

INTERVIEW WITH MR. KURT LOEWENTHAL
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Jewish Community Relations Council,
Anti-Defamation League of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

- Q: This is an interview with Kurt Loewenthal on February 21, 1983. The interviewer is Nina Samuels - in my home at 3518 Bloomington Avenue in Minneapolis. This is for the Oral History Project of the Jewish Community Relations Council. Mr. Loewenthal, will you tell me your complete name?
- A: Kurt, no middle name, Loewenthal.
- Q: And you said that you do not have a Jewish name?
- A: No. I don't remember.
- Q: When were you born?
- A: December the tenth, 1907.
- Q: And in what town and country were you born?
- A: In Germany in Gelsenkirchen. It's in the state of Westphalia.
- Q: And how large a town was this?
- A: 300,000 inhabitants, as far as I remember.
- Q: What were your parents' names?
- A: Emil Loewenthal and Flora. My mother's maiden name was Heyman.
- Q: Do you have memories of grandparents?
- A: I do have memories, but I don't remember their names.
- Q: Do you remember their occupations? Where were your parents born?
- A: My father was born in Grunau. That's in west Prussia near the Polish border, and my mother in Gnesen - that's the German expression - and in Polish it's called about the same.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: Yes. I had one sister and two brothers.

Q: Older than you? Younger? Can you tell me something about your family?

Q: Well, we were four children, and my sister was the oldest, and I had one older brother, and then myself and the younger brother.

Q: What were their names?

A: Erna. That's my sister's name. And Bruno, my older brother's name. And Erwin, the youngest brother.

Q: What were your parents' occupations?

A: General store.

Q: What did they sell? What do you mean by a general store?

A They sold about everything! Everything one can think of. Like, this was in the cities at the time, that small stores could exist. They were not so dependent on the department stores, although there were, already, some department stores.

Q: Was this quite a small store?

A: Mid-sized.

Q: Did they have employees? Besides the family?

A: Yes.

Q: What languages were spoken in your home?

A: German, but my mother could speak Polish, and my father understood - he couldn't speak, but he understood.

Q: What about Yiddish? Was there Yiddish spoken?

A: No.

Q: Would you say that your family was secular or religious in its orientation? Maybe you could describe the way Judaism was practiced in your family.

A: Well, it was practiced as much as the parents could, but, for financial reasons, they were not able to close the store on Shabbos. It would have been

impossible, because Shabbos was the day when the people bought because during the week they just didn't have any money. This was a mining town - Gelsenkirchen - and the major part of the population were miners. But we kept all the Jewish holidays, and we went to shul, and we lit up the candles on Shabbos evening, on Friday, and my father went to synagogue on Shabbos morning. So I would say that you can call it secular.

Q: I don't think we need to give it a name. Did they keep a kosher home?

A: Yes.

Q: Was this by-and-large true of the other Jews that you were growing up with?

A: I would say most of the Jewish people in Germany were secular Jews, I would say the majority.

Q: So your family was more observant than most?

A: Maybe. I don't know.

Q: Would you describe the size of the Jewish community in your community as you were growing up?

A: Pretty good sized. Yes.

Q: Did you live surrounded by many other Jews then?

A: We, personally, were not surrounded. But there was a beautiful synagogue in Gelsenkirchen, and the Orthodox people had another synagogue, and then the secular Jewish people. So there were three synagogues in Gelsenkirchen. It wasn't such a small town.

Q: Did you receive any formal Jewish education?

A: Yes I did, but I didn't like it.

Q: Would you explain? What was the education like?

A: It was boring to me.

Q: How many years of Jewish education did you have, would you say?

A: Four or five years.

Q: I'd like you to try to remember events - if there were events that you felt were leading up to what was to come in Germany - what events you were aware of in

your community, either locally or on a national or international level from the mid-1930's through 1941?

A: As conditions got worse and worse, we could not go any place any more. We were practically - which was not before - like in a ghetto.

Q: Where could you not go within the town?

A: Within the town you couldn't go to any theater, you couldn't go to any sports, and this was all forbidden for Jews. My younger brother and myself, we had a wholesale in candy. And not only did we lose most of our customers, but the few customers which remained - through the hate propoganda - came in the evening when it was dark and picked up some merchandise. And once I drove out to deliver merchandise, and my delivery truck was thrown over. Life became quite unbearable. I was a young fellow then, and I said, "I'm not going, under these conditions, to stay in Germany." And so I snuck over the frontier and into Belgium.

Q: When was this, can you remember?

A: In 1937.

Q: Were you by yourself when you left?

A: Yes. I wasn't married, and I had enough of all of what was going on - the slogans, the persecutions. And so it was just impossible.

Q: Did you have gentile friends at that time?

A: Quite a few, yes.

Q And how did they respond to what was going on? Did your relationships with them change?

A: It changed profoundly. It changed completely. Some of them, they were not anti-Semitic, they were not Nazis, but they were afraid! They were threatened! They were threatened if they would continue, that harm would be done to them.

Q: And was harm actually done to gentile people who you knew?

A: No. I can't remember, but the threat, by itself, already did. As I stated before, we lost almost all our customers.

Q: Were people not allowed, by law, to do business with you? Or was it a formal restriction?

- A: It was not a law, yet, at the time, but the pressure from the Nazis was that strong that they didn't dare! I already left Germany in 1937. It was bad enough then. Later on it went worse! This was two years before outbreak of the Second World War - when I left.
- Q: Do you remember specific anti-Semitic incidents? You've told me a few. Were there others that you remember happening around you before you left?
- A: Well, I had not been in my house at the time, but my youngest brother, he was beaten half to death, at the so-called Kristall Night - in France a German attache was killed, and in reprisal, my brother was beaten half to death in the night. So this was one of the worst incidents. But this was only told to me. I had not been in the house.
- Q: Is there anything more that you would like to say about that part of your life before you left? You're welcome to go back to it, if you like, at any time.
- A: I would say this: the German Jewish people, until the rise of the Third Reich, had been quite in good living conditions. Always there was anti-Semitism in Germany. Probably not quite as much as in Poland and Russia, but there was anti-Semitism. But the German Jews, they had a very good life. They were in good positions as doctors, lawyers, and business people. And they thought that it would pass by - that it would normalize. But I remember when I went to school, they always said that Germany did not lose the First World War, it was just so that the Jews and the people which were left behind - it's their fault. The Germany army was not defeated! And in school then they just loved to talk about fighting and wars and this was the highest thing there is!
- Q: It sounds like you remember as a schoolboy, anti-Semitism quite early, then.
- A: Yes, I remember anti-Semitism, but it was not at the point that it was just intolerable. It was not as widespread.
- Q: Can you describe the process from the very beginning? The early anti-Semitism? And what was added to that, and what was added after that?
- A: Well, I hadn't been, then, in Germany anymore. I only know what happened later on - that special laws were instituted. And later on, even the complete annihilation of the Jewish race. This came later on. They added always more restriction to this.
- Q: My question was more about earlier. When you were a young boy, as you were getting older, how were you aware of anti-Semitism getting worse while you were still living in Germany?

- A: It was not. It was always the same practically, my younger years. Not that I could say it was mounting all the time.
- Q: So when the incidents started happening where you were not allowed to go to the theater, and to go to other places in your city, and people were afraid to do business with you, did this happen quite suddenly?
- A: No, not suddenly. It came with the coming to power of the Nazis.
- Q: To your knowledge, what happened to your family members?
- A: They were all killed. They were all deported. I'm the only survivor.
- Q: How did you find out what happened to them?
- A: I'd been told by the neighbors. My father and my mother, and my sister with her children - they were deported to Riga. And they were told that they were "relocated." They were not told anything of the kind - those people, they didn't know what was going on. They said they were working in a work camp, but not that they were destined to dying in the ovens! But they were just told, "We have to make room." They put them in the cattle wagons and sent them to Riga! And my older brother, he was with me in Grenoble later on, and he was arrested there, and I never heard from him anything. And my younger brother, he was in Buchenwald, in concentration camp, and he survived, and I talked to him after the war, but he was in such a bad shape, that right after the liberation, a year or two later, he died.
- Q: Where was he then?
- A: He was then in Germany. He was back in Germany. So all the sufferings he went through, he couldn't survive, even though he was not old then. Let me see, he was born in 1911, and he was about 40 years old when he came back from the camp.
- Q: Did you see him again after the war?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Did you keep in touch with your family after you had left Germany?
- A: Yes, I wrote letters from wherever I was until later on - nothing more.
- Q: Did you receive letters from them also?
- A: Yes, up to the year, I think, 1942, but I'm not sure whether it was '42 or '41. So many years have gone by.

Q: Will you tell me now about when you left Germany - what happened to you? How you decided where to go. Where did you go?

A: Well, I went first to Belgium. And Belgium was a small country. they didn't give any permission to stay, they didn't give any papers to be able to work, or anything. There was a Commission, and I was called before that Commission, at that time, and I was asked, "Why did you leave Germany?" And I told them under what conditions we lived. And one member - the people which decided whether one could get permission to stay or not - one of those members stood up and said, "I have been in Germany, and I have seen the Jews are still doing business. They're doing good business, and you pretend that you had to leave Germany, that you couldn't stand it any more." So they didn't give me any permission to stay in Belgium. So what was I supposed to do? I went over the frontier clandestinely to France.

Q: How long were you in Belgium, would you say?

A: Oh, about half a year.

Q: Were you single and by yourself at that time?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And how were you supporting yourself for that half a year?

A: It was very difficult - extremely difficult! There were Jewish committees supported by the Joint Distribution Committee and we received meal tickets with which we could go to small Jewish restaurants. There were quite a few there. And it was very difficult. Now, the problem was, we were not really "poor" people. I could have taken some money with me, but I didn't dare, because it was a law that if anybody was caught, that was punishable quite severely. So I really didn't have any money or anything. It was just terrible! Hoping always, among the refugee circles, that Hitler would disappear! All kinds of rumors came out. But in France it was just terrible at that time.

Q: When you say "we," were there a lot of people in your situation in Belgium?

A: Oh, yeah! Quite a few.

Q: Can you describe what a typical day would have been for you there?

A: A typical day? (Laughs) A typical day was to survive until the next day, to have something to eat, and the worst part is, at that time, I could eat. I wish I could today. (Laughter) And have a roof over the head.

Q: Where did you stay at night?

A: In flop-holes, rundown, and hotels. And the worst part is, in Belgium, these particular hotels were under surveillance and they came and looked at the papers, and we didn't have any papers, so I have been several times arrested because I didn't have valid papers. And then was the question, "Where do you want to go from Belgium? Do you want to go back to Germany, or do you want to go to another country?" And invariably the answer was, "No, we go to France when we go out." And so we were brought to the French borderline and then came back.

Q: Then you would go back into Belgium.

A: Into Belgium, yes.

Q: And you sneaked back?

A: Yes. But later on I had enough of Belgium, and went into France and stayed there.

Q: Which cities were you in in Belgium?

A: Brasschaat, Antwerp - mostly Brasschaat.

Q: Is there more that you would like to say about your life at that period in Belgium?

A: Not really. I would say we were not treated very well in Belgium, but in a way it's understandable. It was, it is, a small country, and maybe they couldn't afford to have that many, because we were hundreds of thousands - I don't know how many Jewish refugees there were at the time in Belgium. So, that's all I have to say. In France it was easier, because the country is much, much larger. But, too, like in any big city, you know where one goes - one goes to Paris.

Q: So is that what you did? Would you describe what you did when you left Belgium? Where did you go?

A: I went to Paris. And we get permission to stay for three days, and then we had to stand in line for hours in order to sometimes got one day, and the other time was clandestinely. It's terrible! They had particular people - police - which was constantly asking. And they knew the difference between a refugee and a Frenchman at the time. So, it was a miserable life, until 1939.

Q: And what happened in 1939?

A: In 1939 in the newspapers and everywhere there was an announcement that all foreigners had to go to the Stadium of Colombes, which is near Paris.

Q: So until that time, how long would you say you were in France until that period in 1939?

A: I would say about two years.

Q: And how were you surviving then?

A: The same as in Belgium.

Q: With help, that means, from the Jewish community?

A: Mostly, yes.

Q: Do you remember any details of that - places where you received help, or people that you met at that time?

A: Yes. There was, near Place Daumesnil, there was a big Jewish center. And there were thousands, literally thousands of refugees there. I don't remember the street, but near Place Daumesnil.

Q: What do you remember was the spirit or the mood of the refugees at that time?

A: Oh, pretty low, their mood. The thing is, everybody was uprooted, and everybody was hoping that it wouldn't last, that they could go back to their occupation, to their country. It wasn't fun! It was, I would say, a vagabond life.

Q: How did you carry your belongings?

A: I didn't have any. (Laughs) What was there to carry? We had one suit - I don't remember exactly.

Q: Did you manage to find work at all, in the years that you were in Paris?

A: Not at all. You couldn't work without having a "permis de travail." Do you speak a little French?

Q: No. I understood, though. So then in 1939, why don't you go from there. What happened?

A: In 1939, from Stadium de Colombes, we were there a week about. And then we were by train shipped to Villerbon. This is near Blois.

Q: Could I go back to what your experience was in the stadium? Were there hundreds of you? Thousands? What?

A: I would say thousands.

Q: And what were the conditions of the stadium?

A: The condition was like almost everything in France, nothing was organized. There was an open stadium, and they put some straw in on the floor, and no blankets, no nothing. And the only "nuriteur" - nourishment - was pate. And I ate so much, that's why I can't stand pate up to today any more. Pate! And this was the only, only thing we had to eat in the Stadium of Colombes, so it was just a beautiful thing that we finally were shipped out to the camp in Villerbon.

Q: So you were shipped then to Villerbon. Were there many of you shipped there?

A: Oh, yeah. Not only Villerbon; there were all kinds of little camps around Blois, not only Villerbon. I don't recall the names of the other camps, but one camp wouldn't be able to have all these people which were shipped there.

Q: How would you describe the camp that you were in in Villerbon?

A: There were some barracks, and we were not mistreated - absolutely. There was a French lieutenant. He was a commandant. The only thing was, the food was absolutely lousy, what they gave. Now the people which did have money, and some of the Jewish people at the time, they had quite a bit, and they were able to buy in the stores. There was no shortage then! Because the Nazis had not defeated France yet, so the stores nearby the camp were quite well-stocked. But the people which did not have money, they were suffering malnutrition. And we didn't do anything - just linger around. We didn't have to work or anything. That was all. And there we were in the camp, and nothing happened. Everybody was talking about the drole de guerre. You understand?

Q: Yes, but I don't know if the tape-recorder does.

A: Drole de guerre was the "funny war" - that nothing happened. And the French were in the Maginot Line, and the Germans were in the Siegfried Line, and we made fun of it until the fun wasn't there anymore, when the Germans decided to attack in earnest, when they felt it was the right time. Then France was overrun, I think, in about six weeks.

Q: And this was while you were in the camp? At Villerbon?

A: Yes. But, when I was in the camp, I heard the cannons coming closer and closer everyday, and I took off.

Q: Oh, so you left the camp.

A: Oh, yeah. I escaped.

Q: Did your camp have a name? What was the camp called?

A: No.

Q: Was it built specifically for this purpose, to house refugees?

A: I think so. They built some shacks, and then later on the refugees built other houses themselves, to be better conditions.

Q: Were there any restrictions on you in the camp?

A: The restrictions were that you had to have permission to leave, but it was not enforced, really. If somebody wanted to go to the grocery store, he didn't even have to ask to get something.

Q: Is there anything more that you'd like to say about that period in your life?

A: I don't think so, because not much happened except the daily rumors and gossips and all kinds of things. And waiting. Hoping that the French would defeat the Germans and we would go back to Germany as we used to live.

Q: And then how did you decide to leave the camp?

A: Well, when I heard the cannons coming closer and closer, and the news came that the French were running, so I thought I'd better run with them! Before being caught!

Q: How did you manage to escape? What did you have to do to escape?

A: Just cross a little river. The guards didn't look that close. Of course, there were guards. But there was a chance to escape.

Q: So where did you go? What happened then?

A: Well, from one village to the other. Sometimes caught a ride from a Frenchman by hitchhiking. And sleeping in the farmers' houses, in the barnyards, and so on, until I came to Montpellier.

Q: How long were you traveling, would you say, until you came to Montpellier?

A: Maybe a week: Every town or city in France had a small representative of a Jewish committee where the refugees were helped. Usually for one or two days they were supported from that place. And in Montpellier I met my future wife - at the Jewish committee there. She was a refugee. She was born in Poland, and she was a refugee from Belgium. She is a dentist, graduated from the University

of Brussels, and she practiced in Belgium and when the Germans came, she went with the refugees to France, and we met at this committee in Montpellier.

Q: And what was her name?

A: Levy.

Q: And her first name?

A: Susan.

Q: So she was practicing dentistry then?

A: In Belgium, yes. She worked for a Belgian dentist, but she has her diploma from the University of Brussels, from the dental school.

Q: What happened when you arrived in Montpellier then?

A: In Montpellier we liked each other. That's what happened, and we went together to Beziers.

Q: Would you say that up until this time, would you say you were being hidden at all?

A: No. There was no reason to hide by then.

Q: Just being offered places to stay.

A: Yes. And so from Blois we went to Montpellier in order to escape the advancing Germans. Germany and Italy were Allies during the war, and when France was defeated, Germany occupied the northern part of France and Italy the southern part, and so because we felt more secure to be among the Italian occupation forces, that's why we went to Montpellier. It was occupied by the Italians then. This was the reason. From there we went to Beziers.

Q: Was Beziers a city or a small town?

A: A city near Montpellier - a city of about 150,000 inhabitants.

Q: And what did you do there?

A: You couldn't do anything but just living there - somehow.

Q: How did you manage to live there? Did people take care of you again?

A: Again there were small Jewish committees like Montpellier was. We had a small apartment there, and we got married on the 18th of January, 1941, in Beziers.

Q: How long would you say you had know each other at that time?

A: Not very long.

Q: What was your wedding like?

A: That's a terrific question.

Q: Will you tell me about it?

A: Yes. Well, we didn't have anybody - just the two of us and the old couple where we had the apartment. They were our witnesses. We didn't have absolutely nothing, nothing to eat for a wedding, so for pity, the French butcher sold us one steak. And this was the wedding dinner and nothing else. There was no celebration, no nothing. This was the wedding day.

Q: Who married you?

A: The City Hall. Legally married in City Hall in Beziers the 18th of January, 1941 - that's all documented. But there wasn't even by then a Jewish synagogue or anything, not as far as I know.

Q: Did you stay in Beziers? For how long would you say?

A: We stayed in Beziers to October, 1942. And our son was born in October, 1942. When he was just out of the clinic, about a week old, the alliance between Germany and Italy broke down, and the Germans occupied the entire country. With a week-old baby, we decided to get away from the Germans, to get into the mountains. That's when we went to Grenoble.

Q: So keep telling me what happened, if you will. How did you travel to Grenoble? Was it a long distance?

A; No. By train.

Q: Were there others also on the train who were escaping to the mountains?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Were there mostly Jews, would you say, escaping at that time?

A: Yes. Nobody wanted to stay where the Germans were. Now in Beziers, many times the French authorities got the order from the Vichy government. In the

Vichy government there were collaborators of the Germans, and they were told to assemble so-and-so-many Jewish people and send them - they said - to "work camps." They didn't tell the truth what it was about.

Q: Were they sending them out of the country?

A: Yes. They sent them to Poland - to the extermination camps, but nobody knew about it. And we escaped it. We were not caught. At the time there was an exclusion that the pregnant women - the couples and the children - would not be deported. So that's the way we escaped one time. And there was another time I just happened to know one of the policemen which were to arrest the Jewish people. I happened to know him a little bit. He said, "Don't sleep this night. Don't sleep in your house." This was the second time. So we escaped twice in Beziers of deportation. Then when the Germans advanced, and a few days before they arrived you know already by the news and by everything that they would occupy Montpellier and Beziers - and so we went to Grenoble to be a little away.

Q: And what happened to you when you arrived in Grenoble? How did you survive there?

A: Like anyplace else.

Q: Were there also Jewish committees there then?

A: Yes, everywhere. They were set up in every larger town.

Q: How long did you stay in Grenoble?

A: I don't recall exactly. We stayed in Grenoble, and then the Germans occupied Grenoble, because they occupied the entire country. When my brother, who was also in Grenoble at the time, was arrested and deported, we went to the Vercors. This is a mountain range nearby Grenoble. There we met a Catholic priest, Father Borelli is his name, and there was a convent, and there were the nuns - Catholic nuns - and my wife and the kid, they went to Catholic church in order to say we are not Jewish.

Q: So at this point you were really in hiding then.

A: We were hiding from Grenoble. The place is Notre Dame de L'Osier it's called. That's where we were.

Q: Was this a small...

A: Very small. Just a few inhabitants. But there was this convent, and there was Father Borelli, and he did quite terrific work for all the Jews.

Q: Were you actually staying in the convent, then?

A: No, not in the convent. In the farmer's house, but Father Borelli knew his people. He knew the people - we didn't have to fear that they would be collaborators of the Germans.

Q: So did he find the farmer's house for you then?

A: Yes. And from Notre Dame de L'Osier - we were staying there and my wife, one day she had a premonition or something. She said, "It's too dangerous. We have to get out of here." So we talked to Father Borelli, and he sent us to another little village, but I don't recall the name anymore, of the other farmer's house. And so we changed villages all the time, because we were just near the Vercors where those many people have been massacred at Oradour sur Glane in reprisals of the Germans, because the resistance movement blew up bridges and killed people in the convoys.

Q: And this was near where you were staying then?

A: Oh yes, absolutely close by.

Q: So French Resistance members were massacred there? Is that what you're saying?

A: At Oradour sur Glane, yes. The entire population of the village - completely wiped out! Just in reprisals for the great Resistance movement they had done to the Germans. I still absolutely don't know how we ever escaped, that today we are alive.

Q: Did you live out the war in hiding then? From then on?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: All in that area? In villages in that area?

A: All in that area. We had a big map. And through the British Broadcasting Company, they told us what was going on - the radio. Almost every day we crossed off another city in Russia that was liberated from the Germans when the Germans had to go back in wartime. It was just a celebration every day, but still, I don't know how we ever escaped. And once when we were in the farmhouse, the French gendarmes came with about ten guys with the shotguns (laughs), and I asked, "What's going on?" They said, "Here you..." - we had false papers then, under a French name.

Q: Do you remember what the name was?

A: Curtin. Because my first name is Kurt, we made it Curtin. Born in Alsace. Now the French authorities, they inquired in Alsace whether there is a Curtin by this name. There wasn't. So they came, those gendarmes, to arrest us. The but captain of the gendarmerie was a Resistance fighter, and when he asked us, "Are you Jewish?", we told him, and he said, "Let them go." They took off.

Q: Where was this? Do you remember where this was?

A: No, I don't recall the name of the village where this was.

Q: This is in one of those five houses that Father Borelli helped you to find?

A: Yes, right. But this Resistance fighter later on was caught by the Nazis and he was killed by them.

Q: Do you by chance remember his name?

A: This all happened about forty years ago.

Q: You have a wonderful memory.

A: Well, not the way I really would like to - the names and everything.

Q: Well, his acts will be remembered on tape.

A: Yes. And so it went and finally there came the liberation. The worst part of this, we have not been in death camps or anything, but we lived under the terrible threat, day after day, from one day to the other, and we heard that as the news came through, that many of our friends, and my wife's brother, and my brother, were arrested and deported. And so that is a rough thing.

Q: How did you hear about their arrests? Were you with them when they were arrested?

A: No, we were not there. When I visited my brother, he wasn't there. The people where he lived, they told me that he was arrested. and I am not even sure whether the people where he lived, if they did not denounce him to the Germans. And my wife's brother, he was also in a farmhouse. He was arrested there and we got the news from the people, too, that he was deported.

Q: Can you remember more details about what life was like for you in hiding? Where did you sleep at night? Did you have enough to eat? Did you worry about noise?

- A: We were worried all the time. there was not a minute. But we had, to eat, because the farmers there had something to eat.
- Q: The farmers really helped you in many ways.
- A: Well, mostly Father Borelli. He helped. Because, as you know, these people, they are so Catholic there, what the priest says, that mostly goes, if he says, "You have to do this." We had rather very good experiences with the French Resistance. They really helped us. But many people say that, of course, there were traitors among the French. Quite a few.
- Q: In the Resistance you mean?
- A: Not in the Resistance, no. But others, yah. We don't talk very often about the experiences, my wife and myself, but when we talk about it, then we still ask ourselves, how come that we are alive? How did we escape?
- Q: Do you have some opinion about that? Have you come up with an answer for yourself about why you escaped?
- A: No. If I would be a religious man, I would say God has protected us. But since I am not, I don't know. (Laughs) So I will be very frank about it. I consider myself as a good Jew, but not as a really believer.
- Q: Will you describe where you were when you were liberated, and how you received that news, and what happened then?
- A: The news came already that France was invaded in Normandy, but the battle wasn't finished yet. We got news through the radio every day what was going on. Finally all the cities in France had been liberated, and the day of the liberation, I will never forget this. This was a jubilation. Ahhh! One cannot imagine what was going on in this small town.
- Q: Do you remember the date?
- A: The date is known. I don't.
- Q: So this was the day of the liberation of France.
- A: Yes, but entire France was not liberated! We were in the southern part of France. paris, for instance, has been liberated a little later.
- Q: What happened when you heard of the liberation on that day?

A: Oh, people kissed complete strangers they had never seen. It was just a jubilation. the feeling is impossible for somebody who hasn't lived through that, that finally we were liberated at that time.

Q: How old was your son at that time?

A: Well, he was born in 192; the liberation was in 1945 - three years old.

Q: So, you were really in hiding for the first three years of his life.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: What is his name?

a: Claude.

Q What happened to you after the liberation then? Where did you go?

A: After the liberation, I went back to Paris.

Q: And what did you find there?

A: I found that I couldn't get a work permit.

Q: Did you intend to stay in Paris?

A: We intended to stay in France and in Paris, because we liked Paris and was kind of familiar with the city after we had been there some years, but without a work permit, we just couldn't make a living. So then I decided, well, I don't like the Nazis, I don't like the Germans, but maybe I could eventually take over my business again which I'd left in Germany, and we went back home. Oh! In 1945, right after the war, our daughter was born, but she was born in Paris after the liberation. With both kids we went to Germany. I tried to have the business going again, but when I saw how the Germans were, that in reality they had not changed a bit. We were hoping it would have improved! But then we had a chance to come to the United States. And here we are.

Q: When did you come to the United States?

A: 1951.

Q: You spent, what, about five years then in Germany?

A: Yes.

Q: When you say the Germans were not really changed, how do you mean? Did you feel anti-Semitism?

A: No, not anti-Semitism. But most of the people just didn't feel that they had done anything wrong - by their saying that they were forced into it. Nobody was an anti-Semite, nobody was a Nazi then. They were just forced into this. And so then we came to this country, and were naturalized citizens in 1957 here. I was fortunate enough to find a job with the electric company, and so I stayed with them for over twenty years until I had to retire.

Q: And when was that?

A: Ten years ago, at the age of 65. Now I'm 75.

Q: Is there more that you would like to say about your whole history of the war years?

A: Yeah, I would like to say this: Never again something will happen. I hope the Jewish people have learned from this, that if we would have had during the Holocaust a State of Israel then, I don't think - I don't say it categorically that it could never happen - but not that many people would have been murdered. And that's why it is so dear to my heart, the State of Israel.

Q: Did you ever consider living in Israel?

A: No, not me personally, but I wouldn't mind at all if my daughter would like. I would like to encourage her, and there are three big guys that are six-feet-and-some tall, and I think the State of Israel could use them. There are four beautiful granddaughters., She said in a couple of years she would like to go, maybe to live.

Q: So maybe you'll get to see it and to visit.

A: Yah.

Q: Is there more that you would like to say?

A: No, could you think of something?

Q: Not right this moment I can't other than to thank you very much for this chance to get to know something about you.

A: I forgot to mention why we were in Beziers. I have been in a French camp near Beziers, in the village of Agde. I don't recall exactly how long I have been in this camp. We were not mistreated by the French authorities, only again the same thing, it was the French themselves, they didn't have anything to eat, and the

conditions in the camp concerning nourishment were just awful. The Germans confiscated everything and sent it to Germany. So as the French suffered and the people in the camps - they suffered even more under this. Otherwise it is not very nice to be in a camp. You sleep practically under awful conditions, but no mistreatment. And there again there was one loophole. We were told people which wanted to work in the agriculture, from the people in the camp, they could be released. We had French friends, and they had a small piece of land. He wrote out a certificate that I would work for him. So I got out of the camp in Agde, and we could live together in Beziers.