about it. And you kept going. You'd look towards the future, so you didn't delve into those issues.

I just assumed she was hidden with these people for two years in some small room in that building-- in that particular building. When I came back to her, I remember something very clearly was going through the closet-- which was her closet, I guess-- and seeing a jacket with a yellow star with [FRENCH] written on it.

Really?

Yeah, and it struck me that it had no meaning. I mean, I couldn't relate it to-- I mean, it meant that she was a Jew, and it was kind of strange. But I never asked her about it. I mean, I was probably, what, 7 and 1/2, 8 years old. I mean, I don't-- so I never asked her what that was or why she had it there. But I'll never forget that it was such a strange thing to have in your closet.

So that's why we didn't discuss it. Later on, when I became aware that time was going on and I wanted her to talk about these things, and when-- especially when the kids, especially when the kids came along, my three children, and we would go back to visit my mother. And I knew we had a Holocaust remembrance book, and I always try-- for the sake of my kids, I wanted them to hear it from her. And I wanted her to talk about our-- where we came from, and our community, and what Jewish life was like, and her family. She had 11 brothers and sisters.

In Lubartow?

In Lubartow. And only-- and you can imagine how many cousins, and nephews, and nieces and you know, huge. And the only ones that-- I think there was, like, two or three sisters that survived, and one brother. One sister was in the United States, and then my-- my aunt Charlotte, [NON-ENGLISH], and then my uncle Moishe, which was her brother. And all of the others perished.

So that when I would try to find out from my mother during those visits what was it like, what were you doing during the war? How did-- she would break down crying hysterically. And so-- and we couldn't even finish looking at the remembrance book, the Yizkor book, because she would just get so emotional. Because she would see these people, and including pictures of my father and pictures of all of her brothers were there-- not all of them, but a few. And that was enough to make her real nervous. And then everybody would say stop.

When did you become aware that this was-- I mean, at age 7, did you know that you were a Jewish kid?

When I came back to Paris, the world told me I was a Jew.

Who told you?

The French kids. They call you dirty Jew, [FRENCH] Juif, for whatever reason, you know. It was-- I mean, they just--

What happened? What did you do?

Well, I think I had a couple of fights. And, you know, and I remember coming home crying. And then I discovered that

there were other kids that were Jewish, as well. So--

Did your mother say anything when you came home?

Not really, no, no. Yes, things like, they've always hated us. And why do they hate us? And [FRENCH].

Why the Jews, why the Jews?

Why the Jews, all the time the Jews, you know. And she spoke mostly Yiddish with me. That was the other thing. Suddenly I was going from a French-- did I know Yiddish? From where?

So I go to my mother who I hardly know, who's a young woman with this foreign accent who speaks Yiddish mostly. And so I learned to understand Yiddish. But like I say, I did begin to like the Yiddish culture that I was being exposed to-- the singing, and those people, and they were very kind of vibrant people, you might say.

But I knew-- I knew about the Holocaust, that they were all-- it was like every family was amputated somehow-- that there was pieces missing. And when I asked, and even with my-- I mean, it's like, how do you learn about the Holocaust? You learn little by little. And I would ask my mother, like, I asked my cousin one time, and she told me that-- see, that was interesting because we had this beautiful picture which I still have of my mother, and my young cousin, and me in the middle-- a formal portrait.

And I said, what happened to her? How come she's not here? Because we had hardly any relatives. I had a few cousins.

It was a portrait before the war?

It was a portrait pretty close to the war, you know. I think before the invasion possibly, or maybe just a month before. And my mother looks-- she looks pretty serious. My cousin is smiling, but my mother looks pretty tragic.

And so I said to her, well, what happened to my cousin? I forgot her name even because she was a strange ghost, you know? And she says, well, she was out in the street one time when she wasn't supposed to be because they had these regular hours. The Jews were allowed to go out shopping as long as they're wearing their Star of David. And some had different clothes if they wanted to pass, and they had fake ID, et cetera, they could go out at other times. And of course, they would not wear their Star of David.

And that's what she did. But she got caught in a raft with a-- as a matter of fact, my cousin was on her way to see us, it seems. And she was out in the street, and they barricaded the end of each street. And then, of course, in order to get out, you had to show your ID cards.

And if it said Juif, which is what ID cards would say, and you were not wearing your-- that's it. So it was the first time I heard the word [FRENCH], deported, which is a strange word when in translation, deported. But in French, it means-- [FRENCH] means you went to the death camps.

The word means-- well, that's what it--

[FRENCH], the word means one thing in French. It's death in terms of the Jewish context, in terms of the Holocaust. And I heard that word over, and over, and over again about family members. You know, my friends, and I would ask questions, well, where was her husband? Because her husband's not there. And we were the kids?

And was this-- [FRENCH], and et cetera, you know-- deported is the term.

That's the first time that you had some sense of what the Holocaust was about?

Yeah. That was when I sensed that it impacted our whole people, you know. But I still didn't know, of course, you know World War II, and the context, and how many. And I don't think any of us in those days knew.

We knew our own little piece of experience. And of course, as people, well, you know, it was only recently historically that that stuff has been researched and all that.

But it must have raised, in an eight year old's mind, a lot of questions about that little piece of experience. Would it--

Oh, yeah. It made me very clear that the Christian world hated my goddamn guts. It was clear as pie that we were Christ killers. And even back then, I knew that that had something to do with it.

How did you think of the Lepages then?

No, I knew they were good people and they were bad people.

Still, they were part of the Christian world.

Yes, yes. But I knew that I was-- that they had protected me and saved me, and they were good people. But that I was-- I knew because of who I was. And at one point, I remember I accepted the fact-- I never thought that I'm going to convert. I don't want to be a damn Jew. I never thought of that.

As a matter of fact, and I think it may have something to do with my father, that he had died, I don't know what, fighting the fascists, or something. But there was a certain pride that you couldn't just give up your Jewish identity. You know what I mean? I knew that I was a Jew because that's what everyone told me, and I knew my mother was Jewish. And it was no fun being a Jew, and they were trying to kill you.

And yet I accepted that switch. And when I came to the United States, you know, I accepted-- and I cut off my ties. I remember very consciously, to this day, to anything French. I mean, I-- and anything Christian, you know, those early years.

So you're not-- you're not French anymore when you come to the States?

Right.

And you're not Catholic.

I'm not Catholic, and I'm not French. I become a Jewish kid from Brooklyn. And they call me Frenchie, which is OK. Because they couldn't say Rene or Rennie. It was a girl's name and sissy name, so we got rid of that quick. I became Ronald. I actually became Ronald Brandwein.

Ronald Brandwein? How did you become Ronald Brandwein?

Well, my stepdad was Brandwein, and the closest thing to Rene was Ronnie, which was Ronald, so I became Ronald, including when I joined the military. My military papers say Ronald Lichtman. And at one point I said, what is this shit with Ronald? I'm not Ronald, I'm Rene, you know? So at least I have some kind of authenticity. But I became Ronald Brandwein, and that was OK, too, you know.

So your mother remarried?

She remarried a gentleman by the name of Brandwein, who was from Williamsburg, Brooklyn. And that's where we went to live. And my guardian in France, when she told me that, when she was reassuring me from my fit that I was going to come to the United States, she painted this-- she said, oh, the United States, there'll be skyscrapers, and you'll be so happy. And they have wonderful streets, and it's very rich. And, you know, think of Chicago. She kept talking about Chicago.

And I came here, and we lived in the worst slums of New York.



Williamsburg?

Williamsburg. Yeah, I slept in the living room. I never had my own bedroom. But that was OK, too. I was very adaptable. But my stepdad was not a very-- not very tolerant, accepting, understanding. And I can't blame him. I'm sure I was a difficult kid.

Was he a survivor?

I'm not sure when he came to the States, come to think of it. I don't think so. I think he came a little bit earlier than that.

So you didn't get along with Mr Brandwein?

No, we had-- no, we had-- we had a real rough time. And it really, unfortunately, I think-- unfortunately, it colored my perception of the religion. And, you know, just reinforced, I guess, atheistic feelings in me.

Did your mother change when she came to New York?

She changed-- my mother, it's one of the tragedies-- I think it's kind of a personal tragedy. I don't think-- she never accepted me, or understood me, or accepted me, whereas my guardian, Mama Nana, always accepted, and recognized, and-- and just the drawings. I mean, just think of-- I'll give you two images, and I've never thought of them before. The two images, my guardian saved these drawings all those years until I had them in '64.

I remember she took them out. She was living in this little tiny, tiny, nothing little, you know, 17th century box in a very old little town back in the south. She had saved these drawings. She had hardly anything else. And my mother, when we were staying with my aunt in Brooklyn when we first got there, and my cousin was a witness to this. My cousin never forgot it.

I was drawing pictures at my aunt's house. This is in Brighton Beach before we moved to Williamsburg. And my mother ran across a room and took up the drawings. And I have to say that my uncle, Sam-- my cousin, Sam-- this is my mother's sister who had come to the United States who was the intellectual, the Yiddishist, you know, and kind of left wing Zionist, et cetera. She had raised these kids. They were very artistic, they were in theater, and they were art, including fine arts. And Sam had won Guggenheim fellowships and all kinds of accolades. He was making films.

And he had visited us in Paris in 1950, and he was an artist. But in my mother's eyes, he was a bum because he was a Bohemian. And so here I was in my aunt's house-- his own mother's house. They had brought us over. We were there like two weeks, and I was drawing. My mother runs across, and she takes up all my drawings, and she rips them up, and throws the pens across the room. And she says, you're not going to be like [NON-ENGLISH], your cousin, Sam, an artist.

And it was the-- my cousin, his sister, Tessa, to this day, she said, she could not believe it. She had never seen anything like that. It was the only thing I cared about, and she ripped it up. She hated the idea that I was going to be any kind of an artist. So that was a different-- to the end of my life, that's why it was the contrast between the way she sees my drawing, my activity, which is the only thing that kept me sane in some ways, and the way--

And so that never-- so my relationship with my mother was never-- it never healed. Because as soon as I had a chance to get out of the house, I did. I joined the military when I left high school. And I think-- I mean, I don't know what to attribute, you know, her feelings. I always thought of her as kind of a Polish peasant, ignorant.

But what I had learned about Jews that I knew in New York were that culture, and the arts, and poetry, and charity, and caring for other human beings, you know, and all those kind of artistic left wing type of values was what I liked about Judaism, and was very proud of. And she didn't encompass any of those. She was like-- she was just a tough chick.

What she did that I respected was that she was able to come to New York, and go into the sweatshops, and work very,

very hard. And be very independent. So she was like my first feminist model, you might say.

Your mother?

Yeah. Because she was very independent, very self-reliant, and a hard worker. And that's what she wanted me to do. She wanted me to just get a job, any kind of a job. But forget about this art because you're going to starve. You can't have a family. And I guess she was concerned about me in some ways, but she never accepted me.

And so we never really communicated until the very end when the grandchildren were born. And she liked Kathy, and she figured that was one good thing where I had succeeded. But I think all of that is-- I think she was terribly wounded by the Holocaust experience, you know. She was deformed.

You know, she became-- I think it made her terribly nervous, for one thing. Very, very nervous person, you know. And I think it had to do with fear, and rage, and she-- if there was anything German on television, she would spit on the floor and run out of the room. And it was-- oh, yeah, she was--

The pictures you have of her that we'll see, she's a very attractive woman.

Yeah, a beautiful woman. Yep, had a way with men. Had four husbands.

Four husbands? So Mr Brandwein was not the last?

He was number two. Yeah, there were two others after that because he-- what happened was interesting was that they would fight a lot, and I thought it was because of me. And it was kind of. Because I drank a lot of milk because, supposedly, it made me feel made my stomach better. And then when I came out of the army, someone took-- yeah, this was pretty funny.

I came out of the army, and I went to see a doctor for the first time. A friend of mine sent me he says you've got to see a doctor because he heard my story and, this is a doctor-- was it doctor-- I forgot his name. But he was a Jewish doctor from Germany, you know. And he gives me a GIC-- he talks to me, and he says, even before he gave me a GIC he says, I think-- because I was telling him about that I spent two years in the army like this, you know.

And he says, I think you've got an ulcer. So then he gives me these tests, and he says, you do have an ulcer. And he says, I don't want you to go home to visit your mother any more on Friday nights. He says, because your mother's making you sick.

So I went home and I told my mother that.

You told your mother that?

I said, Ma, I'm sorry, but doctor-- what was his name? Dr. Singer, Dr. Singer, he says, I can't come home Friday nights because you're making me sick. [NON-ENGLISH]-- she went crazy. But we had a very-- we tried, you know. We tried to have a relationship. But it was--

But what happened when I came back from the military, I thought she'd have a decent relationship with this gentleman, and-- with my step dad, and she didn't. And so I said, well, you know, if you're not happy with him, maybe you shouldn't stay with him. And sure enough, after 10 years, she decided to divorce him, which was really--

She divorced him?

Yeah, which was, like, in the Jewish community-- and she went off and, you know, continued to work in those sweatshops in New York. And--

It's not an easy thing to do in the Orthodox Jewish community, is it?

No. That's why she was-- I mean--

I once asked you about your stepfather, and I can't remember which one. And you described him for me as, quote, "a real jerk," unquote.

Yeah, that's-- yeah, I mean, I feel sorry for the guy because he chose a woman with a kid, you know. What did he know he was getting into? But that was my-- yes, and he had his own kids that were grown. And they were-- he lost his wife, I think, in the Holocaust. I'm trying to think. I'm not sure how that happened.

But yeah, he just didn't understand me, which is no-- I mean, in those days, he was older, and he wasn't a social worker. So he couldn't-- he was interested in going to shul. That was his thing. And having me-- I mean, I came here, I was 12 and 1/2 years old. When I was 13 years old, I had my bar mitzvah. It was like, I had no idea what the heck I was-- I mean, as soon as I got here, he sent me to a little old rabbi, you know, private lessons, and that was my introduction to Judaism.

I had no idea what I was praying. I went-- I got bar mitzvah on a Monday morning and then went to school. And it was a Monday morning bar mitzvah, and all these old guys. And then I remember going to school for the rest of the day.

Well, when she divorced him, were you--

Oh, by that time I was--

You were out of the house by then?

Yeah, I'm talking about when I was like 12, 13, 14.

She was married to him for a while?

She was married to him for 10 years. So from 1950, I joined the army in '59, came back in '61, and she was-- she was still unhappy. Or I think I may have still been in the military when she separated from him.

And there was another husband then?

Yeah, then there was-- oh my God, I forgot his name. Hohenstein. And she took his name. And what was funny is she never told the other guys that there had been these others, you know. She kind of-- because it was-- she was embarrassed by the numbers. But Henri Hohenstein was French, you know, educated, and she respected him quite-- and he had a heart attack. So after-- they were together quite a few years also, and he was a survivor.

He was also a survivor?

He was a survivor, yeah. Yeah, yeah. And now, I don't know about the camps. The last stepdad was-- he was all the camps he'd been through. He was a tough guy also.

Did you hear them talk about the war? Your mother and--

You know, it was such a taboo subject. It just-- it was such a sad, scary subject. When I went to visit Jaime and my mother-- Jaime was number four-- Jaime and I got along pretty well. And I would always raise these issues about, I mean, I would ask questions and stuff.

And this is an apartment in Brooklyn. You know, you walk in, and there's a closet. And he opens up the closet, and he says, you see that? And there was his camp uniform. This gray camp uniform. And he said, I'm going to be buried in that.

And-- and I tried. I mean, we talked about his experiences and stuff like that. But my mother would not-- she didn't-- the only thing that she knew was that they destroyed our whole family-- her Polish family, you know.

When did she find or receive the memorial book from Roberto?

She belonged. Well, my cousins, because my cousins are in that book. At the very end, there's, like, a picture of the survivors who put together the book. She's not in the picture. But, you know, she kept in touch to the point-- to the degree of when she came to New York, she belonged to the Lubatowa society in New York.

[INAUDIBLE]

I suppose. And you know, they have a cemetery on Staten island where she's buried. And there's a plot for me there.

And did she sit down with you ever with the book and say--

I'm the one. I'm the one. Every time we would come to visit with the grandchildren--

It was the grandchildren that stimulated this, do you think?

Yeah.

Did they ask to see it?

No, me.

You asked on their behalf?

Right. I would say, Ma, I said, can you-- can you show the kids the book, the Yizkor book? And-- and--

because--

because--

I wanted my kids to have a sense of where they came from. And when Josh was born, I thought it was kind of a miracle. Because it meant that the family was becoming-- starting again. And so I wanted my kids to have a sense of where they came from in terms of Poland, in terms of uncles, and aunts, some normalcy which they had on their mother's side, my wife.

So I would say, Ma, why don't you tell the kids about your brothers and people in this book? And I did it every year. We went there, and we'd go there between Christmas and New Year's we'd go to New York to be with her. And, of course, to take advantage of all the cultural activities. Kathy would take dance lessons, and I would go to all the art museums, and we had a great time.

And I would always say, Ma, please take the book and tell us what-- it's written in Yiddish, you know. Tell the kids some stories about our people so they have some kind of Jewish identity and they know about the Holocaust. So she would turn the pages. And when she got to some of the pages about her brothers, she'd start cracking up, you know. She couldn't continue.

She would get so nervous, you know. And I think those nerves of hers I think were a result of the war. I think she was a very high strung, very nervous, very emotional person. So she could never finish. So we never had a sense of-- I asked her once, what was Lubartow like? What were relationships between Christians and the Jews, and what-- did you go to school? And then tell us about uncles, and what kind of town was it?

And she couldn't talk about any of that. She just couldn't talk about it. And to this day, I have no-- very little concept of.

And I wanted for the sake of the kids and for me, too. I wanted her to say things, you know. She-- I don't know.

How many siblings did she have?

11 brothers and sisters, and even that was kind of-- I mean, it wasn't real to me, you know. She-- I knew the two-- Aunt-- [NON-ENGLISH] Charlotte survived. Her husband was deported, and she survived with four daughters. I don't believe it.

All of them survived?

The four daughters, yes. They were all in hiding. Interestingly enough, you know, this stuff is like-- it's just-- nobody talks to kids. It's so frustrating. And again-- that's history, you don't-- you learn about this later on or something like that. But I remember after the war, we used to go to this town called [NON-ENGLISH], and that's where they were all hidden, you know. And that was a real farming community where they were-- where, actually, they made wine and stuff like that. So these--

Where is it?

Who the hell knows? To this day, I don't even know. I've been meaning to ask my cousin last time I was going to say, where is [NON-ENGLISH], you know? It's not that far, I don't think. And you guys still go back.

I mean, I have pictures of reunions with my uncle Moishe, with my cousins, with his-- he had a son that was also deported, his oldest son. But so they were brother and sister, and then the American cousin. Interesting thing about my mother in terms of identity and stuff, and I thought about when I was talking about the relatives or lack of. When we would talk about American Jews, you know, I mean, I was always-- I came to the United States-- that was the other thing.

I came to the United States, and just about everybody I knew had siblings, and they had grandparents, you know. And there was, like, to me, it was a shock. To this day, when I see big family reunions with, like, the typical American family with extended, it's like a miracle to me. It's, like, unbelievable.

And she had a way of saying-- I would say, well, so and so, you know, we were talking about family. She says, well, [NON-ENGLISH]. They're American Jews, implication being that they did not experience the Holocaust. And so they have brothers and sisters, and they have no fears, and they're not uptight, and they're Americans, and they're modern, and they're-- and we're screwed up. You know, we've been through-- we're not the same. We're different.

What do you mean [? different ?] Jews?

Meaning we have nobody left. And whenever I thought of my family, I thought of me and her. I mean, when I think-- and then, of course, intellectually, I know there was an aunt, and some cousins, and stuff like that. But my image of family, besides my French family, was my mother and I, and that's it. Because, I mean, it's just, I guess, an emotional image or something like that.

But just the two of-- her working to keep me going and save me to feed me, and that's it. Real simple. No extended, no help from anybody. Very isolated.

Do you remember ever asking her about your grandparents?

Yeah, I did. I asked her about which were her parents, and I said-- one time she volunteered something. And she said that my crossed eye had something to do with-- it skipped generation, and that her grandfather had crossed eye. Oh, no, excuse me, that her father also had a crossed eye. And it skipped that she-- the woman never wore glasses. I mean, it was, like, such an irony.

She wouldn't say where are they, what happened to them? Why don't I have grandparents, or something like that?

No, I think I did. And it was always the same answer. They were killed by the Germans. Everybody was killed by the Germans. There was-- it's what's-- if you were in Poland, you were killed by the Germans.

And so she would-- she would become very depressed, and she would cry. And then I learned, you know, behaviorism. I learned not to do it unless I wanted my mother to cry. So I didn't raise the subject anymore.

And you know what? All those-- we had big parties at my house with all-- in France right after the war. And they were wonderful people-- hard-working people in different trades-- young, like my mother, survivors. I mean, I couldn't-- I can't tell which ones were survivors of the camps or not. I couldn't tell.

But the atmosphere was always positive. And I think they were mostly Jews that had been in hiding because I don't-- well, I can't tell. But it was not-- they didn't get into discussing the camps.

They sang. They played cards. They gambled. They drank. They had a good time.

This is still in France?

This is still in France. This is between 1945 and 1950. And then the survivors, of course, when I got to Brooklyn, the whole of Brooklyn was survivors, you know. I mean, it was-- well, of course, we had Hispanics and Puerto Ricans, and blacks, and stuff like that. But the Jewish community, like if you went down to Brighton Beach, and you walked on the boardwalk, and you met this huge crowd of Jews, and they all had numbers-- all of them.

And there were no parties there.

Yeah, there were parties there, but it wasn't quite the same because everybody was getting old, I think. Yeah. There were parties. It was different. They had good-- she had good friends there.

She was a very-- my mother was a real social, attractive woman, and she just wasn't-- she just didn't-- and you know, she always, I think, felt guilty that she didn't raise me. She felt guilty she didn't raise her own kid, you know. And I always had sympathy for her realizing that. But then when she tried to tell me how to raise my kids, one time I told her, I said, look, Ma, you didn't raise me, so how do you know-- [LAUGHS]

Do you think she was a role model for you?

She was a role model in terms of my perception of women, I think. Because, I mean, I had a-- I had a lot of respect for her. Because she had no help from anyone, and she was not an educated person. She was not a sensitive person in terms of culture or anything of that stuff. She was just a tough chick, and very hard in some ways. Believes in work.

At the same time, though, she had a way, because she was attractive, and she had this thing about, oh I don't know, just when she was with a man, she was with-- in a relationship, she was very devoted. Let's put it this way. She was-- and it was nice to see her in these relationships except the first one, except her Meyer, the first-- the second husband, I should say. She was not happy with him because he was very-- he was a tightwad. He didn't like to have fun. He didn't like to-- so--

But she had this thing about the Jewish household, the Jewish wife, taking care of the husband, and making sure he's eating well, and he's being-- he's got nice clothes, and he becomes a mensch, you know. Pride.

She continued to work?

She continued to work. She retired when they forced her to retire. And I remember seeing pictures of her at these parties at the shop because she always talked about the shop. And there'd be these pictures of my mother. Here's my mother from Poland, and there'd be Italian ladies, and black ladies, and Puerto Rican ladies, and Filipino ladies. It was very-- and she could get along.

She was-- in that respect, you know, she wasn't really-- what she taught me was that you accept people, and you learn how to-- you learn how to get along in your environment, you know.

What about your father as a role model?

My father? My father is this incredible-- I mean, I know absolutely nothing about my father. Absolutely nothing. And there's no one. I'm the last remaining Lichtman. There's no other Lichtmans from-- and I've tried to look for them. I can't find any. I even went to Chicago for a reunion, and it was Lichtman Jonas reunion.

And I said, can I go there? I'm not really-- and this is the Jonases of Detroit. A lot of Jonases in Detroit. So I went to the Jonas bookstore on Woodward at Jonas, and I said, do you think-- think we are all right. I'm just curious. I don't know any Lichtmans.

He said, oh, OK. And so I put an ad in the Jewish News, Lichtman Jonas reunion. I'm interested, if you're a Lichtman, can you let me know? And nobody responded. So I go off to Chicago, and my wife thinks I'm crazy. And I get there, and sure enough, she says, these people are-- they're going to make fun of you. They feel sorry for you. They're going to-- they're accepting you, but they know you're not one of theirs. And--

What were you looking for?

I was looking for Lichtmans. I have no--

I mean, I understand you were looking for people.

Like my-- Connections?

Connections, yes. Somebody to-- I mean, I don't even know-- my father was such an enigma that my mother told me once he wasn't really from Lubartow. Because I look in the book, in our Yizkor book, in our remembrance book, and there's a picture of my father there. Because he died even though he didn't-- this beautiful picture of him. I mean, he was a very handsome guy.

And there's a picture of his sister. I don't know anything about her. And that's all there is. I said, Ma, how could it be that in a town like Lubartow where everybody had 11, 15, you know, these Orthodox Jewish families, because everybody was Orthodox. My stepdad was-- I mean, my--

The whole town was Orthodox?

Well, my mother's father was religious, let's say. You know, I said, how could they-- well, there's two of them there in the whole town? She says, well, she said, he was really from Warsaw. So how the heck did he get from Warsaw-- so there's all these questions, right? And I have no--

So I went there and I said to these people in Chicago-- they brought in this specialist from Israel who had lived in that town, which was northwest Transylvania, which-- right next to Poland. The little-- the Lichtman Jonases-- that's where they were. It was-- and I looked at the map, and I said, you know what?

So everybody I asked, I said, do you guys have any connections to Poland? Nah, no. No connections. I said, are you sure Lichtman-- this guy Lichtman didn't have ties to Poland? No, no, no.

When she showed up, and she lived there till '68 in that little town, you know, she was the big person who would give them the latest information about their roots and all that stuff. And I asked her, and she said-- she said, oh, we hadn't-- the Lichtman Jonases hadn't been there very long. You know, he just maybe one generation. She said, it could be very-- it could very well be that he came from Poland.

And I looked at the map, and Warsaw to where they were was not that huge.

If she said he came from Warsaw, what was the implication of that?

I have no idea. I didn't know what it meant. I don't know what it meant to her. I don't know when he came to-- but it was one of these things, I didn't pursue it.

You think it maybe meant he was more sophisticated?

I think so. I think he was. I think he was-- I think he was a guy that she didn't know. I think he was a complete stranger to her because I don't know how many times I said to my mother, I want you to tell me something about my father.

But she wouldn't tell you?

She said, [NON-ENGLISH] what is there to say?

He was tall and handsome.

He was tall and handsome. I said, you know, Ma? I don't give a shit if he was tall and handsome. I want to know something about, you know, what was inside. And then I thought to myself, I says, you know, the woman marries this guy in '33. He leaves right away from Paris. '36, she shows up. I'm born in '37. 1940, the Germans come in, and he gets killed.

She's known him three years? Now, you can fall in love in three years, and you could have passionate relationship. But you know, maybe she didn't know him that well.

You still looking?

Yeah. Now I do the internet. Now, I-- I'm still looking because I don't have too many leads. But there's more Lichtmans in Detroit than there were in New York. I never met any Lichtmans in New York.

First time I ever saw the Lichtman name, it blew me away. It was, I think, in Toronto we were traveling, and I see Lichtman bookstore. I go, my God, that's my name! [LAUGHS] That was-- yeah.

So still looking, yeah? It's the strangest thing. I don't know what happened to my cousin-- I mean, my-- his-- my mother's side of the family is really Zeidman. There's Zeidmans in Toronto, you know, and stuff. But I don't have-- I mean, I'm very curious about Lubartow and what happened to all those people, you know. Anyway.

Well, as a child, you must have idealized him in some way.

Oh, yeah. He was a hero.

He was a hero.

He was an anti-fascist. Well, I think that I learned later on that-- no, I think what I learned was, I mean, here is these terrible people trying to kill us, these Germans, these Nazis. And my father tried to do something about it. And he gave his life.

And even the French government, you know, [NON-ENGLISH] died for France. It's a big deal in France-- a big deal. They really-- they-- even if you're a foreign Jew, they respect that.

So I idealized him a lot, sure. And I respected what he did, and I think I always kind of projected ulterior motives for him doing it. Because I think he-- impartially, it might have had to do with my becoming a citizen. But I think there was also-- I think he was part, I mean, of people like him who wanted to fight the Germans.



I think there was a consciousness about fascism, and he didn't want to run away. He had-- yeah, that story that my uncle told is so-- I mean, he had a chance to go to the south.

Yeah. You knew none of this while you were in hiding? But you learned it all later, of course. You were in hiding. Maybe without even knowing it you were in hiding. What do you think the consequences of being a hidden child are in later life?

We listened to this-- we listened to your story several times. The question of identity comes up-- problems about being abandoned at one point. I mean, it was your father, who presumably wisely, but from a child's perspective maybe not so wisely, gave you over to somebody else. How do you get through it? How do you deal with that?

I don't know. You just-- I'm sure it doesn't-- it doesn't help. We had this-- when I was at [INAUDIBLE] we were-- had discussion in our group about whether we're damaged goods or not.

Which group was that?

That's the hidden children's group. And we had a long discussion about being damaged goods. And some people said, we're not damaged goods. And some of the people says, we are, and we're proud of it. [LAUGHS]

And that's kind of the way I think of it. It's-- you know, it's terrible to say some of these things build character, but I think they distort us in some ways. I mean, my family thinks I'm pretty screwed up. I mean, my wife and my children, they think I'm a nutcase. I don't think so. I think I'm really pretty well balanced. But--

Well, let me ask you a little different. When do you think you came out of hiding, and why?

When I came out of hiding?

Yeah, I mean in the metaphorical sense.

Well, jeez. I don't know how that-- how that stuff happens. You know, you spend-- you spend your life with goals, and try to take care of business, and the next thing, and getting an education, and figuring out-- worrying about if you're ever going to get married, and have kids, and what you're going to do for a living, and all that kind of stuff. And I think with age-- and in my case, I mean, I became very political and got really involved in anti-war movement. And there was a connection, there was a definite connection between my childhood experiences and what I did later on. I became very political in New York within left wing circles, and you know, and I always felt kind of a-- that there was-- this was part of the tradition that my father had died fighting these guys. And in some ways, you know, fighting for some kind of justice.

And I felt that that was what I should be doing also to this day. And then the Holocaust, you know, the personal thing, that children's thing, that came much more recently because of the age, I think, thing. And--

Let's stop for a minute, and maybe we can come back and finish by talking about the personal thing.

Let's talk a little bit about the experience of being a hidden child. Very often, hidden children will say that they lost their childhood. They didn't have a childhood. In fact, you said that to me once. What do you think now? Think about that. Do you think that's true, that you didn't have a childhood?

Well, I don't think I had a normal social childhood. You know, I think there are some kids who were raised with adults, I guess, and they liked that world of adults. And in my case, I don't know because I was not-- I didn't share anything with other kids. And I don't think I-- I mean, so I didn't experience these things till much later. I can't tell what it's done to me as a father or any of these things. I don't know what the ramifications are.

I tend to be-- I mean, I became-- what's interesting is I became a painter. And I mean, it gets a little more complicated,

but one of the main characteristics that you have to have as a painter, to be a painter or a writer, is that you've got to be by yourself a lot. If you're a musician, you can't be by yourself. You've got to have an audience.

So if you don't know how to be by yourself, if you don't like being by yourself, you're not going to be a painter. And when I was a painter, and I lived in this building, and I was called a hermit [LAUGHS] by all my friends-- people that I knew in the building and stuff like that. Because I painted, and I enjoyed being by myself. Now, I don't know if there's a relationship between the hidden child, by myself, and being alone, and all that kind of stuff-- you know, the whole psychological thing, I'm not too clear if there's any one-to-one connections.

But, I mean, I don't feel like I had a very happy childhood. I think I had a secluded, almost like a monastery, you might say. And I'm not sure that's so terrible, you know.

It sounded like the first five years that you spent with the Lepages were pretty happy.

They were, yeah. There was a lot of things I didn't experience because of that-- the social things again, what kids do. I mean, I don't remember-- I don't remember running around physically doing things-- sports, or running, or parties, or fighting, or wrestling with kids, or-- I don't have any of those things. I don't have any kids period.

I don't remember any friendships with kids. I don't remember any friendships with kids until I was maybe eight or nine years old with some of the Jewish kids in Paris. But very superficial, very tentative. The first-- you know, I don't remember-- I think the real friends that I made were when I got to New York. Because it was-- somehow, I don't know, it was different because it wasn't Europe in the war.

I mean, I think between '45 and '50 in Europe, we still-- I, mean the antisemitism was still there. I mean, I didn't have friends. But when I-- as soon as I got to New York and I went to public school, and it was like, I remember it was so different. Because there was so much freedom. And in terms of kids talking to their teachers, you know, and almost kind of talking back or talking with, almost adult kind of way, it was like a different world than I came from.

And so I missed-- I mean, that's the thing I guess I missed during my upbringing. I was-- I mean, I think of it as, like, almost being raised in a church or something, or in a monastery-- you know, secluded from the world. So there's-- you know, you learn things, and you learn to be by yourself. And I mean, I don't know what I did all those years with my guardians.

I know I spent a lot of time on her skirt kind of following her while she was doing things in the garden and stuff, but I don't remember going to town, or I remember thinking doing-- doing things at night-- a lot of board games. A lot of board games. Cards, things like that. But just kind of, I guess, restricted in terms of kids' experiences and drawing.

But I think the identity thing, and then there's, I think, the whole thing about God, you know, which is kind of interesting. Because I've thought about that. And I've always thought, gee, I wish I could-- I wish I could believe in God. I wish I could. And I never-- and I never really have because I cannot believe.

And it's, you know, this trite kind of thing. I can't believe God would let something like that happen. But in my case, I think it was just a slow process where I thought all this stuff was a joke when people were actually-- after, I mean, on the one hand, all my friends, and mother, you know, they were telling me what happened to the Jewish people, and that the Germans and Nazis were able to do all these things, and there was antisemitism in your back yard. And you know, there are all these French people who were antisemitic. You know, they were all Christians, and my--

Well, where is this-- so I never really-- I always assumed that this whole thing about God was not-- there's no God. How could anybody think that it was kind of made up, and it was interesting. And I've always felt that. And I've always tried to not feel that. I was trying to-- well, it's got away-- you know, it's not God's fault because he's not responsible for what human beings do, you know. I know that argument.

And I think-- I still think, well-- so. I think what happened was I think the worst thing-- and it was just kind of interesting. I think I became extremely cynical, you know. I mean, you know, how do you believe in anything after

human beings are doing this to each other? You know, I mean, and these are Christians doing it to other Christians. These are Germans against the French, and the French-- the more you learn about when I was learning European history in France, I remember, I was very conscious of this.

I was learning history when I went to school, and the history that I learned was non-stop the wars between the English and the French, and the French and the English. And to me it was like-- and I'm thinking, OK, I'm Jewish, but they're both Christians. And they're doing nothing but-- there's-- you know, the whole thing became so absurd. So that kind of absurdity.

Now at the same time, in terms of what this experience has done to me, at the same time that I've got this sense of the absurdity of the whole thing, because my father died, I think for a reason, for a cause, and I think he had-- even though my mother didn't, I think my uncle and my aunt knew it. She jumped in. As soon as he said he was a communist, she jumped in-- no, no, no. He stopped all that nonsense. Oh, you stop ideas when you switch countries?

And so I always thought of him as an idealist and fighting for right and for justice. And I always thought that was one of the highest values. And the idea in Judaism of fighting for the underdog and for the little guy I always thought, especially among the people that I knew, the best people, the best Jews that I knew in New York all the time were always very secular, very kind of either left wing Democrats or, you know, they had politics in their lives. They didn't have religion.

And they were Jewish by culture. They were strong culture. And those were all role models, you know. And never knew a Republican Jew in New York-- never.

Jacob Javits.

Maybe Jacob Javits. Yeah, but he was-- he was unusual.

Wrong party.

He was the wrong-- We never saw--

This doesn't sound cynical to me.

Right. So on the one hand, there's the cynicism about what people did to us, which was just unbelievable. And at the same time, the fact that my father, you know, represented something else. And that there were good people, that my guardians, to me, were simple people with a heart, you know. And they were good role models for me. They were good examples of what human beings could be.

You're the vice president of an international federation of child survivors and children.

Of the Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust-- federation.

You're the president of the hidden children organization in Detroit-- founder, actually.

Yeah.

And president. You're very active in Holocaust related activities. You run the Holocaust Education Coalition, and you weren't always this involved. What brought you to all this?

I think the realization that, well, it's part of my strong-- I mean, I always feel like I had a strong Jewish identity. I always felt, you know, that we, those of us left, had a real responsibility to do something. And so as I-- and again, it has to do with-- well, anyway, and I think as I got older, I realized that one of the things that I wanted to focus on now was that part of myself when I was a child, and those experiences, and the fact that all those people are gone now. And I think that's the way to keep the memory and the legacy active for the few years that we have left because it's going to be--

already it's history, in the history-- you know it's like Yiddish that I remember loving so much, and the language, and in the people in New York, and Brooklyn, and all that stuff. And now it's in the colleges because it's dead.

Yeah, it becomes something you study in school because it's no longer--

Well, was there an event that touched some of this on?

Well, it was that-- yeah, it was that hidden child meeting that you told me about. And I don't want to go to that. People talking about the Holocaust. And--

This was the ADL meeting in New York?

Yeah. It was the hidden child-- and that's before they were called the Hidden Child ADL Foundation. But it was the hidden children, which was an offshoot of child survivors groups on the east coast and the west coast. And so I attended that meeting, and was really, really struck by how significant all of our stories are, or were. And that it's now, I guess, that stage of your life where you kind of reevaluate things, even though you left out that I'm also in a PhD program, and I'm supposed to be doing--

Well, OK, but that's not Holocaust related.

That's not Holocaust related, but among all these other things. I mean, it's kind of interesting that I do have a foot in the future, and I also spend a lot of time looking back and trying to get answers which I think we-- I should have gotten a long time ago. But even to this day, I think about my cousins that I just visited in Paris, and I wish we could have-- you know, it's like, it's funny. You don't have a form-- you see each other, and you kiss, and you hug, and you're not going to sit down and say, well let's talk about the Holocaust, you know. It doesn't happen like that.

So you have all these-- all these unanswered questions which I think drive me crazy. Because I really would love to have answers to a lot of them-- you know, like my mother's town, and things like that. So in '91, I became active and said, you know, we have-- this is serious business. And it's part of the process of, I think, ongoing self-discovery to do research into our past.

And I think we each had-- that's the other thing is we had-- I mean, I had-- I said, OK, big deal. I was hidden. So then I found out that there were all these other people hidden under similar conditions, and other people under very different conditions.

But the thing that we shared was there was this bond. And I think one of the things we shared is that they were trying to kill us, too. The Germans were also trying to kill us. And when I see these pictures of me as a kid, or all those pictures of these young kids, and I'm thinking, you know, they just want to kill those people. And it's just-- it's just by pure chance or whatever it is that we survived that we're here. So it's kind of a-- if you want to think it's a miracle, but it's--

So I feel that we have things to say. So that's why I get involved.

And you're in a PhD program.

Yeah.

At Wayne State University.

Yeah.

In what?

Instruction technology, which is the usage of technology media in an educational environment. So I've always liked the idea of education, teaching.

And you have a family.

And I have three great kids, who that's the other thing about I think-- and I don't know, this may be the human condition existential stuff or something. But you just-- because-- that's the other thing-- because you're a child survivor or a survivor, I think, and you marry someone who's not, there's always a distance. There's always a distance in your spouses, which may not be bad. Sometimes it's good-- it's good to have a little mystery, things you don't know, things that are your own world, and stuff like that.

But it makes it-- I mean, I don't know which is better, to marry a fellow survivor or to marry someone who doesn't know the survivor experience, I think.

You're talking about your wife, Kathy?

I'm talking about my wife, who's not a survivor, right.

Nor are your children.

No, right. And they don't know-- it's hard. That's why these survivors groups are important, I think. Because then you feel comfortable with these people because you're sharing. You don't feel like a weirdo talking about this stuff. If I talk to my kids about this, what are you talking about this stuff for, dad? What's it have to do with me now?

And their names, just to make sure we get the names.

Oh, Josh is the oldest. He's taken an interest in some of this stuff now. And David, who's a cynic, he blames me for it. He doesn't believe in anything, he says, except music. And he believes in music. That's nice.

And Risa, who's 17, and she's a normal American kid, I think. And--

Also a musician.

Also a musician. And they all have a good Jewish identity, which is what I wanted. And I mentioned when Josh was born, and what a miracle-- I think it was a miracle when I got married. I thought to myself, I said, my God, I'm really going to get married like a normal person. Because those things-- because I didn't have those models in my life, you know. I mean, I never-- I don't remember going to weddings or anything like that.

And so these things were all new. And when Josh was born, and here we were having a Lichtman family again, it was, like, really wonderful. And--

So if I could just correct something you said, you're not the last Lichtman.

No, I'm not. No, because I--

You have children.

Right. I started-- and you feel kind of self-conscious about it because, well, big deal. So what happened to my wife's name? I always wanted her to be Stern, you know, call herself Kathy' Stern Lichtman. So I never understood why the male has to get rid of a woman's name. So-- but no, that's why I think it's great because Hitler was not successful in at least destroying, but now the Orthodox Jews are going to do that. So a little bit of a different thing, OK. But you could see how I get pretty hot about some of these things when--

I also feel that, I mean, anyway, that's-- what else?

Finish. Feel about what?

To me, what the Holocaust experience has done is made me conscious that we got screwed over badly. And we got screwed over as children, and there's other people that get screwed over. And they're no different than what we are. And as Jews, and as survivors, we should be fighting not just for ourselves, but whenever we recognize any kind of oppression like that.

And not just be into our own little suffering, but really generalize. And we should be more sensitive than anybody else because we know what it feels like. And so I think that's-- for me, that was very important. So therefore, I got involved in all these other things-- you know, Vietnam, and all that stuff. That was-- felt that it was unjust.

You think that your experiences as a Holocaust survivor influenced you in those years?

Oh yeah.

You consciously--

Oh yeah. I knew that-- yeah, that my people got screwed over for no reason, and nobody should get screwed over. Oh, yeah. And I always consider that a Jewish value. I always consider that a Jewish value. And to go back, just to-- I mean, this is a bit-- but from my understanding of the guys who went and fought during the Spanish Civil War, to go back just before that fascism in terms of Germany, the fascism with Franco, there was a higher percentage, according to the scholars who have just been looking, a higher percentage of Jews in the international brigades than others.

And I think my dad came out of that tradition. He was-- I mean, Franco Spain was, what, in the mid '30s, right? When the Germans first started dropping bombs on [NON-ENGLISH], et cetera. And he got to Paris in '33.

Your father.

My father. And I'm sure Paris was full of these guys who had been-- well, they put them in concentration camps, the left wing international brigades. But I'm sure he was exposed to their idea they were anti-fascists. So I see a kind of a link to that.

And so to me, there was always part of Jewish value is fighting for right things. So I think my Holocaust-- but you know, that's me. I mean, I've met so many other hidden children who look at me like, what? How do you make those leaps? So--

Don't look so big.

No.

This is a good place to stop, I think.

OK.

Thank you.

One does go off on tangents, huh?