

Interview with Fred Raymes
April 14, 1992
Huntington, Long Island, New York

Today is April 14, 1992. I'm Anthony Di Iorio and I am at the home of Mr. Fred Raymes in Huntington, Long Island, New York. I'm here on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to interview Mr. Raymes about his experiences and his recollections of the Holocaust. Good morning, Mr. Raymes.

A: Hello. How are you?

Q: Fine. How are you?

A: Okay.

Q: Feel like remembering?

A: Not really, but I'll give it a try.

Q: Okay. When were you born?

A: I was born in February 6, 1929 on a very cold day I'm told.

Q: Uh-huh. And where?

A: In Germany.

Q: In Germany.

A: In a little village called Hoffenheim near Heidelberg in the province of Baden.

Q: Supposedly it's a nice area.

A: Well, it...I returned there recently and I was surprised how charming it is. Yes, I must admit, it is very nice.

Q: Do you have any memories of growing up in this town?

A: Oh, yes. I remember a lot of things. I lived there until I was ten or eleven years old so I have a lot of good -- eh -- a lot of memories.

Q: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: Yes. I have one brother named Menachem. He currently lives in Israel.

Q: And he was the younger brother?

A: He was younger by three years, yes.

Q: And how about your parents? Can you tell us something about your parents? Who they were, what they did?

A: Yes. Well, my mother was a typical housewife of its day. My father was in business as a butcher. And they tried to make a living to support us as long as they managed to do it.

Q: Your father was a butcher in Humfenheim?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you live in an apartment or your own house?

A: Well we lived in an apartment and then as a sort of -- because the Jewish community was very small there, on the time we were deported there was as few as ten families, my father acted as a cantor. When the regular cantor left or died, I'm not sure, we ended up in an apartment which was adjoining to the synagogue. So we lived there until the Kristallnacht when, of course, the synagogue was destroyed and we had to move out of the apartment very quickly. We moved in with an uncle who lived in that same town.

Q: So you lived in three different apartments in a short period?

A: Well, as I can remember, it was over a ten -year period.-

Q: So your father's butcher shop, that was separate, away from the apartment buildings?

A: Yeah, correct.

Q: Both of your parents were Jewish?

A: Yes, they were.

Q: Were they Reform, or Conservative, or Orthodox?

A: Gee, I really don't know. But I think it's a typical German traditional, I think.

Q: Most likely Conservative?

A: I don't believe we ate kosher in the latter years. It may well be that in early years we were but I'm really not aware of it.

Q: Do you remember what these apartments were like that you lived in?

A: Not in any great detail. I -- the only vague memory I have is when I was perhaps three years old, and I believe it was about the time my brother was born. I remember very vividly a mouse playing under his crib, that I kept watching.

Q: A real mouse?

A: A real mouse. And that's about all I can remember.

Q: And he wasn't your pet mouse?

A: No. I don't know where the mouse came from.

Q: Did you have any pets?

A: No, I didn't, no.

Q: Hobbies?

A: No, not really. By the time I, you know, 1933 was not very far away, I was four years old, and the little kids in the street very quickly stopped playing with us and would rather beat us up, so there was very little time for hobbies. It was more a question of protection.

Q: Did any of the kids ever beat you up?

A: Oh yeah, quite frequently and I learned to run as fast as my little legs could carry me.

Q: You mentioned that there were very few Jews in this town and I imagine half of them were relatives.

A: Not really. I think we, my brother and I, and another girl were the only children that I can remember.

Q: And you had at least one uncle.

A: Yes, but he didn't live in that same town.

Q: No?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Did you ever get to go to school?

A: Yes. I started school when I was six, which I guess means 1935, and went to school for about two years, till --- or perhaps it was three, I'm not sure. No, it was two years. Till they prohibited Jewish kids from going to the public schools. And I was then enrolled in a Jewish operated school in Heidelberg. And every morning I had to get up about six and take a train all by myself to go to Heidelberg and in the evening I returned home. I did this for one or two years, well until the Kristallnacht, and then I think that school closed. One or two years, yeah.

Q: How was it like going to school as one of the few Jewish kids?

A: I don't have very much memory of the school, except that there was a lot of persecution. I was asked to leave the room when they talked about Nazi indoctrination, which of course made us little Jewish boys stick out like a sore thumb. And of course, whenever the kids could catch me

they would either push me into the --- some --- the embankment that fell up from the road, or beat me up otherwise --- anything they could do. Recently, I returned to Germany. This is an aside. And the seminary student, who is 28 years old wrote a thesis on the life of the Jewish community in this town. And he found a lot of details about the history of the community, and myself and my family, and so on. Things that I didn't know, I had forgotten. And, in fact, he found my school records. And I had forgotten all my grades, but I can tell you they were terrible.

Q: You were a terrible student?

A: Well, it's not surprising.

Q: Or, how did the teachers treat you? That was my next question, anyway.

A: How what?

Q: How did the teachers treat you? Sometimes people had terrible grades but they were good students.

A: Well, I really don't remember. I think all the teachers were Nazis, ultimately. Otherwise I don't think they could teach. And I think as long as he had to put up with me he did, and when I was prohibited from attending, I guess --- I really don't know. But I was surprised to find my grades after about 50 years, you know. Wasn't particularly paramount on my mind.

Q: No. Even then.

A: I have the piece of paper, if you want to look at it.

Q: That piece, his thesis, oh, the book, the research. That would be interesting.

A: It's quite amazing. It's quite an experience to meet these Germans. In fact, it's something I'd like to talk to you about later.

Q: The rest of the town, were they, uh, was it more of a Protestant town or a Catholic town?

A: I don't know what the percentages was, but I have the impression it was maybe 80/20 Protestant, but I can't tell you. There was one church each, of course.

Q: Did you have any, I hesitate to say friends, but any non-Jewish acquaintances?

A: Yeah. I don't remember really playing with any particular kids. When you ask that question, the image comes to mind of the first funeral I went to. One of the non-Jewish kids died of something and the whole class, I was still in the public school, went to the funeral. The first time I've ever been in the cemetery. And I vividly remember the open grave and the casket in it and every kid was supposed to go by and drop a flower on top of this casket. And I was so scared, I just couldn't do it. That's all I remember. Now whether this kid was a particular friend of mine, I don't know. I don't have any vivid memory of ever really playing, or really having a good time to tell you the truth. I, or perhaps I and my brother, but my brother was so much younger, were always too busy fleeing from being attacked. I remember the streets were

full of pretty large rocks. These were not paved roads, they were dirt roads with rock over them. And I always had bloody knees because I always kept stumbling and falling as the kids would pursue me or they would throw rocks. They were very handy little missiles, you know, pick them off the floor and start throwing. So my memories were not particularly happy ones in that town.

Q: These were kids that were roughly your age?

A: Yeah, of course.

Q: You didn't have teenagers for example going after you?

A: No, they didn't bother with me. Not that I remember. I think that some of the older people in town, in the time of higher excitement, particularly after, maybe Hitler made a speech, and we would venture out in the street, in those days they still had horses and wagons, you know. I remember vividly one particular man who lived close by coming down that street on a wagon and taking his, what do you call this thing that you hit horses with?

Q: The whip.

A: Yeah. Take the whip and try to catch me walking in the street. You know, with the whip.

Q: Crack the whip.

A: Cracking ---

Q: Cracking the whip in your direction?

A: No, not in my direction. He hit me.

Q: He got you?

A: Yeah. But I think in general that, kind of, was the exception.

Q: It must have been lonely not having many kids your age that you could play with?

A: I guess so. I really don't have any strong memories of that.

Q: How were you informed that you could no longer go to this public school?

A: I don't remember. I think just that one day, I think, my parents told me I was going to Heidelberg to continue school. And they would buy me a ticket, a monthly commuter ticket, just like the Long Island Railroad. And every morning, I would end up on that train with a school bag on my back and a big thermos bottle in the school bag with the books, that was my lunch.

Q: Did you know any Nazis?

A: Well I think the village was full of them. And based on what this fellow wrote in his thesis,

more recently, apparently, he tried to interview some of them even as late as last year. They threatened him with mayhem if he kept up the research.

Q: There are Nazis still in hold?

A: Of course we observed many of the, we saw many of the Nazi festivals, and so on, going on. But, you know, the Nazis were, as usual, disciplined, and they would only take over the action when it was sanctioned like, Kristallnacht, and so on and so forth. Otherwise, because, presumably, my father --- not presumably, but my father was a soldier in World War I. He had somewhat higher stature, if you like, in hierarchy of how they were treating the Jews and some others. Of course in the final analysis it didn't do him any good.

Q: And your father was in the German army in World War I?

A: Yeah, he was in the German army for four years.

Q: A decorated veteran?

A: Yeah, he had a cross of this, a cross of that, which I remember he dramatically threw at the Gestapo agent when they eventually deported us.

Q: In 1940?

A: In 1940.

Q: `This may come as a surprise to you but you were a privileged child because your father was a war veteran ---

A: Is that really ---?

Q: -- Apparently you were able to go to public school longer than the other kids.

A: Was that so? I had no idea. I see. A little distinction. Yeah, they did make a little distinction.

Q: Yes, two or three years.

A: Yes and I remember when the --- after the Kristallnacht, he was arrested and he was sent to Dachau like most of the males, if not all of them. He was privileged. He was let out four weeks afterwards and some other people had to wait a little bit longer.

Q: So he was able to return home after this first trip?

A: Yeah, well I think most of them returned home.

Q: Yeah, what was his crime?

A: His crime? I guess being a Jew.

Q: Being a Jew, that was it, right?

A: Of course.

Q: He hadn't done a thing.

A: Well all the males were arrested, after the Kristallnacht so the reason, I don't know what they are, logical, or if they needed any.

Q: You remember Kristallnacht fairly well?

A: Yeah, but before we talk about it, I'd like to tell you one incident which was --- and I don't remember what year it was. We lived in this little town called Humfenheim, essentially an agricultural town. In those days some farmers still lived upstairs and the cows lived downstairs. I mean that's how close they were. And, the regional town called Sinsheim is about four kilometers from there. And for some reason or another, my brother and I were walking to Sinsheim I don't remember why, and one of the pleasures along that road was that the road was lined on both sides with apple trees. It must have been the time when the apples were just about ripened, but they weren't ripe yet. And to this day I love green apples. We ate a lot of green apples as we walked along that national road, a two-lane road. And we'd take a bite out of the apple and we would throw the rest of the apple at whatever car was speeding by. We would miss most of them but this particular car, we hit right smack on the door and the whole apple splattered. The car came to a grinding halt, backed up, and it turns out that the apple had hit the SS sign of this particular car which was on the road. And the SS guy comes out of the car. "Who threw the apple?" And we both denied it, and of course he knew we were lying. He took our name and didn't say anything more. That night we came home and our father says, "I had a call... I was visited by the police. What did you guys do? You were throwing apples." "We weren't throwing apples." And he hit us across the face, I can still...

Q: You lied to your father?

A: I lied to my father.

Q: He believed the SS over you?

A: Well, I was so scared. I remember that very vividly. So when you say did I encounter any Nazis, well that was a very close encounter.

Q: That's a very close encounter. SS.

A: I would guess it was 1938.

Q: After you had stopped going to public school?

A: Probably, yeah, probably.

Q: And you didn't know it was an SS car?

A: No, no, we would throw apples at any car.

Q: You hit the jackpot.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did your father have any non-Jewish customers, I would think?

A: I presume he did, as long as it was all right to buy from a Jewish shop.

Q: Do you recall how his business fared after the Nazis came to power?

A: Well, I think it quickly went to pot, but I don't really remember the details, really, I had very little to do with the store.

Q: So you wouldn't know whether there was boycotts?

A: No.

Q: Shunning and so on?

A: No, I really don't know. I think it probably followed the typical German history of this time. These villages were surprisingly proactive. And based on what this fellow, recently has told me, it's still true.

Q: In general, the Nazis were much more popular and stronger in the small towns.

A: Oh is that so, I see, I didn't realize that.

Q: The smaller the more likely...

A: Oh.

Q: Big cities tended to be Red.

A: Yeah, well because everybody knew everybody and of course the Jews stuck out like a sore thumb I suppose.

Q: Even though there weren't very many Jews.

A: No, but at least you knew who they were, and of course... An interesting incident that this guy told me. There's a bakery there in this village, today, and would you believe that every Friday they bake and sell challah? And he told me that they do this because I guess the Christian population loved the challah, even though it was Jewish bread, right. And today, they have forgotten what the history, he told me, they forgotten the history of why is this bread baked the way it is.

Q: And when. And when.

A: Yeah. This generation at least, has forgotten. It is amazing.

Q: And yet they do it on Friday.

A: Oh yes, yeah, for the weekend, in other words. That's amazing I thought...here is archeology in action while I'm still alive.

Q: Do any other incidents leap to your mind?

A: From that time?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, one memory is the...all of these villages had communal gardens... and if you didn't, most people didn't have a lot of land on their own, they lived in these villages, you could get a little plot from the community, raise your own vegetables and of course, you take that home. And I remember my mother working in this communal garden, you know. And we, as kids, would go to the local river which flows right by, which when I look at it now is about three feet wide, at that time it looked terrifying, and take water out and put it in the garden. I'm still afraid of water because we used to swim in this water, or try to, and the other kids would like to drown us. And I'm still terrified of the water. In fact, I'm a very poor swimmer, I think as a result of that.

Q: You live on Long Island?

A? Yeah. Incidents, and I am a sailor too. I...One winter, we, I had some sort like a snow- suit on, very warmly dressed, it was very cold there. And in the kitchen we had a cooking stove which was fired, I think, by coal or wood, probably coal. And a big pot of soup was bubbling away. Someone accidentally turned that soup over and it landed on my leg. I got a tremendous burn over here. This was the time when Jews couldn't receive medical attention from non-Jewish doctors and there was no Jewish doctor in this town. And I almost died because they... Eventually the doctor that delivered me in 1929 who came from another little town, this Sinsheim I was talking about, snuck into the house at night and provided some limited amount of medical attention.. I remember that particular incident. Of course I'm carrying that scar around

Q: Was he a Jewish doctor?

A: No, he was not. He was a Christian doctor. I don't remember his name but he was a nice guy. I remember a time, you probably know the year, when they insisted that all of the Jewish boys and girls get a Jewish identity card. When is that '38?

Q: '38.

A: '38. Again we had to go to this (unintelligible) town and get the card, get the picture. In fact I have the picture here in my file, and from then on I had a middle name called Israel.

Q: And if you has a sister?

A: She would have been Sarah.

- Q: Do you remember your parents talking about politics or talking about the Nazis in the household?
- A: I don't have any real recollection. They must have been so preoccupied and so overwhelmed with the day-to-day problems of making a living and making ends meet that if they did talk about it maybe they talked about it when I wasn't present but I really don't know.
- Q: Do you remember whether your mother was allowed to tend her garden until the deportation?
- A: I don't remember how far that went, or how long this lasted. I have no idea.
- Q: And Kristallnacht you remember?
- A: Yeah, vividly.
- Q: Vividly?
- A: Vividly.
- Q: Can you describe what you saw?
- A: Yeah, what I saw. I went to the train that morning, and went to school in Heidelberg. This didn't happen in the night of the 9th to 10th in this village.
- Q: They were behind a day?
- A: Yeah, I guess they didn't get the message or something. Even though, you know, this was a particular (unintelligible) what was his name? Wagner, I think, who apparently was more rabid than most. And apparently he was a major factor behind this. And the first thing I knew is when I got to Heidelberg and got to school, in the school, they told a lot of kids to go back home because something was happening. Or maybe they told us what was happening. I don't remember the specific event. I went back to the railroad station.
- Q: This was at the Jewish school?
- A: Yes. The Jewish school. I went back to the railroad station and caught the first train I possibly could. This was not exactly on the half-hour. And as I was walking out from the railroad station and looking up the so called main street, right by the little post office I suddenly saw my parents pushing a very large pushcart with whatever, in retrospect, they could save from this apartment which was right adjoining the synagogue I was telling you about. And pushing it, you know, to my uncle's house where they had made room for us to live with them. They did not, as I remember, they didn't burn that synagogue. They literally took axes and hammers and kind of destroyed it bit by bit without setting it on fire. When I was in Germany about a year and a half ago, for the second time, the local minister walked me around the village. This is a whole separate subject. And he took me to the place where the synagogue was, which I had a little trouble remembering and, well, there it was. They had managed to put a little plaque up which said "former synagogue". They had, of course appropriated eventually the real estate, and a pharmacy had been built on that lot. So there's no evidence. That's really all I remember

except my father being arrested, sent to Dachau and came back, I believe about four weeks later. It was snowing. This was November so this would make sense. December, January or something like that. He was limping very badly, had a red bandage, a red kerchief-like tied around foot, you know, ambling into the house. I remember that particular scene. That's about all I can remember.

Q: Kristallnacht, you never returned to the apartment? Your parents had basically left?

A: That's right. It was all destroyed.

Q: The apartment was gutted?

A: Yeah, all the furniture was destroyed and whatever belongings we might have had were destroyed except what they could manage to get on that cart.

Q: The pushcart was there at that time?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: And your younger brother was with your parents?

A: I believe so, yeah. He was too young to go to school at that time.

Q: Do you remember anything else on that day?

A: Not really, not really.

Q: Just walking into your uncle's apartment. (?) wasn't there either.

A: Well, no, he was also at Dachau, so here you had all the women and children living in this one place. That's the place where I got burned so it must have been '38, '39 it must have been. That's right.

Q: Do you remember anything your father said when he came back from Dachau?

A: I really don't. I think it was ... I think I remember tears but I don't remember words.

Q: How was life the next few years?

A: It's a blank. I don't remember what life was like the next two years, except that my father's brother, with his wife and daughter, the (?) that was mentioned earlier. We lived in South Birken which is more or less on the border with France. I guess they were forced to evacuate because Jews couldn't live too close to the border, I suppose, and they also moved in with us, with that uncle. So now a family of two suddenly became five and now suddenly became eight. And of course, the house got a little tight with eight.

Q: Were these uncles all brothers of your father?

A: No. Yeah. The uncle we moved in with was the uncle of my father, not my uncle.

- Q: Oh. It was your father's uncle?
- A: Yeah. I think the two brothers were brothers of his.
- Q: Grand (?) And then the one from Starboken?
- A: Yes, he was the true uncle to me. He was my father's brother.
- Q: It was crowded?
- A: Yeah, it was crowded.
- Q: Did you continue going to school in Heidelberg?
- A: No, I don't believe so. I'm not sure, I'm not sure.
- Q: So you don't know whether that school or whether...
- A: No I don't know what happened to that school. I remember the teachers names(?).
- Q: Reunion two years later? Do you remember any changes when the war broke out? In '39 or '40?
- A: Not really except that you know that the war was so favorable to the Germans so quickly they were all elated and I think the happier they were the more anti-Jewish they became. I mean it just were a way of beating up on somebody. I remember vividly, I must have gone to school because I was in Heidelberg, and they had a big exhibition under a tent in the middle of the town square of some of the war booty that they had captured in Poland and France. I think it was French equipment, maybe also British equipment from Dunkirk.. And of course, theoretically, only Germans were allowed there. At that time we couldn't go to the movie... I've never seen a movie in Germany, no we couldn't go to the movies...
- Q: Not allowed...
- A: And, I always passed myself off as a German, you know, or a non-Jew. And, I would Heil Hitler up and down that tent, you know, and look at all that equipment, you know. All the kids, all the boys are interested in guns and stuff like that.
- Q: And they didn't know you...?
- A: Of course they didn't. I had no trouble passing.
- Q: Were you proud as a German regarding these victories?
- A: I really don't know. I don't think I thought of myself as anything other than. But I really didn't have any of these philosophical opinions at the time.
- Q: But you know, sometimes kids, especially boys, are impressed by military trophies, military

weaponry...

A: Well, I remember Heil Hitlering, you know, just to get by, because it seemed like the thing to do (?) I had blond hair in those days, I still have blue eyes.

Q: You still have blue eyes.

A: I didn't have a problem.

Q: You were an Aryan. That brings us now to October 1940.

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you find out about this new voyage, this new trip of yours to France?

A: Well, as I can remember it, the police came to the door and they told us we had two hours to pack some minimum amount they allowed us to carry, I forgot how many kilograms it may have been. And we went. One of them stayed with us.

Q: One of the Germans?

A: One of the Germans.

Q: Police or storm troopers?

A: I really don't know. I thought he had a black uniform on but I'm not sure. I know he had a gun. Guns were still somewhat unique. And he kind of rested his hand on the gun, I think it was just a way of kind of resting his hand, I don't think he meant anything. And frankly, I don't know what the reaction of my parents was. Except that there was a lot of scurrying around and grabbing suitcases and so on and so forth and stuffing in rather irrelevant things I'm sure. In fact, I know it was irrelevant because later on I found some of those things.

Q: Did you help pack?

A: Huh?

Q: Did you help pack?

A: I don't think so, no, I don't think so. And that's one incident I remember when my father had some words with the policeman. He might have known him. I don't know whether he was a local guy or not. And, kind of threw him or handed him his Iron Cross from World War I. The next thing I remember is we walked through the streets, I believe, down to City Hall, where the bus, some sort of bus or perhaps truck was waiting and they put us all in this truck, with whatever bags we had. The local Germans were, of course, were looking around their curtains, of course, and their doorways and what not. I don't remember anybody saying anything. And they trucked us to Heidelberg. To the railroad station. Where we boarded a waiting train. This was not a cattle car train, this was a passenger coach, and there we sat, probably waiting for a number of other people coming in, and eventually the train started to move. I remember an incident where the accompanying Germans, I presumed they were Gestapo but I really don't

know, asked for all valuables. And I presume, as good Germans, we probably handed them over, I really don't know. That's about all I can remember from the trip except eventually we stopped at the German border, and I'm almost 100% sure it stopped in Mullhurst.

Q: Mullhurst? Did it?

A: Yeah, yeah because I remember, I think I saw that name on the station. And it stopped and went and it took a rather long time and eventually it ended up in some siding. We had no idea where we were because nobody told us where we were going. And they took us off the train and I'm quite sure it was raining and we ended up on dump trucks, I know these were dump trucks. There was a lot of mud, and they trucked us, I guess, from (?) railroad station (?) into what turned out to be Gurst (?). I had no idea where they were taking us. I mean I had no idea what was going on. We just...it's almost like being asleep walk at this point. I don't know what the adults were thinking.

Q: Even though you were going to France?

A: Yeah.

Q: Before you...

A: No. I had no idea.

Q: Nobody...

A: I had no idea and I'm not sure they told this to anybody till eventually they ended up in France and of course they probably could see and read the signs at that time. We knew nothing about this Madagascar business and so on that eventually developed.

Q: You all sat together on the train?

A: Family?

Q: Yeah?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: As far as you could tell of the Jews, all of Jews that you knew from your town were on this train?

A: Well, I presume so. Yeah. I knew all the Jews were deported at the same time...

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: ...and I presume we were more or less in the same carriage. I imagine they loaded those as people came along, I really don't know.

Q: What did you take? What did your parents take?

- A: I really don't know. But, I know that after my parents were re-deported from Gurst to Auschwitz eventually, my mother left behind one of those suitcases which somehow reached me where I was and it had a lot of bed linen in it.
- Q: No beds?
- A: No beds. No. But bed- linens. At long last.
- Q: How were you treated at Gurst?
- A: Well as you know Gurst was divided and men and women were separated. Both of us ended with the mother. We were in (?) if I remember right. You know being curious boys, this was all new. There was naturally a fence around it. There were barracks, completely bare. I don't believe we had mattresses. I don't remember that when we moved in there. And all the people were just kind of laying like stacked wood, one next to the other. I saw my first death there one morning. Someone who was laying near me, perhaps not next to me, passed away during the night and my mother rushed me out of the room, the barracks, as quickly as she could. This was October/November, and as you know was rather miserable weather. Very muddy, very rainy, rather cold. I don't remember the barracks being heated, but they might have been. It was a rather, you know, difficult situation. The toilets were communal and washing area was communal where everyone washed in a long trough with, I believe it was a pipe that had a bunch of holes punched in it and someone turned the faucet on and the water came out.
- Q: Cold water only?
- A: Yeah. I believe so, yeah. I don't believe there were showers. I can't remember any showers. But then as a boy I wasn't too anxious to shower anyway. I remember the toilets. They were surprisingly mechanical. You climbed up a bunch of stairs and there was a platform. And they had the fifty gallon barrels under the big hole and you did your thing and then it plopped into the barrel. And the...the small narrow range railroad, railway, rail line, circled the camp and they would move these barrels on top of some sort of flatbed car like affair, and they would push it to wherever they would dump it. That's how they moved it. I don't remember why I would know that detail. As kids, we would... the camp of course was not guarded by Germans. This was Vichy France, guarded by French soldiers who were relatively loose. I don't know how, but, we as kids, managed to crawl under the fence and go to visit our father in the separate part of this camp. My father lucked out because he was a butcher, they thought he would make a cook. And he ended up working in the kitchen. And he would sneak us an extra piece of bread or whatever he could lay his hands on. I have some vague memory of going... Some of the older boys would sneak into the local town, which was about...
- Q: So you could get out of the outer fence too?
- A: Yeah. And I remember buying some pate, in a tin can. I don't know where we got the money, and going back to camp at night. I remember one guard, oh yeah ... we had a very good looking redhead in this barracks and...
- Q: That's right, you were in the women's ...
- A: Yeah, I instantly fell in love with her. I don't know how old she was, she must have eighteen,

twenty. With long reddish hair. I've had a red hair fetish ever since. And, I remember watching her making love with that French soldier, that French guard. She wore a cross and obviously she was half, so-called, half Jewish.

Q: She never reciprocated interest in you, though?

A: No. I was too young. I saw my father's? brother there a few times. I saw the other uncle, my mother's brother. I don't remember seeing my grandmother, who died there.

Q: You didn't attend her funeral?

A: But she died after I left. The mud is the most memorable thing I think. It's an incredible mark, it's very deep. We, somehow, we, many of us ended up with galoshes, which is, you know, sort of a rubber shoe. If you stepped in that mud and then tried to pull it out, the suction of that mud was such that you could lose your shoe. And I remember many older people, falling in that mud and having a hell of a time getting back out of it. And if you went to help them, they would pull you in the mud. And so for many months (?) struggled with that mud. I don't know why that sticks in my head, but it seems to have been a major problem...

Q: That seems to be a major memory of all the people who were at Gurst.

A: I remember getting some terribly strong vaccinations and believe it or not I have a certificate from (?) signed by the doctor at (?) against typhoid, diphtheria, etc. etc. Apparently these things developed in those great environments very quickly and they inoculated, I guess, all the kids. And I presume many of the deaths which occurred there, probably occurred due to some of these epidemics that developed that you might know more about us than I do.

Q: When you weren't eating pate, what were you eating in this camp, what did they feed you?

A: The standard fare seemed to be just some sort of a soup with some vegetables floating in it, that's all I can remember.

Q: Not especially tasty?

A: Not particularly. The French eat a lot of beets, at least we ended up with a lot of beets, and (?) we called them.

Q: How about quantity?

A: Oh I think we were always hungry.

Q: You were always hungry?

A: Yeah. I don't remember any particular packages coming in from the Salvation Army or the Red Cross and so on. I know these people in later years, I found out they were quite active, but I wasn't particularly aware of that activity. It doesn't mean that it didn't exist. As I said we managed to get some extra pieces of bread from my father. He would hold it at the end of a long fork against this open fire where they had these big, tremendous, fifty- gallon drums bubbling away with the coup of the day and he would toast it. And they had these, maybe five

gallon drums of fat standing there, and he would spread that on the toasted bread and that would taste like heaven.

Q: Not a kosher kitchen?

A: No, I don't think there was any attempt at that.

Q: Was there any cooking outside of this central kitchen where your father worked?

A: Not that I'm aware of, not that I'm aware of.

Q: Now, earlier, you mentioned that you saw your teacher from Heidelberg.

A: Yeah.

Q: Was there any attempt to resume schooling, have classes?

A: I don't believe so, not while I was there, no. I have no recollection of that.

Q: Now the time you were there. What did you do during the day when you weren't sneaking out under the fence?

A: I really don't know. I don't know how we spent the time.

Q: Not much to do?

A: I guess, you know, kids at that age, as long as they are in reasonably good health, I guess we ran around, we probably became very rowdy and non-controllable, I suppose. I really don't know what we did.

Q: I'm sure you tried to stay warm, this was winter. You had gotten there just in the nick of time as far as winter is concerned.

A: I imagine I blocked out quite a bit of these negative part, I only seem to remember the better parts, I guess.

Q: Did anyone have any idea what was to become of you? Where you would go or how long you would stay or why you were there?

A: I have no idea. I don't what the adults knew. I had no idea what they talked about. I don't know if they, men and women, ever got together even for talking purposes. All I know is that one day my mother and father both said that they had volunteered us to be taken out of the camp by some organization and I don't remember my reaction. I don't know whether I was delighted or reluctant. But we found ourselves, I guess, again on the truck with forty-seven some other children, fifty children were taken out and we eventually ended up in a French orphanage, near that camp.

Q: Do you remember when this was?

A: Yes. This was in 1941, February '41.

Q: February '41.

A: So I was in that camp about three to four months.

Q: You were taken to an orphanage nearby?

A: Yes, so my brother and I, with the other kids, were taken to the orphanage and it turned out later on that a branch of the American Quakers, the American Friends Service Committee, acting through the Swedish chapter, had made arrangements with the French government to take these fifty children out. The French in World War 1, you know, had lost many men, so there were millions, I guess literally millions, of households without males. So they built a whole number of orphanages ... (side one of tape ended, pick up with side two)

Q: We were talking about the orphanage ...

A: Yeah. And this was now roughly twenty years later. The orphans of course had grown up, the orphanages were relatively empty and, I guess, somebody was smart enough to realize that here was a possible place where, at least you could put some people. As I understand it, the Quakers committed themselves to feed the whole orphanage if they took these fifty Jewish children ... So we ended up in this orphanage in a little place called Aspet, A-S-P-E-T, in the Haute Garon (?) department. Near ...

Q: Towards the Atlantic?

A: No, no, no. This was right at the foot of the Pyrenees. It was not too far from (?). It was near a larger town called Saint Grodance (???)

Q: But it's toward the western part, that would be rather than towards the Mediterranean.

A: I guess so. But it is quite close by. We ended up in this orphanage. I believe it was a two or three story affair, there was a sort of a classical institutional looking affair. These German kids, of course now we were Germans, we weren't Jewish, in this French institution. The French had just lost the war so they didn't have a lot of love for the Germans, right. So we were the (?) no matter how you looked at it. The director of the camp was an interesting man ...

Q: The director of the orphanage?

A: Of the orphanage, and he had some women who helped him. They organized us like little soldiers and that's how ... there were roughly half and half boys and half girls in this little group of Jewish children.

Q: Kept separate?

A: We were kept separate. As I remember we did not go to German schools, French schools rather.

Q: The nationality of the director ...

A: He was French.

Q: He was French.

A: Oh yes.

Q: And these Quakers ...

A: The Quakers just came and went. I mean they came perhaps once every few months and see how we were doing and then left. I guess they provided food in part for the whole institution. There were of course other French children there. It was a fairly self-contained community relatively speaking. They had their own fields where they raised vegetables. I remember they had a man on the horse who did the plowing. They had an infirmary there. And I guess they tried to bring us up as sort of little bit like French kids would be. They walked us around the hall somewhat on a military side, but I guess that's the only way you could control fifty kids.

Q: They didn't give you wine though?

A: I don't think so.

Q: So you weren't 100 % French.

A: No. I don't think we had wine.

Q: The nationality of these Quakers, was it Swedish or American?

A: Swedish.

Q: Swedish. And aside from the schools was there anything else that you had to do? You didn't work in the gardens or anything like that?

A: I think we did some chores and at sometime they brought in a Jewish couple who lived in the village and I think he would come in and give us some modicum of instruction. I doubt it was particularly effective but they made an attempt when he was till busy hiding of course. This was Vichy France at the time. The only memories I have is this farmer who took care of the fields where they grew the vegetables, one day they decided, somebody decided, they were going to kill the cows so they could feed the kids. And it's an indescribable scene on how this cow was killed. I don't know if you want to hear about it. For the hell of it I'll tell you. There was a manhole cover right in front of the so-called cafeteria, or the Refectoire, as the French called it, and they tied the cow down on this manhole which was of course steel and relatively heavy, by the horns, so the cow was now sort of ...

Q: Nose to the ground.

A: ...Nose to the ground. And this guy, was a big guy, would take a pickaxe and would literally hit this cow between the horns. It seems like hundreds of times till eventually, I don't know how long it was, but it was too long, eventually the cow got on his knees and just died. The French eat blood sausages, are you familiar with that?

Q: Yes.

A: Or blood, it's not even sausage. They take the live blood and bake it, I forgot what it's called.

Q: They put it in soup basically.

A: Not soup, no. It becomes almost like a jello. It becomes, yeah. And that's the first thing I remember them feeding us. And well, that's one thing I can remember.

Q: You scooped all of this up of course.

A: Huh?

Q: I mean did you really feel like eating this?

A: No. I have had an aversion to blood ever since. But to the French this was fairly routine. If they killed a sheep, which was fairly routine, the blood would be collected and that was one of things ...

Q: And meat was a luxury.

A: Oh yeah. Well that was rare. Every afternoon it seemed like they would insist we would walk in fairly ordered fashion through the village and through the surrounding countryside, which in retrospect was quite beautiful. And they would teach us French songs and we would march to these songs and that's how we got our fresh air. I remember when we first got there, I guess we had a lot of lice and all the boys got their hair cut down to the scalp, including myself. I have a pict..they took a set of I.D. pictures of every kid. I still have one of them from that time. There was a lot of bed wetting, I remember and I think I was one of them. And they shamed us ...

Q: Unintentional.

A: Oh yeah. Well I think all of the kids were obviously disturbed. And that went on a long time. I remember, I don't know why, I remember the toilets, the typical French, just a hole in the ground, with an appliance over the hole and you put your feet on either side and you crouch down and do your thing. Paper was very rare and many of boys would wipe their behind by just cleaning their finger on the wall. And one of the jobs that we had was to clean the walls. Well we tried to instill in the kids to stop doing that but one kid would continue to do it and we couldn't find out who it was. So we decided to stake out the toilets. The toilets had fairly high walls but they were open on top and on the bottom. So we put two kids on top of the wall watching, and this one kid would come into the toilet and he did his thing and wipe his finger on the wall and of course we beat the hell out of him.

Q: And made him clean it ...

A: And you know what his nickname was for the rest of the time we were there?

Q: (?)

A: No. The name for (?) is (?) in French. His nickname was (?). You know when you wipe your

thing? His name was (?).

Q: You didn't make him clean it?

A: Well what's amusing is that in 1972, I believe it was, my wife and I went back and retraced all these steps I was just talking about. And we went to this little village of Aspet and the orphanage is still there and it's now a home, they told us, for disturbed children. Of broken marriages, you know divorces are also rampant in France. And I wanted to go see the toilets. And would you believe they are still there and they're still the way they were and the doors are still as high as they were, it's amazing nothing has changed.

Q: And the walls need cleaning.

A: No, that I don't remember.

Q: Was your wife, you mentioned you went back with your wife, was your wife there as well?

A: No, she was born in Vienna, Austria and she came here in 1938, a day or two after Kristallnacht. And she lived in the States and I met her here in the 50's. What else do I remember of Aspet? Not very much except we were there until 1942 and we had, the kids who had come out of Gurst had not seen their parents for almost two years. We were busy trying to, we were saving bread from our ration in shoeboxes because we were all excited that we were going to have a temporary visit with our parents, who at that time had been transferred to (?). I don't know if all of them had but mine had. We of course would get correspondence from the parents, regular letters, my brother has most of these letters. And one day a car came, we were going to go there in August as a matter of fact.

Q: So you were going to go to the (?)

A: ...of '42, right. A car came, a Gestapo car came. We never saw a German in that place. The Gestapo showed up. They went to see the director. The director called two kids in and said your parents are going to be transferred and they asked that you go with them. Pack your things and go with these people. And they left. And I still remember the name of these kids. He was one of my friends. And I had imagined that the worst had happened to him. I told you downstairs that my brother is writing a history of all of these kids. Well he met this guy, he told me last year. He ended up after the war in East Germany and had a whole history of his own on what's happened in East Germany to him. So he never ended up in Auschwitz. That's what I had imagined. I don't know how he eventually escaped. At any rate, to make a long story short, they prevented us from going to (?) because, unbeknownst to us, that's when the deportation started.

Q: That's right.

A: ...re-deportation started.

Q: That's right. The first deportation was to Auschwitz.

A: And we stayed there for, up to the time, I believe, when the Germans occupied all of France. Was that in '43?

- Q: November of '42.
- A: '42. So it was only a month or two later, right, August, September...
- Q: Yeah, a couple of months.
- A: And I guess at that time they passed some sort of law that Jews couldn't live within 20 miles of the Spanish border or something like that, and we were closer than that to the Spanish border and some magic hand, I don't know who, the Quaker, the Ouzay (?), or whatever it was, took us out of this camp and sent us temporarily to Toulouse, where we were in some sort of a school. And within a month or two I ended up in another town called Montsac (?) which is in a town (?) department. And there was a children's home there which was run by a Jewish organization.
- Q: Ousay?
- A: It could have been Ousay (?) and it was on the principle of the boy scouts) That is the life of this organization was, it sort of as you lived there a boy scout 24 hours a day.
- Q: Jewish boy scouts?
- A: Jewish boy scouts. French Jewish boy scouts. Which is fairly prominent organization. In Toulouse as I remember it, somehow my brother got separated from me. I don't know if it was on purpose or otherwise and he ended up in Switzerland and spent the rest of the time, his time, in Switzerland.
- Q: But you didn't know that until after the war?
- A: I knew we were separated.
- Q: Yeah. No, but you didn't know that he had made it to Switzerland?
- A: I don't know whether I knew that or not. I went to see him after the war in Switzerland so somehow I knew or found out where he was.
- Q: So the group of 48 transferred out of the orphanage ...
- A: Yeah, but then we were ...
- Q: And then you were broken up.
- A: ...broken up. Yeah. Different people ended up in different places. So that takes us to 1943 or so. Life in Montsac was quite different. This now was an openly Jewish life. I wouldn't say religious but observing. We all joined boy scout troops, we made our bed, we did kitchen duty. They had some sort of a schooling organized and had organized a number of trade schools there where you could learn to become a carpenter, a cabinetmaker, an iron worker, and so on and so forth. Not terribly practical trades today but in those days that was the thing to do. Not unlike the kind of preparation, I think, for people who might want to emigrate to then Palestine. You know, they'd teach you a trade. That lasted for about a year.

- Q: These are all boys?
- A: No. Boys and girls. It was strictly co-ed. The girls were on one floor, the boys on the other. And we were getting through the puberty stage and in fact there were some that were eighteen, perhaps twenty. And you know, any number of girls got pregnant. It was not unusual. But it was fairly, you know, it was a decent life.
- Q: Were here boys and girls from other parts of France?
- A: Yes. They were French Jews and there were people from Belgium. These were families that might have moved to ... children who ended up from other countries in France before the war, didn't have, necessarily French passports, you know, so all kinds of mixture. There were not that many German Jewish children there.
- Q: They would probably come from (?)
- A: Yes. Btu they mostly, only, talked French there. By that time you either ...
- Q: You knew French by then.
- A: Well, yes, more or less. I'm sure with a very heavy accent.
- Q: And ironically all of this was under direct German occupation.
- A: Yeah. By that time it was. This home started before the occupation of France.
- Q: You got there and it was early in '43?
- A: Yeah. Yes. I'm quite sure that I ended up in early '43.
- Q: Winter. It seems like you're making all your moves in winter.
- A: We were there for perhaps a year, maybe more than a year when it was obvious that the Germans now had cleaned all the concentration camps of the Jews they already had captive and they were starting to arrest other Jews including the French Jews. And whoever this magic hands was, decided we better move all these kids so called underground, so to speak underground. And we all received French identity cards, phony identity cards. My name became Marcel Mantue (?) And I ended up hidden in a county seat called (?) where French children would go to school during the school year from the farms, they would stay in the school like here in the, you would have dorms in a college and you would stay ...
- Q: Boarding school ...
- A: Yeah. Like boarding school. But public ... Ad then during the vacation of course they would go home. And I bluffed myself through that school, hiding my identity.
- Q: So you had to hide your identity from the other students?

A: Yeah.

Q: No one had to know.

A: Yeah. That's right. I don't remember how successful I was. And during the summer, the same invisible hand had managed to make arrangements with a number of farms in the area to take a number of children who had no other place to go. Whether these people knew we were Jewish or not, I have no idea and I spent either one or two summers during the summer vacation that way on the farm. Guarding sheep. Very useful, typical French farmhouse. Probably ate very well.

Q: Is this still the same part of France, in the south?

A: Yes, it's south.

Q: Southwest?

A: All southern France. While we were in Montsac, of course, in the boy scouts we would camp during the summer. We would, in fact we camped somewhere near (?) in that French, in that partisan village we were talking about earlier. We would celebrate the Jewish holidays. We had a chorale, a singing chorale, which was presumably quite good, led by a young guy who became quite famous and lived in Geneva, Switzerland, perhaps (?) and a chorale director. It was in retrospect, an interesting life.

Q: Yeah. I see smiles on your face. It wasn't all bad.

A: Yeah. There were some tense moments while we were underground, you know, as I guess we moved into 1944.

Q: Is this when you were on a shepherd, or a farmer, or already before that?

A: Well, I don't remember exactly. There was one summer when we ended up in some other arrangement and the Germans, I guess, had found out that there might be either some Jews hiding or some (?) fighters hiding and they raided this place and we had to disappear into the woods rather hurriedly. We heard machine guns of course and a number of people were arrested but somehow I managed to get away.

Q: Did you know anyone who was arrested?

A: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Q: Jews, Jewish refugees or rescuers?

A: I don't remember. I guess there was more concerned for fellows who were eighteen, twenty, twenty-five years old. I was still fourteen, fifteen at the time. On the assumption you could hide your identity. You know, if you didn't register for labor in Germany and so on you were subject to arrest even if you were French. Well that's how we somehow got through the war. We somehow heard about D-Day. And eventually we all ended up back in Montsac in this home. The home now took over a building, a relatively new building that the Vichy

government had built for physical education because they were going to develop their own master race. So we ended up in this rather posh building which today, incidentally is a hotel which I slept in when I was back there in 1972. It was a time-warp experience of it's own. And ...

Q: Do you know when you were liberated? Or where you were?

A: I don't remember exactly where I was.

Q: Summer of '44?

A: Yeah. Must have been in the summer of '44.

Q: Did you ever see combat troops, either German or American?

A: The only real memory I have is seeing a big pipeline with a lot of gasoline leaking out of it and I've never seen red gasoline before, it was all red, on some of the major roads we were hiking on. I think, of course, that happened while we were in the boy-scout camp since they landed in June. This all happened during the summer so I presume we were not in school at that time.

Q: The landing in Normandy was in June. The landing in the Mediterranean was in August. You were kind of in the middle.

A: Yeah. So I'm sure I saw the pipeline that came out from probably Marseilles or (?). There wasn't any significant fighting as I remember it in that area. I think most of the fighting was up north of course and it didn't take too long for the Germans to all hustle themselves north and east trying to...

Q: Avoid the trap...

A: ...to defend the Normandy part of the invasion. But I don't think there was any fighting.

Q: In your area they were in risk, they were in danger of being cut off from the Mediterranean operation up the Rhone valley linking up with the operation north which would have cut off all the forces to the southwest.

A: I see. I see. So what we saw more of was the (?) taking revenge on the local French, particularly, I remember rather vividly the women who had so-called fraternized with the French, getting their hair shorn, that was more prominent.

Q: Those were the quite fortunate ones.

A: So we ended back in Montsac and tried to return to normal. The school started again etc. etc. Somehow I believe this was a Quaker (?) somehow got in touch with me. They wanted to know if I knew anyone in the United States and whether I wanted to go there. So I said, "Well, yes I remember my parents telling me about an uncle in the United States." In retrospect, it wasn't an uncle, it was a second cousin of my grandmother's. It was a man who had come over in something like 1908. In fact, he was a brother of the man we moved in with after Kristallnacht. (?) and they placed an ad in the paper, in the New York area, and he had over his many years,

sponsored maybe something like 20 or 30 couples to come here (?) And he told me in retrospect he got a lot of calls.

Q: So you didn't have to be a cousin, or...

A: On this ad. Well, at this time they were curious on who survived. None of his families. And he asked me whether I come over. And I said yes. I remember receiving a very large package with, I believe a salami that looked like it was three feet long but maybe it was only one foot. And I remember standing at the children's home, in my room which I shared with a number of other boys, and slicing salami for two or three hours because everybody's coming by getting a piece of salami. After about a year, well, in fact it was December '46, I eventually came over.

Q: To the United States.

A: And I came over early, believe it or not, because I was not on a Jewish quota. I was now on a German quota. And the German quota was undersubscribed because during the war, obviously did not come to the United States.

Q: It was unused?

A: Yeah, and since I had so called ... in the eyes of the Americans I was a German, so I could get in under the German quota. Irony, isn't it. So I ended up in Manhattan. I came over on the Normandy (?)

Q: (?)

A: No, I stayed here five years and I had a dying to go to California and I did. I ended up in California for 15-16 years and came back here in 1970. And here we are in 1992.

Q: Your brother who escaped to Switzerland, he went to Israel.

A: Yes, I went to visit him after I had agreed to come here to talk him into coming with me. He had come under the influence of very religious Zionist organizations, I don't remember who it was. He was only about 11 or 12 and he was going to go to Palestine. He insisted. And I said, okay, if that's what you want to do. So he ended up in Palestine before the state became Israel.

Q: You were never tempted to go to Palestine?

A: I might have been but, I guess, not enough to do it.

Q: Were your parents especially happy with (?). Did they ever talk about or think about leaving there?

A: Yes, they wanted to come here. And as a matter of fact they had a quota. Believe it or not I remember the number. Not exactly, but it was something like 16,000 something, and they were waiting for an affidavit from this same uncle. And perhaps had the affidavit, I don't know. But obviously you couldn't go until your number was up.

Q: And the deportation of course.

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