This is Susan Bachrach. I'm at the home of Mr. Emanuel Munzer. I'm representing the US Holocaust Museum, and Mr. Munzer is going to tell us about his life before and during the war.

Could you tell us a little bit about your family background, where you were born and what your father did, your school background, those sorts of things?

I was born in Berlin on February 26, 1920 in Berlin, Germany as the only son of my parents. What should I say?

Give your parents' names.

Hans and Margaret. And I had pretty normal schooling, went to kindergarten, pre-school.

Did you go to public school?

Public school. And after that, I went to a gymnasium with the intention to go to university and become a electrical engineer and go through to my PhD. And this was interrupted by the advent of the Nazis in 1933.

OK. What was your father doing in-- you always lived in Berlin with your parents?

I always lived in Berlin, yes, with my parents.

What sort of neighborhood did you live in?

Do you recall?

It was a well-to-do neighborhood. It was in the southwestern district of Berlin. That was a district called Schoneberg. And I had a good childhood.

Was it a Jewish neighborhood?

No, no. I was mixed. There were many Jews living there and many non-Jews.

What sort of building did you live in? Did you live in an apartment building?

We lived in an apartment building. We lived on the fourth floor, and my father always complained about being bald, that when he carried me these four flights up the stairs I amused myself pulling out his hair.

And so you spent all your childhood in this apartment?

That's right.

And let's see. Your father was employed for a business?

My father was a foreign correspondent for a notions trading company, and he spoke eight languages fluently.

Did he travel a great deal?

He traveled, yes. He traveled, too, not a great deal, but he traveled.

Was your mother at home?

My mother was a full-time mother, yes. She was at home bringing me up.

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Where were your parents from? Were they born in Berlin also?

My father was born in Berlin, and my mother was also born in Berlin, actually.

What do their parents-- what sort of backgrounds did they come from?

They came from-- my father's father was the first lyceum professor appointed by the then-emperor William III.

The first lyceum professor, did you say?

Professor at the lyceum, professor of history, a full professor of history. He was one of the first Jewish appointments by the emperor.

That's interesting. And did you know your grandparents? Did they live near you?

My grandparents on my mother's side I knew very well. My father's father died at an early age from cancer, so I didn't know-- he died about a year before I was born.

Did your father have any brothers or sisters?

Yeah, one brother, and he was a captain in the United States Army. He was a medical doctor, and he came to the United States in 1928 or '29.

What was his name?

His name was Albert Alfred Munzer, MD.

Did your father receive a university degree?

Yes.

At the university in Berlin?

No, he went to the University of-- I think he went to University of Leipzig or somewhere. That was before my time.

Do you know your father's birthday?

Yeah, September 21, 1893.

Do you know what year your parents were married? Were they married--

They were married 1918, I think.

And you said your father was--

Shortly before the end of World War I.

And your father was enlisted during the war?

Yes, yeah.

Did he fight?

Yeah, he saw frontline service, but he got meningitis and had to be hospitalized. And he recovered, and then they

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discharged him.

Do you know where your parents met? Did they meet after the war, or did they know each other before the war? Do you know anything about the circumstances of their meeting?

They met as members of a youth group.

A Jewish youth group?

I don't know whether I was Jewish. At that time, it was very popular to make trips to rough it.

Right, climbing mountains.

Climbing mountains, bike trips, canoe trips. My father had one of those Klepper boats, those folding canoes with the rubber draped over it, to assemble it on the beach, wooden planks, and you'd drape the rubber skin over them. Everything matched perfectly.

So you would go canoeing with him?

Canoeing, sailing, anything.

Where did you do that usually? Where did you go to do that?

Oh, lots of lakes and rivers in northern Germany, especially in that area south of Berlin.

You don't remember any special place that you used to go to?

Havel or MÃ¼ggelsee. These are two as far as I remember.

So the whole family would go on these excursions?

Yeah.

Did you take friends?

Yeah, we-- this boat came along with a tent, and we spent the nights in the tent.

Is there anything else, any other-- so did you have any religious education when you were growing up?

No, not that much.

What did it mean to you to be Jewish when you were a child?

I wasn't very conscious of it.

You didn't observe-- did you observe the holidays?

We observed the high holidays, but that was about it. We belonged to that--

That's very typical.

Yeah, we belonged to the class of the emancipated Jews.

So after Hitler came to power, you were still in Berlin for a time?

After Hitler came to power, we were still in Berlin, yes.

Can you tell us a little bit-- your memories of-- so you were in-- if you could just describe some of your-- so you were a teenager. You were 13 in 1933, so you were in your early teens during the years when the Nazis came to power. Just describe some of your memories of--

Well, we had-- I walked daily 2 and 1/2 miles to school and 2 and 1/2 miles back from school, and there were no school buses to pick us up. And I wasn't aware of any incidents, except maybe one we had these-- we wore these Tyrolean pants that were very popular at the time, and somebody turned around on the street and remarked that Jewish kids shouldn't be wearing these things.

Did you walk to school with Jewish friends?

Jewish and non-Jewish, oh, yes.

Did your non-Jewish friends start treating you differently after Hitler came to power? Do you remember anything about that?

No, no not in the beginning, no. Now, Berlin was a thoroughly socialist city. There was a social democratic mayor at the time Hitler came to power, and he was Jewish.

And the story goes that the Berlin police was all poised that when the brown shirts were marching on Berlin in 1932 that the Berlin police and the Berlin national guard was mobilized with everything to give them the appropriate reception.

But somebody cut the wire that led to a button underneath the mayor's desk. It was sabotaged. And when it came to pushing the button, nothing happened, so consequently, Berlin was taken over by surprise.

Do you remember-- so you continued to go to school until when? You were in a gymnasium already in '33?

Yeah. In '33, I went to the Konigstadtige Oberrealschule in the northeast of Berlin. And at that time, my maternal grandmother took me under her wings because my parents I left the country for France, and I had to be given away.

In 1933?

Early 1934.

Your parents left the country in '34.

Late '33, they left the country, and I was given into my grandmother's care. And in 1934, she gave me up to the Auerbachsches Waisen-Erziehungs-Anstalten. Which was an orphan asylum that took in the kids that had parents but whose parents are no longer in the country.

So why did your parents leave in '34?

'34, of course, they were apprehensive, and they knew that somebody was after them.

Is this because of your father's Jewishness or his political affiliations?

Both, both.

So you can talk about that.

My father was the district supervisor of the Wilmersdorf-Schoneberg district of the Socialist Party, the same party that

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Albert Einstein belonged to. And as a matter of fact, I do remember having played with his grandchildren. We were both kids, very young, and we were playing while she was at the piano and he was playing the violin. And they were entertaining each other. And they talked business, and we talked children's stuff. We played together.

Wow. Do you know what year that was?

Oh, that was way in the 20s.

That's interesting.

But he was a marked man as far as the Nazis were concerned.

A lot of social democrats were imprisoned starting then, right?

Mm-hm.

So he had friends or other party members who were in prison then? Did they have to leave fairly quickly?

Yeah, they had to leave very quickly because one-- I remember one evening my father got this note that was pushed under the door. The post office wasn't reliable anymore. People would open up each other's mail and look for trouble. And so this note under the door said something to the effect that, change your domicile, somebody is after you.

And do you remember the month and the year? You think it was early '34?

It was early 3-- well, it was shortly after the election in April 1933. My father was very upset. He came home. He says, guess what. He said, the Nazis won.

So they gave up their apartment, and they lived under an assumed name some place else as a-- in a room sublet by somebody.

Still in Berlin?

Still in Berlin, yeah.

And so they stayed there for a few more months, and then they--

Incognito.

But when they changed their identities, that's when you went to live with your grandmother--

Yes.

--because you couldn't easily--

And then I was getting to be too much for my grandmother, so I ended up in this orphan asylum.

How long were you there?

1936-- until 1937. Yeah, early 1937, they put me on a train bound for Paris.

So you were in the orphan asylum from--

'34 to '37.

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Oh, for three years?

Three years.

What memory-- did you still go to school from there?

Yes, they forbid the Jewish kids to go to a regular gymnasium, so I went to the Jewish middle school.

What are your memories of that?

Well, they tried their best.

So it wasn't gymnasium anyway.

Hm?

It wasn't gymnasium.

No. I remember my Hebrew teacher-- he was a tall fella, blond, pug-nosed, blue-eyed, the real image of the typical Aryan, and they wanted to get him into the party, a party member. And they didn't believe that he was Jewish. He was tall. He was 6 and 1/2 feet tall.

Gosh. I can see why they wanted him.

Blond, blue-eyed, ruddy-faced, the typical Aryan.

What happened to him?

I don't know why that happened to him. He's probably still around some place.

So what was this-- was this orphanage-- who ran the orphanage?

Was this a Jewish--

This was a Jewish-- yes, this was a Jewish enterprise, and it's no longer in existence, actually. The building is no longer existence. It was established in an old brewery which changed location because it got too big for this building, so they sold it to that orphan-- to that company that established an orphanage there.

This is still in Berlin?

Mm-hm.

Berlin proper?

It was still in Berlin proper. As a matter of fact, the son of the director of this orphan asylum is now a famous rabbi in Ottawa, Ontario at a temple called the Holy Blossom Temple. His name is Dr. Plaut.

How many--

And his mother-- I sent her a congratulatory letter. His mother just turned 100 last June, a year ago, June.

How many children-- what was the atmosphere at this orphanage like?

There were three groups of children, the toddlers, the medium-sized, and the adolescents, and I was one of the oldest.

Were you treated well there?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Considering the conditions, we were all treated well.

During this period, you had a more intense religious history.

And they were all indigents, and the parents paid for it. My parents did, too, for me.

So you ate well enough, and you got enough food?

Oh, yes.

Did you make friends with anyone you've stayed in touch with or you didn't track anybody down?

I didn't track anybody down.

So then your-- do you have any memories during '34, '35, '36 of intensified Nazi persecution of Jews, anything that comes to mind, any incidents?

It's strange. Nothing happened to me personally.

Did you see people getting beat up?

No.

Nothing like that?

No.

You didn't-- did you have a personal--

No, because we were sheltered, actually, by the orphanage, and when we could walk to school, you always walked in groups. And they never bothered us.

You had to wear the Star of David?

No.

You didn't have to wear any identification?

No, no.

And you didn't personally have any particular fears?

No. I heard a lot of things that went on around us, but it never affected us personally.

And then your parents took you out of the orphanage?

Yes.

That was in 1937?

'37, yes.

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You left the orphanage, and you traveled to Paris?

--to Paris to rejoin my parents. At the time, they were in Paris. And they had a--

Excuse me. You said that your mother died in 1935.

Yeah.

She died in Paris?

Hm?

She died in Paris?

No. She died in Berlin. In 1935, I was still there.

Oh, so your father left for Paris alone?

That's right.

Oh, OK, all right. Oh gosh. And she died after he left? Was she in the hospital or--

She was in the hospital, and the prognosis was not good for her. So he did his best. Actually, I don't know what happened, but I'm reading that he sort of abandoned her. He sent her money, but--

Did you see her?

I saw her regularly.

So he was in Paris, and so he met your stepmother there?

That's right.

She's French?

No, she is also from Berlin. And they didn't travel together, but he made her come.

And they got married in France?

They got married in France, yes.

So you joined them in 1937?

'37.

And go on. And you were telling me they were living in Paris.

And I joined them in Paris, and they had a-- they established a business, a sort of a library.

You mean a bookstore?

Bookstore, yes, part bookstore and part lending library and specializing in books that were banned in Germany.

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How did that do?

They did pretty well.

What neighborhood was it in?

Hm?

Do you know where it was?

Yeah, it was the 15th Arrondissement.

And you lived over there?

It was not far from a slaughterhouse.

You remember that, probably. So you lived in the 15th?

Yeah, in the 15th.

So that was 1937.

That was in 1937, from 1937 on.

And the first half of 1939, I--

Did you go to school when you went to Paris?

No, I went to a training institute that would prepare me for mechanics, and I wound up in employment at the Hispano-Suiza Works in Courbevoie, Paris in 1938.

The what?

They made engines similar to the Rolls-Royce Company. As a matter of fact, they were compared to it. And they made engines and engine parts, and I was employed there as a mechanic.

Oh. So had you studying French in Germany so that you can get around, or did you just pick it up when you got there?

I was worst in languages, but it took me only 30 days to master the French.

So you worked there for how long?

I worked to the end of 1939 when war broke out.

Did you have teenage friends in Paris?

I don't know. I don't remember. I know there were lots of girls after me, but it was passe.

So when the war broke out in '39--

'39, yeah, after Hitler invaded Poland thinking that the Russians would be with them, then he turned against the Russians. And that's when England declared war first and then France.

What did your father think when the Soviets signed the pact with the Nazis?

I don't know. He was pretty upset. I had my own apartment. I wasn't much in contact with him at that point.

Oh, really?

I was alone, by myself.

But you were living in the 15th?

I was living-- no-- at Courbevoie near the plant.

Where's that?

Courbevoie is the outskirts of-- it's one of the outskirts of Paris.

So you were in Courbevoie living by yourself and working when war broke out, and then what happened?

Then, since the French classified us as hostile aliens, they rounded us up and took the young ones into the inner-- into the inside of the French countryside, where we were harvesting sugar beets.

Where was that exactly?

In Touraine. And the little village where we were quartered was-- the little village was Marolles, M-A-R-O-L-L-E-S.

When did you arrive there?

They took us-- 1939-- it was 11 weeks after the-- 11 weeks after the-- no, 11 days after the outbreak of the hostilities, they took us into the Touraine.

Can you describe the circumstances of your being rounded up? How did they--

Well, the gendarmes just showed up and told us to pack all of your belongings and go with them. That's it.

So you were registered at the police, so they knew your address, and they came to your house?

Oh, yeah. Everybody was registered with the police, every resident.

So you were taken by a truck?

We were taken to the railroad station, and the railroad station-- and were freighted into the well, freighted. We had passenger cars, passenger compartments, going into the French cornbelt, as it was called, the wheatbelt. It was called the Touraine, a series of little villages, little villages, farmers, farming villages.

Were their other Jewish kids with you?

Some of them yes, some of them not, but they were all foreigners.

From--

--all over. Some were students. They helped with the harvest because the men went to the front, so we went to the interior helping with the harvest.

How did the French gendarmes treat you?

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They were nice but authoritarian.

And you stayed in farmhouses with families when you got there?

We stayed as guests of the farmer there.

You were with one family there?

Well, we were housed in an old barn because we were many. We were about 40 people.

Oh gosh.

And at 3:00 in the morning, we were out there with our machetes harvesting the beets in order to-- and the dew was heavy, so in order to prevent the outbreak of rashes and other disturbances of the skin, they fed us vitamin-- I believe it was vitamin A and D, giving us boiled lard to eat in the morning, and black bread from weird stuff. I liked it. It was very fat.

Oh, really?

The fat was just dropping off them. Oh, yeah. Boiled lard? Oh, yeah.

Oh, got you. And so you were all--

Potatoes and bread.

You were all men or--

All men.

Oh, you were, OK.

And the weekends we whiled away our time with playing cards and going into the local pubs.

Oh, so you had-- you had freedom.

Oh, yeah. We had freedom there. Oh, yes.

And were you paid a wage?

We were paid a wage. Oh, yeah, that arrangement was not bad at all.

Why did you start work so early in the day? It wasn't-- you couldn't see.

Apparently sugar beets get stuck on the ground when the sun is up, and you have to-- to collect these beads, you have to put them straight up not to break them. You want the whole beat, you see. Once they break, they're no good anymore. That's it. You can't do a thing.

So the ground had to be slightly wet to pull them out? That was it?

That's right. It had to be done before sunrise.

What did you do the rest of the day? Did you work on the farm?

Well, by the time the beats were out of the ground, the sun was up, and then you went down the roads with your

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machetes and cut off the greens.

OK. So you worked real hard there? What time did you get off work?

Oh, yes. Well, 3:00 in the afternoon was quitting time, and the rest was ours.

How many months were you there?

I don't know. When the harvest was over, they took us away. I guess it was eight weeks or something like that.

Oh, oh, I see.

Eight or 10 weeks.

And then where did you go?

Then we went back, and in the meantime, my parents moved from Paris to Nice.

They did that because they're worried about being rounded up in Paris?

No. My father had a fall-out with his partner, and he said, OK, you take your business. You take your business and shove it. And they went to Nice because they had a good offer there and established a lending library instead of the delivery. And I joined them there until--

Is this picture taken in Nice?

That's the picture in Nice in front of part of the books.

So this must have been 1940?

Yeah, that was before we were taken.

'41?

Oh, yes, '41.

They went to Nice in '41, did you day?

'41. I can't see this very well, but your father looks very bookish.

And right after I arrived in Nice, I was told that, as a hostile alien being of a relatively young, manageable age, I had to go into military duty. And since I couldn't join as a non-French-- since I couldn't join the regular French armed forces, I had to go into the French Foreign Legion.

Oh. That was in 1941? '42? How old were you?

I was in-- that was '41, yes.

So you were--

No, that must have been--

You were 21?

No, it was in 1940. What am I talking about? It was in 1940, right after I joined my parents in Nice.

How long were you with them?

So then I-- oh, there was only a few weeks. I had to pack my bags and leave. I got my working papers.

What was the living situation in Nice?

They're living situation?

Yes.

Well, we had only this one big room with the books, and I slept on a couch. And they slept in a double bed.

And this was in same room?

Yeah, it was a big room. It was partitioned off with a drape, with a curtain. So they put the curtain and made a bedroom out of part of the living room. And the living room was full of books. That's how they lived.

Right. Did a lot of people come into the lending library?

Oh, yes. They had a good business there.

That's interesting. So did you go-- was there still a beach life there or anything at that time?

Beach?

Yeah.

Oh, yes. Do you remember that at all before you left?

Well, Nice is up against the French Alps. They fall right off. It's nestled in a cliff sort of. As a matter of fact, the bay reminds one of Los Angeles because-- it's called the Baie des Anges, and the beaches is all pebbles.

I know. I've been there.

The beach is all pebbles. I had the hardest time to walk on these pebbles, but you get used to it after a while.

Were you there in the winter or the spring?

It doesn't matter. Yeah you see people bathe in the wintertime, and you look up the-- as a matter of fact, we were up in the mountains, and we looked down to the sea, to the beach, and we saw people bathing. We were having a snowball fight up in the mountains.

So right after you got there you went to the mountains?

So then you enrolled in the Foreign Legion--

The Foreign Legion--

--in 1940, when you were 20 years old.

That's right.

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And where did you go?

We had boot camp in Lyon, France, which lasted, what, five weeks, and we went on to the Sahara Desert. And I remember the crossing of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean is a nice, smooth body of water, very innocent-looking, but every once in a while, it gets stormy. And when it gets stormy, watch out.

So we had one of those passages on a sloop going to North Africa, and the water was terrible. Oh, was it ever choppy. I couldn't remember a thing like that. It was stormy, outright stormy. That thing was-- I don't know how he could have made headway, but he did.

Was it a small bar?

It was a sloop. It was slightly bigger than a fishing trawler. And I saw people standing up, lining up on the railing, green in their faces, and giving to the see whatever they ate, giving it back to see. I was sitting there down at the captain's table and ate everything in sight. No, I had no fear of the sea at all.

So then we ended up in North Africa. We got a ferried to-- we were transported in trucks, military convoys to the Sahara Desert, and a little village right at the outskirts of the desert by the name of Bouarfa. That I remember. It wasn't far from the Algerian border with Morocco, but we were on the Moroccan side.

And we were told to-- well, a regular, little garrison, garrison duty, and then we were told to watch out for the Arabs because they're very treacherous. They can sneak up behind you, and you don't even know what hit you, just come out-- the desert is just a mass of sand, and dunes, and whatnot, and they have their ways of fighting. And they make no noise when they come up on you, so you had to watch out.

Were you scared when you went there?

No, but I had a carbine, which was-- oh my God, and I don't know. I was shooting around the corners. I never hit the target. I don't know. We had target practice, and I always ended up hitting somebody else's target.

And I looked at the bayonet of the thing, and it was dated 1792 or something like that, way--

You're kidding.

Yeah, from Napoleon's time. That's what we had. And then we did our little garrison duty, and then the Germans came in after France laid down her arms in late 19-- well, actually, in 1940, she laid down her arms, but the Germans took a little while to get in there and organize their things. It took about a half a year until they found out about our Garrison. And I guess in early 1941 they disbanded the French Foreign Legion.

Oh, yeah, I remember. We were under the Vichy regime, Marshal Petain. And he took care of the running of the French Foreign Legion until the Germans were good and ready to organize it their way. So we had a little time. Meanwhile, we kept on functioning as a garrison, as an outpost. And then the Germans came in, and took all our weapons away, and got us to work on their railroad project.

When was that? That was in '41?

That was in '41.

Now, do you remember who was in the group with you, some of the other--

Oh, we had-- our group was made up of all kinds of renegades, breakers of the laws, and things like that. I couldn't tell you.

What were they like? Did you make any friends?

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No. You can't make friends with those.

Really?

They were totally foreign to you? They really rough?

They were rough, yes. It was a rough and tumble bunch.

Did they leave you alone? Did they give you a hard time?

Some were murders. Well, I was once threatened by somebody who wanted to cut off my ears.

The fact that you were Jewish-- was it known to anybody?

No. It made no difference. It made no difference. We were all in the-- as a matter of fact, I remember when one of the colonels at the end of boot camp in Lyon on the French mainland gave us a charge before dismissing us. And he said, you are in the French Foreign Legion. You are here to die, to fight for your fatherland and to die. Little did he know that these are all a bunch of foreigners.

Well, I'm sure you didn't look at it so ironically then.

No, no, no. But it struck me as out of place, completely out of place.

All right. So you did the Foreign Legion, and then the Germans took it over. And that's when they made you start working--

The first thing they did is disband the French Foreign Legion.

But they took over your regiment or whatever?

That's right. That's right. They took over our regiment and made us break up those stones they trucked in from some place. I don't know.

You stayed in the same barracks, the same location?

They put us a little deeper into the desert, and at that time, they housed us in pup tents.

When you were in training, did they give you survival-- did you learn how to survive in the desert? Did they give you some training for that?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yes.

So that wasn't a problem, adjusting to that?

That was not a problem, no. No, no. The French government fed us, and the Germans made us work. In other words, we were still obeying the French, and the Germans were in the background.

It was German army units or Wehrmacht?

A couple of higher-ups once in a while came to inspect the work we are doing and sniff around a little. Bit largely they left us alone because we were doing our job.

Was that hard, breaking up the stones, that work?

Oh, yeah. It was hard. You had to-- there was a quota that you had to meet, but it wasn't too hard.

No? How long did you do that?

Until my father coughed up 20,000 francs I guess in '41, '42. Yeah, in early '42, he was able to get me out of there, to buy me out and to have me shipped back to the mainland, to the French mainland.

And how long were you there before you were deported? You went back to Nice?

I went back to Nice thinking that Nice was a safe area because it was under the Italians.

So you were there for a couple of years or--

I don't know how long. Again, this is-- when Italy laid down her arms-- when Italy laid down her arms, the Germans took over the entire area, and they made the-- they rounded up the Jews.

Were these SS?

These were SS.

Who went around rounding up-- so you were deported with your parents?

With my parents. I was first put into a hotel.

In Nice?

In Nice, and from there regular shipments were going to Paris collection camp.

What did the SS tell you when they rounded you up?

That they had work for us in some other place they'd be designating.

Were there many other Jews in Nice?

They were all Jews.

No, I mean, was there a large Jewish population there at that time?

Yes, it was a fairly large Jewish population because the Italians left the Jews alone, and the Jews were working under Italian occupation officers, military officers. They had it good, as a matter of fact.

Were they mostly French Jews?

They were all kinds of Jews, French, non-French.

Was there a community there?

Oh, yeah. We had three temples in Nice, a kosher Jewish kitchen, a business conducted. There were many Jewish doctors.

So you were taken on regular passenger trains from Nice?

From Nice, we road a regular passenger train, yes, to Paris, under guard, of course.

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And were you allowed to take possessions with you then?

Only the rudimentary things. We had to leave many things behind. We couldn't take money along. They let us have jewelry when we couldn't take money along.

Did your father entrust the lending library to a friend, or what happened to that?

My father entrusted the lending library to a friend, non-Jewish friend, an artist, a painter artist-- I don't know what happened to him-- by the name of Gowa, G-O-W-A. As a matter of fact, I came across a-- do you read French?

Yes.

I think the library was confiscated by one of the Vichy representatives, but it was restored after the war. And this Mr. Gowa--

That's nice.

And there's my signature there. This was, of course, after the war.

No, she went via Switzerland. She got into Switzerland somehow, and from Switzerland, she went to the United States.

Did your father ever think of trying to get to the US under the-- with your uncle's help?

Excuse me?

Did your father ever think of emigrating from France to the US? Did he ever think of trying to get your uncle's help to get out of--

Yes. As a matter of fact, he was thinking of going to Spain and from Spain to go into the United States. But he somehow missed the boat. He thought it wasn't going to be this drastic. He had his confidence in France and the French people. So he missed it, and that was--

Well, he probably wasn't the only one.

Well, he was interned in Gurs, in the camp of Gurs.

Oh, he was?

Yes.

When was that?

That was before I was picked-- before we were picked up. He was freed again after that. He was let go.

So he was picked up from nice and put in Gurs?

Mm-hm.

And your mother then--

He first came back to Nice after that.

Your stepmother was not?

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Hm?

Your stepmother was not interned there?

No, no. For some reason, they needed some workers there or something like that.

But that still didn't scare him enough, when he was picked up?

Well, then any thought of going to Spain, but again, as I said before, he missed the boat.

Did the SS take him to Gurs or was it the French?

No, French, French.

It was?

Yeah.

How long was he there?

And the French got him out. Oh, I don't know. I don't know when that was.

Did he talk about what it was like there?

Yeah, it was like a military discipline.

I heard that-- did he go there in the winter? No?

I think so. I don't know.

Because I heard that the conditions were pretty bad. A lot of people got sick, got typhus.

I don't know what happened there. He came back. He came back, and he made up his mind to get going.

It was just too late.

Yeah, it was too late.

So you were deported from Nice to Paris.

Yeah.

And then to Auschwitz, right?

Then to Auschwitz, and there we were separated. They got loaded on a truck, and, of course, that went right to the gas chambers.

Were they ill?

Hm?

What was their physical condition then?

I didn't know. There was an SS man. When we were herded out of the cattle wagons, there was an SS man, and he just pointed. So my parents this way and for me that way.

And you didn't have any idea then what was happening at all?

I smelled it. I smelled it. It was sickening. They didn't have to tell me anything there.

So you were on these cattle cars. You were deported on cattle cars out of Paris. Was it Paris or Drancy?

Paris.

Oh, it was from Paris.

From Paris, yes. And these cattle cars-- we were sealed in them. The conditions were horrible. I don't have to describe it. That's pretty well-established.

But you were still with your parents then?

Yeah.

And everyone else on the cattle car with you-- they were all from Nice?

They were all from-- no, they were all from France.

Oh, OK. So you--

This was a collection camp. They came from various regions.

Were there young children on there?

Some of them were young children.

Families?

Families, yes.

And then how many days did the trip take from Paris to Auschwitz?

I guess four days.

Was that the summertime when you were deported? What time of year was it?

It must have been in the fall because the temperatures were moderate. Thank God.

Were there people who died on that trip?

Yes.

There were? From starvation?

Starvation, and they were too crowded conditions. And there a horrible stench.

So when you go to the camp, you are separated, and where did you go?

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The first thing I noticed, we were stripped of all clothing, all belongings. Next thing, I got the number tattooed.

That was done right away?

Then we were told to go into the sauna. So our heads were shaved and all this other stuff, cleansed with kerosene or something. I don't know what went on then, some chemical that smelled like kerosene. It was awful. It was like a shower.

And then they dried us off and gave us some rags to put on, were not fitting well at all, and wooden shoes--

And you were at--

--clogs.

I had your-- you were at Auschwitz for the remainder of the war?

No, no, no.

Do you have any experiences that you want to talk about there in particular?

Well, some representative of the Siemens Works came, and they were both recruiting officers, civilians, by the name of-- one was H-A-N-K-E, Hanke, and the other one was Jungdorff, J-U-N-G-D-O-R-F-F. And they were representative of the Siemens Works, and they were looking for mechanics.

And they asked me to do certain things, to explain-- to read a vernier scale on calipers and to identify mechanics tools and things like that. And they were satisfied, and they were hiring me on the spot, and from that moment on, I was treated fairly well.

Did you leave the camp?

We left the camp, and we were transferred to a little-- it used to be a tire factory, brake factory, a brake factory, abandoned, of course, abandoned brake factory near the Elbe River which was taken over by the Siemens people.

And they were giving us lathes, and drilling presses, and all these tools to make jigs for producing electrical components like switch components, contacts, and things like that. So we had the tools. I don't know where they got them from, but we had the tools. And they were pretty good, too, were pretty good quality.

Did you live--

Yes. We had bunk beds with mattresses and bedding, and we had horsehair covers and pillows, strangely enough. It was-- that's why I say. You see, I don't open my mouth too wide because I don't have this experience that others had.

Oh, well, you had enough.

I had enough. But compared to what others experienced, I was pretty well-treated. We had good food. We had--

You had enough?

--sausage. We had cheeses. We had-- you name it. I was pretty well-nourished. I couldn't complain.

And you spent the duration of the war there?

Potato soup and so on and so forth. Well, this arrangement went on until the Russians came uncomfortably close to Auschwitz. That was in-- when was it? February or March of '46, was it?

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'45.

'45. And we had to leave. We had to leave in a hurry. I had to abandon everything, and we went to Dachau.

How did you get there?

We were transported again in cattle wagons, but there was one difference. We could take our belongings and our food along. And the trip took only about a day. We spend about, oh, I would say five days in Dachau before two recruiting officers from Siemens found us again. And we were again singled out, and this time we were transported by truck, a military convoy to Berlin, Siemensstadt, their main factory there.

And that's where we continued doing our own little thing, except that every time the Allies laid down one of those bomb carpets we had to go into the bunkers, into the shelters. In the work-- this was an Arbeitslager. This was not a concentration camp. This was a work camp.

So at that time, we had to go hurriedly back to the work camp and go into the bunkers because Siemens itself had only bunkers enough for their own employees, so we had to go back. And we had to share these bunkers with the SS. But again, they left us alone. They were human beings. They left us alone.

And there was one bunker next to ours that was only SS. We didn't-- and one of those bombs really hit hard. I was standing near the door, and I felt the impact from the air rushing in, the sudden air pressure.

Well, the bunker next to ours got a direct hit, and when they dug these-- when they got all these bodies out, one guy had a gun. The thing was turned around and looked like a trumpet, one of those French horns. That's what the impact--

Is that the most terrifying thing that you experience, the bombing?

Well, it stood out in my mind. So we had to-- there were lots of incendiary bombs they dropped, and they never exploded, these pencils-- they were octagonal in shape, and they had a pin. And the idea was, when these things dropped down, the pin got pushed in, and flames spilled out, and the flame got out.

And they had us-- they had us pick up those things, those things that did not go off, and just hold them away from us, push the pin and let them flame out.

Oh, so were little? They were small bombs?

No, they were these incendiary bombs, and the incendiary bombs are-- they look like gigantic pencils with a pin at the end.

They make you do that?

They made us do that to neutralize those things, get all the stuff out. Now, actually, when the flame gets thrown out, these things don't get hot. The flame is far enough away from these pencils.

So no one got killed doing that?

No one got killed doing that. We went into a neutral area. As a matter of fact, they had a whole stack full of potatoes for us, for the kitchen, raw potatoes. And we amused ourselves to discharge these things against the potatoes so we had some nice roasted potatoes for dinner.

No, we didn't-- I personally didn't suffer too much with my--

Where were you liberated?

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--my skills. Well, then Berlin got too hot. The Siemens complex was destroyed. Our work camp was destroyed, and they ferried us up to Oranienburg concentration camp, back to the concentration camp. Now, that was already the latter days of the Nazi era, and most people saw the light, that this was an untenable situation, and the Germans were done for, and it was only a matter of time.

So they prepared us-- again, no hardships. They prepared us for and march to the Mecklenburg region, and we were supposed to board a Red Cross ship in Bremen. But we had to walk over there. And the order came to march us into a forest and to machine gun us all to death. Luckily--

You knew that?

Yes, yes. The SS told us. We got the orders to shoot you all, but we refuse to do that. We don't want to do that. Orders, orders-- nobody checks on these orders as the war is over. The war is finished.

So this was April, probably?

This was in April of '45, yes.

So they were afraid at that point of retaliation.

And they were afraid-- it was that point of retaliation. They said, to hell with these orders. We just march on. Let's go.

So we go, and we went to that one forested area full of foxholes for the night to bed ourselves down in one of the foxholes. We had our-- at that time, our hair was starting to grow, and we had our-- we took our blankets along and all that. And we were pretty well-organized in there.

And in the morning, we looked around. No SS, no German officers. And there was a clearing-- in a far clearing, I saw a rider, man on horseback. It turned out to be a Russian soldier on reconnaissance.

So they discovered us, and they took us into a gigantic farmhouse with a barnyard and whatnot. And the Russian colonel, who turned out to be a medical doctor, spoke a good English-- well, who spoke a good German at that time, spook a good German at that time.

And he said, look, you're free, but if you want to do yourself a favor, don't eat right away anything that comes into sight. I know you are hungry. We will give you some thin soup, and we'll gradually increase your diet to where your stomachs can digest it because if you eat you die. That's what the colonel said. He said, you'll get sick, and you'll die.

And we were a couple of days with the Russians, and they fed us pretty well. They gave us no solid food for the first two days, and then they started out with a slice of bread here a little over there and so on. No, but somehow I reacted-- I came down with dysentery.

So then the Russians said, well, we have no ill facilities. I'll tell you what. We'll deliver you to the British. They have a field lab a field infirmary, and they can get you back, straightened out.

So they put me on what the Russians called an ambulance and got me over to the border lines, which weren't far away. And there I spent about three weeks on a diet of all horse meat hamburgers. I gained weight at the rate of 3 pounds a day. I was simply emaciated.

So even though you think you were treated so well, you were emaciated?

I got three things. I got sulfa drugs. I got aspirin, and I got more meat hamburgers, horse meat hamburgers, all horse meat hamburgers. That's how they put me back on my feet. And then I was repatriated to France because everybody went where he was taken from.

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Did you go back to Paris?

Yes, we went back to Paris on the first stop, and there we-- and they welcomed us as heroes. And we were quartered in one of the luxury hotels. I think it was the Ritz. I don't know. And we were given clothes, and things to wear, and my first haircut.

And after this died down, I went back to nice, and I reclaimed my old apartment. The books were gone, of course. And I lived there for a year before I came down with the-- well, the diagnosis was water on the lungs.

I went to the hospital, and they found that I had water. I don't know. They took one of those big, gigantic syringes, those horse syringe, a big needle, a heavy gauge needle. And the doctor felt me between the ribs and just jabbed that thing into the lungs and pulled out water, pulled the water out of my lungs. And thank God the water was clear, so there was no evidence of tuberculosis.

But they put me into a ward together with tubercular patients, so in order to prevent me from catching tuberculosis, they injected me with an aspirin solution, a sugar solution of aspirin, 500 milligrams a day, three times a day. They reduced it to 200 twice a day, and then I came out of it, no evidence of tuberculosis. And, well, here I am.

When did you emigrate to the US?

In 1947. As a matter of fact, it was May 4, 1947, and I landed at LaGuardia on a regular immigration visa. My uncle furnished the affidavit.

Can we just-- I'd like to-- you told me your father's birth date and birth place already, and he had a university degree, and his background. Do you know what your step-mother's birth date was? Approximate year?

No, but I could find. I can find out.

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