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Summary

Henri (Heinrich) Korn was born November 4, 1929 in Elberfeld, Germany. Father Yankel (Jakub) and mother Eva (Chava). Mother came from Hasidic family in Poland but left because of "enslavement" of women. Father German who served in WW I who loved German culture. Father was a textile salesman until 1937 when he was dismissed because he was Jewish. Family totally assimilated, not religious. Korn went to Poland in 1935 and met Hasidic relatives. He felt they were "foreign" and "very primitive." He went to a Catholic school which was more liberal than the Protestant schools which were pro Nazi. He went back to Poland in 1937 and stayed for 3 months. He went to shul, a steibel, for the first time as his uncle as the chazan. His uncle put him in a cheder but he refused to attend as it was too religious and "totally alien." While he again noted the extreme poverty, he was enamored of the Jewish food he ate, describing it at length. After returning to Germany October 1937, he was forced out of school because he was Jewish. The Jewish community organized some classes. He recalls German youth gangs stealing from Jewish kids. On Kristallnacht he saw destruction and the burning of a synagogue. Around May 1939, family warned of possible arrest and father fled to Belgium while Korn, mother and sister had in another apartment and later left town for Brussels. Once there, he enrolled in a Flemish school. No other Jewish children.

When war started, British soldiers arrived in Belgium. Father feared being arrested if Germans were to come. By this time, there were more Jewish children in his school. After Germany invaded Belgium, family fled to Antwerp/Ostend hoping to escape by ship to the UK. While waiting in Ostend the station was bombed and some refugees died. They then headed to the French border but were held up there because they spoke German and were suspected of being spies. Eventually they tried to get to Dunkirk but were forced back by the escaping British troops. A German armored column caught up with them and his mother tried to convince troops that they were "Volksdeutsche," i.e., border Germans but were recognized as Jews because they spoke "high" German, but were helped by a soldier who said Hitler was a "madman" who would lose the war. Other soldiers bragged about beating and killing Jews. The helpful soldier arranged transportation back to Brussels July 1940. In November 1940 he went to a camp for underprivileged children, where being Germanic was helpful. He did have to wear a Yellow star, but some non-Jewish students wore them as well as a protest. He went back to the camp November 1941 to January 1942 and was verbally assaulted by the teacher for not going to church. At this time, father had had a breakdown and mother made a "friend" (his word), Jonathan Zeebrugge (?) who complained to the camp about the teacher who was then discharged. In May 1942 they learned that mother's home town in Poland had been made "free of Jews." About this time, Germans were rounding up Jews to "work" but he and sister and mother were hidden in mother's "friend's" home. Later Korn and sister were taken to a Red Cross home to stay with other refugee children while mother and father hid elsewhere. Zeebrugge obtained an ID card for his mother showing her as his wife. At the Red Cross home, the Matron, Renee Jacquemart (?), complained that all of the world's problems were caused by the Jews who had crucified Jesus and had started the war. She urged him to convert to Catholicism which upset his mother a great deal. Nonetheless, he ended up being baptized a

catholic and became an altar boy and a choir member and even collected contributions from parishioners. Once, he even put a stone in his shoe so he could "suffer like Jesus." In June 1944 a priest in a nearby parish was killed by the Belgian SS as a warning. Korn wanted to be part of the underground which he joined circa September 1943. His group relayed messages to and from London and provided info re troop trains. Because he spoke perfect German he was most useful in learning information from German troops. He observed bridges and saw a troop train burned in an air attack. By August 1944, Germans retreating in horse and dog carts. Americans arrived August 20, 1944. Along with parents, family made it back to Brussels by October 1944.

By 1946, antisemitism creeping back into Belgium. Much directed at Minister in charge of converting occupation currency back to Belgian francs because he was Jewish. As the Belgian Jewish community reformed, his mother made him join a Jewish youth organization which was Marxist/Zionist. The organization reinforced his Jewishness "whether I liked it or not" and he even discussed his problem with a priest. The family talked about going to Palestine and he joined ORT to learn electric installation, a 2 ½ year course. His sister studied music and his mother worked as a machinist. In 1948, his father briefly returned to Germany but learned Jews were unwelcome. Korn heard stories about survivors of the camps who lost their religiousness because of their experiences, but he decided to remain a Jew but not have relationship with God.

In 1948 the family decided to go to Australia but needed a guarantor there. Jewish groups helped them work this out by finding distant "relatives." Korn decided to go to Paris which he did until 1949. Family finally left for Australia April 28, 1950, arriving June 23, 1950. Originally, they shared a room with 16 people but soon moved. He went to work at General Motors and his sister worked for the Jewish Welfare Organization. Eventually they bought a house in Fairfield, a suburb of Melbourne. He says that new Jewish immigrants were resented by the established Jewish community because they feared the immigrants would arouse antisemitism. Korn was more welcome because he spoke French. He married, and has children and grandchildren. His message is, simply, "to survive."