

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HERBERT FINDER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Dates: February 19, 1987
March 19 & 26, 1987

© 1997
Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

This page left intentionally blank.

HF - Herbert Finder [interviewee]

NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]

Dates: February 19, 1987

March 19 & 26, 1987

Tape one, side one:

NL: ...interviewing Mr. Herbert Finder [address, phone]. This is February the 19th, 1987. Now, Mr. Finder, if you'll be good enough to start by telling me where you were born, and when, and a little about your family background.

HF: I was born in Vienna, Austria, April 22nd, 1929. My father originally came from Poland, emmigrated to Vienna during World War I and became an Austrian citizen. My mother was born in Berlin, Germany, and she moved to Vienna after marrying my father in 1928.

NL: May we have the name of your father?

HF: My father's name is Heinrich Finder, now Henry Finder. My mother's name was Gerda.

NL: Gerta? Or Gerda?

HF: Gerda.

NL: Gerda.

HF: Born Schwarz.

NL: C-?

HF: Schwarz. Born Schwarz. S-C-H-W-A-R-Z.

NL: And they were married...?

HF: They were married in Berlin in 1928.

NL: And what was Father's occupation?

HF: My father was a salesman. He would travel in the countryside, during the last few years before the occupation of Austria by Germany.

NL: Do you have any memories of Vienna?

HF: Only vaguely. I remember going to school in Vienna, public school...

NL: A public school.

HF: Which was not very far from our house. I remember going to a small synagogue with my father. And I remember the last couple years before the *Anschluss*, of my grandparents living with us, who were refugees from Berlin, and they lived with us in Vienna.

NL: Ah ha. They left Germany?

HF: They left Germany in 1937 and they came to live with us, in Vienna.

NL: They thought it would be safer, do you suppose?

HF: Yes, yes. And...

NL: And more protected. Both grandparents?

HF: Both grandparents.

NL: Now, do you remember anything about your parents' relatives? Close relatives, sisters or brothers or...

HF: Well...

NL: Cousins?

HF: On my father's side he had relatives in Poland, which we visited once in 1937.

NL: What were your memories of that visit?

HF: Well, it was a very small village in Poland where he came from, near Tarnow. And I just remember vaguely visiting with him. And then he had other relatives who lived in Krakow, and we visited there too, but I was a very young age at the time.

NL: Did you think your situation was better, more comfortable in Vienna? Or didn't you make any comparison?

HF: No.

NL: But those folks remained in Poland as far as you know?

HF: No, they survived. They live in Israel now.

NL: But they stayed in Poland.

HF: Yeah, they stayed in Poland.

NL: I see. And on Mother's side?

HF: Mother...

NL: Did she have any sisters? Brothers?

HF: Mother had a sister and a brother who both emigrated to America during the Hitler period.

NL: And...

HF: My uncle was interned in Mauthausen during *Kristallnacht*, but he was let out and then...

NL: He was?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Do you know what were the circumstances? Because that's very unusual.

HF: I think a lot of German Jews were let out after *Kristallnacht*. They had to promise to leave Germany...

NL: Ahhh!

HF: Within a very short period of time.

NL: Yes, I thought that was true just of the German concentration camps.

HF: Well it was...

NL: But obviously it was true for Mauthausen too.

HF: I believe it was Mauthausen. I'm not too, I know he was let out on the assumption that he would leave Germany...

NL: He would leave.

HF: Within a short time.

NL: Do you know if it was difficult for them to get out?
HF: They had visas to come to America and then...
NL: So they must have applied...
HF: They had already Amer-, yeah.
NL: Very early.
HF: Very early, yeah.
NL: And you had said at one point I think in our discussion, sometimes it was easier for someone who was poor to leave.
HF: Yeah, but they had...
NL: They had...
HF: They had well-to-do relatives in California, from...
NL: I see.
HF: From his side of the family, although his mother remained behind and perished in Theresienstadt.
NL: She stayed behind.
HF: Yeah. Because she had no papers. And later my grandmother also perished in Theresienstadt.
NL: Again for the same reason.
HF: Yeah. She was, everybody left and she was, she stayed behind.
NL: Do you know what their last names...
HF: Well my grandmother's name was Hedwig Schwarz. I don't know what my uncle's, what his mother's name was. I mean it was Herrscher. That was a family name. But what her first name was, I don't know.
NL: H-I-R-?
HF: H-E-R-R-S-C-H-E-R.
NL: And they both perished...
HF: In Theresienstadt.
NL: In Theresienstadt. Sometimes this is helpful in setting up registers and there is a big organization of survivors of Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia, in London, and they might be interested.
HF: But this happened, I mean, this happened in, I don't know what year it happened. I really don't have the documents for that.
NL: But you know this...
HF: Yeah, yeah.
NL: Happened.
HF: We have documents. I have an aunt, my mother's sister, who still lives in California, and she has, she knows about. There were documents sent to her.
NL: I see. About their fate.
HF: About their fate.

NL: Now about the school experience. Did you encounter any anti-semitism in this Vienna public school that you attended?

HF: Well, the time it was most obvious was in Vienna we had what you call *Religionsunterricht*, which means public religious education. And at that time the Jewish children got their *Religionsunterricht* separate from the non-Jewish children.

NL: This was after regular school or it was part of the...

HF: No, that was during, that was, yeah, yeah. That was during.

NL: Once or twice a week or more often? Do you remember?

HF: I don't recall. I believe twice a week.

NL: And what did you study?

HF: Well the Jewish children learned Jewish subjects.

NL: Including Hebrew?

HF: And, I don't believe Hebrew.

NL: The Bible?

HF: Yeah, Bible and so on.

NL: History.

HF: History. And the non-, and that started very early in grammar school.

NL: And it was taught by a Jewish teacher?

HF: Yeah, by, yeah. It was all, in Vienna everybody had to pay a *Gemein-*, a tax, like a...

NL: Membership.

HF: Membership tax to belong to the Jewish community. And basically then the government paid the salary of teachers, Jewish teachers.

NL: They came in just to teach these religious courses or...

HF: Subjects, yeah.

NL: Subjects.

HF: Subjects.

NL: Or were they regular teachers who also taught these subjects? You had a different person?

HF: It was a different person I think. And...the non-Jewish children were of course taught Christian subjects. And there was instilled all of the hatred against the Jews as being the killer of Christ. And that was the, and after this one hour was over, they was always trying to beating the Jews from the non-Jewish children. And I know I'm getting away from the subject, but my mother-in-law went to school in Stuttgart, in Germany. And we discussed this one time, she being about 30 years older than I am. She experienced exactly that same thing in Stuttgart thirty years earlier. So this was very, because you didn't have a separation of church and state of being taught.

NL: Yes. And you felt the anti-semitism particularly after these classes.

HF: Yeah. It was, that's the only type of anti-semitism that I can remember as a child.

NL: But I suppose there were comparatively few Jewish students in your public school. Or am I wrong? Did you have a goodly number of Jewish children?

HF: Yeah. Yeah.

NL: You did.

HF: We did not live in a Jewish neighborhood. I mean, there were...

NL: It was mixed.

HF: We lived, Vienna is divided in what, 21, they call it *Bezirk* which is sections of the city or...

NL: Neighborhoods.

HF: Neighborhoods. And most Jews, as Polish Jews and the poor Jews lived in the second district, whereas we lived in the ninth district, which was, there were Jewish stores. And everybody, it was not a...

NL: Solely Jewish.

HF: City, yeah. There was a large Jewish population before World War II in Vienna.

NL: Yes.

HF: I think it was 100 and some thousand probably.

NL: Yes, a very large population. And you, so you had non-Jewish playmates, do you remember, Mr. Finder?

HF: Now...

NL: Jewish playmates.

HF: No they, all my friends were Jewish.

NL: Jewish.

HF: But in school of course it was mixed, schooling.

NL: Non-, mixed.

HF: Right. There were more non-Jews in class than Jews.

NL: And the synagogue that your father, your family, attended...?

HF: My father attended a small...

NL: Was it Orthodox?

HF: Small Orthodox. My father was Orthodox, came from an Orthodox background. My mother not. My mother came from a German, I would say maybe Reformed or...

NL: Reformed.

HF: Reformed. But when she married my father, she kept a strictly kosher household and so on. But she really was not from a Orthodox background. There was a larger synagogue not far from us, but my father preferred to go to a smaller synagogue.

NL: Yes. And were most of their friends Jewish?

HF: Yeah.

NL: They socialized mostly with...

HF: Yes, mostly with Jewish.

NL: Jewish...

HF: [unclear] Right.

NL: Friends. Would you say that they were fairly comfortable in Vienna, that they didn't seem to be troubled by antisemitism in the early years of their marriage and in your early childhood period? Did your father suffer economically in his work because of any anti-Jewish feelings as far as you know?

HF: I don't think so. Why, I, although I believe there was always the tendency, as far as what I heard him say, that he was rather a, although he was Orthodox, modern in appearance. And when he spoke German well, he wrote German well, and he was an Austrian citizen. I mean, he came to Vienna as a young man. My mother was from a German background. And I think that the antisemitism or the antagonism against Jews was felt more among the Jews who still, you know, lived in the Jewish neighborhoods, who did not...

NL: From eastern Europe.

HF: Eastern European Jews who were still clinging mostly to the *hasidic* garbs, the beards. This was the impression that the population had of Jews, because my father would say many times that even people would say, didn't even know that he was Jewish because he just...

NL: Seems like everybody else.

HF: Yeah. Right.

NL: Yeah, yeah. The same thing of course happened in Germany, that the anger was very often directed against the Eastern European individuals...

HF: Yeah. Because I remember he would, when after Hitler, I mean, after the *Anschluss* when the Germans came into Vienna and they used to, you know, just to antagonize the Jews. They would gather them up, all of a sudden a group of Jews on the street and they made them scrub the...

NL: Pavement.

HF: Pavement...

NL: Yes.

HF: With water and lye and you would step on it. And like, people like my father, they would, someone would say to him, "Well why don't you go away? You don't belong here."

NL: Oh.

HF: Only...

NL: They made a distinction.

HF: When, yeah, in their mind these were a different Jew.

NL: A different [unclear]...

HF: Yeah. A different, yeah. They...

NL: When...as far as you can remember did you sense anti-semitism in the general population? When was there some penetration of the Nazi movement in Viennese life?

HF: The only thing I remember a little bit, and I was very young at the time, was in 1933 when they had the assassination of Dollfuss.¹

NL: The Chancellor.

HF: The Chancellor. I remembered that yet vaguely. But otherwise I really cannot recall, except the events that happened in school with the antisemitism.

NL: These religion, after these other religious classes.

HF: After, yeah. Otherwise I really personally did not feel anything. All, the only thing I remember of course, we were aware of the, what happened in Germany due to the fact that my grandparents came to...

NL: Live with you.

HF: To live with us. But prior to that, while Hitler was already in power in Germany, we went to visit them, to Germany.

NL: Did you?

HF: And...

NL: Do you remember what they reported about their own life at the time? I guess you were too young.

HF: No. That I don't remember.

NL: But their lives were not yet changed apparently.

HF: No, no. And as a matter of fact, my uncle from Berlin, who they lived in Berlin too, before they were, they came to visit us also in Vienna nearly in 1936, '37. And there was no problem for Jews to travel. Maybe because they were German citizens. Now see, there is also a distinction between Eastern European Jews and German Jews or Austrian Jews.

NL: Yes.

HF: Now to bring it one step further, my grandfather went back to Germany in 1937, because he wanted to liquidate what he had there. And while he was there, he suffered a heart attack and died. And my mother had no problem going to Germany for his funeral, from Vienna.

NL: From Vienna.

HF: She...went to the funeral and...

NL: No restrictions.

HF: No restrictions whatsoever. And she...

NL: So, you first felt the brunt of antisemitism then after the *Anschluss*, I presume. Or, was this happening before?

¹Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss assassinated in 1934.

HF: Yeah. Well, the knowledge we had of course through my grandparents, while my grandparents were living with us. I mean, why they left Germany. And...

NL: But you didn't anticipate a takeover? You...

HF: I don't know what my parents anticipated.

NL: You don't know. Yes, yes. You don't know.

HF: I don't know.

NL: Do you remember the *Anschluss* day?

HF: Yeah, the *Anschluss* I remember very distinctly, because it happened on Friday night. And we didn't know anything Friday night. Not even my parents knew anything Friday night. But we had school on Saturdays. And they were, all public schools were open Saturdays. And I remember going down on Saturday morning. I was nine years old at the time. I wasn't even...quite nine years old. I was just a month shy of being, I was, went to the third grade at the time. And I went down, and the first thing, we lived across [from] a girls' school, a girls' high school. And there was the German flag hanging there already. In one night there were all German flags hanging.

NL: I see.

HF: And that was...something strange because I never had seen that. And I came to school, which was only, maybe five minutes' walk from my house, and it was closed that day. And so when I came back, I told, my father even asked me, I remember him asking me, "Why do you come home from school?" And I said, "Well, there, the Germans are here and there is no school." And he was not even aware of it.

NL: Was he surprised?

HF: Yeah. Now, of course there was no, we didn't have radios and television. You did not have all that instant news.

NL: But there wasn't any uproar in the streets?

HF: Not...

NL: Or panic?

HF: Where we lived.

NL: Not where you lived.

HF: We lived, I mean we did not live on the main thoroughfare. We lived on a side street.

NL: But presumably the other Jews in the neighborhood didn't know either?

HF: To the best of my recollection my father and mother were not aware that it had happened, or whether they were aware that things were going on, I cannot, no, I don't know.

NL: Did they seem upset?

HF: At that time? I cannot, all my recollections are that I came home and I told them that the German flags were hanging all over with the *Hakenkreuz* and the school was closed. And that's all I remember really of that particular day.

NL: And then what is your next memory, following the *Anschluss*?

HF: Well, following the *Anschluss* not very long, much later rather, we were not able, the Jewish children had to go to a different school. The...

NL: Oh, then let me ask. Were you able to resume your schooling the following week, and were you able to stay in the same class?

HF: Yeah, no, we stayed in the same class for a short period of time, and then I had to go to a school which was much further away from my house, where only Jewish children went. And that was maybe April of 19-, the *Anschluss* was in March '4-, eh, '38, and this was maybe in April, 1938.

NL: Do you remember if you were upset by that? Or was it just something that as a child you accepted?

HF: Just accepted. The only thing of course, I always heard my father telling me, you know, they would, they would, as people, Jews, were walking the street, they would grab a certain amount of Jews and they would make them scrub the streets and clean the sidewalks.

NL: You saw that?

HF: I don't remember seeing. I just remember my father telling me about it, that he got caught up in these things. And he would travel a lot in the countryside and he could not pursue that any more.

NL: He wasn't able to continue his work.

HF: No, to continue his work, because he wasn't able to travel.

NL: He worked for a Jewish company or...

HF: No, he worked for a non-Jewish company.

NL: Non-Jewish company.

HF: Non-Jewish.

NL: So what sort of work, then, did he do?

HF: I guess he just traveled inside the city. He was not able to go out of the town.

NL: I see. And still able to make a living as far as you knew?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Yes.

HF: For a short time.

NL: For a short time.

HF: And then my next recollection, the, there were a lot of refugees coming to Vienna from the countryside. They were expelled almost immediately, especially around Tyrol. And we had a lot of refugees streaming into Vienna, very shortly after the *Anschluss*.

NL: And what provision was made for them, do you know?

HF: Well, the Jewish community tried to provide for them in every way. I remember we had some who would come to our house for dinner. And we would take them in. They would eat and so on.

NL: So they were somehow absorbed.

HF: They were, yeah.

NL: Do you have any recollection of Jews leaving, or trying to leave the city? Or do you remember your parents discussing it?

HF: Well I remember we all discussed, right away we discussed where to go.

NL: Did you?

HF: Yeah. And one of the things we discussed was, we thought about Uganda. A lot of them were trying to flee to Uganda.

NL: Your parents discussing that too?

HF: Yeah. They were discussing, looking up on the map, where was Uganda and so on. And within...a very short time, I mean, my father made every effort to try to leave Vienna.

NL: So he applied for papers?

HF: Well we, our, actually, we left already in August...1938 we left Vienna.

NL: Oh, you left then, oh.

HF: Yeah.

NL: And where did you go?

HF: Well, we, I don't know, well he was, wanted to leave, and I guess my mother wanted to leave. I remember them selling everything we had. And he had to stand in long lines to get all the necessary exit papers I know. One time he got kicked in his kidneys and he had to be hospitalized for a short time.

NL: Kicked by one of the guards?

HF: Yeah, because he had to stand in line, for days. He had to stand in line just to get all the documentation, permission to leave. Because you could get permission to leave, even if you had no where to go. That did not really matter that much to the Germans.

NL: Well Eichmann was already in charge [unclear]

HF: I mean, that, yeah. I mean, this is not some, certain, some of the things that I recollect. But I recollect that he was standing in line, he would come home late, he had to stand like all day in line, until he got all his papers together. And we left Vienna around the middle of August of 1938.

NL: And did your grandparents leave with you?

HF: My grandfather died.

NL: Oh, your grandfather died.

HF: And my grandmother, she, through the *Anschluss* was, she did not want to stay in Vienna any longer, and she returned to Berlin. She said that within a very short time things happened in Vienna that took many years to develop in Germany, in Berlin. So she decided that's what she wanted to go, she didn't want to stay with us. She insisted on going back to Berlin.

NL: And did she have any place to go to?

HF: Well my, my mother's sister, they lived in Berlin.

NL: I see.

HF: They had, because they left for America in 1939. And my mother had a brother who still was, who left in 1939 for America. So she went back. She just said she, "This is much worse than Germany." She just did not want to stay there. They, so she left for Berlin.

NL: Yes, apparently Eichmann speeded up all of these processes that as you said, had taken years in Germany.

HF: Yes.

NL: Did you hear from her after that, do you know?

HF: Yeah, well, while we were still in Vienna we heard from her. And...

NL: But after you left...

HF: Later we...

NL: Vienna.

HF: Well, when we, we left Vienna in August, 1938.

NL: And where did you go?

HF: Well, we went to Köln, Germany.

NL: Cologne.

HF: Cologne, yeah. Cologne, Germany. And...

NL: Why did you...

HF: Well, it was known at this time, I mean I found out, I mean, that's how we went. Now how my father got the hint of it, I don't remember. That if you bought a ticket, a ship board ticket, to England, you could leave Germany into Holland—even if you had no visa to go into England. As long as you had a ticket to go to England, you could leave Germany. I mean, Germany would let you out. There was no question. And Holland would let you in.

NL: With a ship ticket to England.

HF: With a ship ticket to England.

NL: Interesting.

HF: So, we left. We went to Köln. As far as I remember we stayed a few days in Köln. We went from Köln to Aachen. Aachen?

NL: Right.

HF: And from Aachen we stayed I believe another day or so. And then we crossed the border, I mean, by train, into Holland. And we ended up in Breda. Breda is Holland.

NL: Breda. Holland, yes.

HF: Of course we got, we couldn't take any money out, except ten *Marks*, I believe. And we were all searched on the border. Even though it was a charter it was searched. Everybody was searched. And we just took some, had some hand luggage. That's all we had. And we went into Breda. Now it was known, for some reason, that if you smuggled yourself from Breda—I mean there's no chance of getting to England if you had

no papers—if you smuggled yourself illegally across the border, into Belgium, Belgium did not deport anybody to Germany. Now we could not stay in Holland.

NL: You couldn't.

HF: No. Holland did not absorb anybody, illegally.

NL: That was because of the government restrictions?

HF: Yeah, yeah.

NL: So...

HF: But Belgium...

NL: Belgium?

HF: We ended up in Breda. We spent one night in Breda. And then, I don't know, my father must have made some arrangements with the Jewish committee or somewhere. And we traveled to the border with Holland, with Belgium. Belgium to Holland. And I think, I believe it was by car. We got out of the car and there was a group of people. And we crossed the border on foot, from Holland into Belgium. And soon we were on the other side of the border. That same car picked us up again, and took us to Antwerp.

NL: Antwerp. And...

HF: And we were...

NL: You weren't searched on the Belgian side?

HF: No, we're illegal. We're illegal immigrants.

NL: You were illegal immigrants.

HF: Yeah, well we crossed the border illegally.

NL: But there were no guards.

HF: There were only, there was no guards, I don't...

NL: That you could...

HF: Yeah, we even heard a patrol further away were some soldiers marching. but we just, I mean they were all official smugglers. I know "official," I mean they were paid smugglers...

NL: Paid smugglers.

HF: Who smuggled people from Holland to...

NL: Were you frightened during that time, do you remember?

HF: No, I don't remember.

NL: You had your parents around you.

HF: We had the parents and it was not such a big...

NL: Not so risky. And...

HF: I mean nobody was shot. If they would have caught them they would have sent them back across the border. I mean it wasn't...

NL: But you knew there was no deportation, from Belgium.

HF: People apparently knew, back to Germany.

NL: Back to Germany.

HF: Now you could not go directly from Germany into Belgium, but you could get [unclear] the other way.

NL: And you had to be wise to all that.

HF: Well, I mean, and so we ended up in Antwerp. And once we got to Antwerp, the Jewish Committee or the, would help the people there.

NL: Were there many other Jews from...

HF: Refugee Jews? Yeah.

NL: Who were refugees, yes.

HF: And we could, then you could go to the police in Belgium and get official identification cards, and reside in Belgium, and they would not send anybody back, providing they did not catch you working. You were not allowed to take a job. Because they had high unemployment.

NL: But the Jewish community...

HF: Helped, right.

NL: Provided for you. They provided you with some housing?

HF: Well, they provided with housing the first couple days. But they provided with money.

NL: Money.

HF: People rented their own apartments and...

NL: You found...

HF: The population, yeah.

NL: You found a place to live.

HF: Yeah. People did some odd work or...

NL: Sure.

HF: But not official work.

NL: Not official. And what did Father do?

HF: He was not able to do very much. My mother was able to do more than...

NL: What did she do?

HF: Well, she worked. She did a little, some domestic work for rich, there were a lot of rich Jews in Belgium. She did some baking. She was, she did some, [unclear] she would go and bake cakes, something like that, and then she would do a lot of handy work, like belts and stuff. And my father would sell it, would go out and peddle it like.

NL: Embroidery?

HF: Not, yeah, some sort of embroidery.

NL: Dressmaking?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Dressmaking. Hand, handiwork.

HF: Yeah, handiwork.

NL: And what happened to you? Did you go to school?

HF: Well I thought, yeah, when it, a matter of fact, we went to a very religious school there. They had a very good Jewish day school in Antwerp. And I did not actually lose any...

NL: Any time.

HF: Any time. I went up to the third grade in Vienna, and I picked up right away to the fourth grade.

NL: But you had to speak a new language.

HF: Well, we learned Dutch, which was not that, Dutch is not...

NL: Not too hard for you.

HF: Not too hard, yeah.

NL: And that was the language of instruction in the Jewish school?

HF: Well, half a day was Dutch, and half a day was Hebrew. Of course my Hebrew was not as strong as the children there either, but I had learned some Hebrew in Vienna. But I was able to master that.

NL: And you made some friends at school?

HF: Yeah, yeah. Well, it was a very active Jewish community. They were very helpful to the Jews.

NL: Helpful.

HF: Yeah. A matter of fact I always recall they were, there were women who would work in the kitchen, in soup kitchens—they had maids at home—would come and work in the soup kitchens for the refugees.

Tape one, side two:

NL: ...of our interview with Mr. Herbert Finder. You were saying that the maids of some of the wealthy Jewish families came and cooked?

HF: No, no, the women came.

NL: The women themselves.

HF: The women themselves came who had maids at home.

NL: Who had maids at home.

HF: Maids at home.

NL: Yeah.

HF: They would help then. But most refugees within a very short time had their own apartments and where [unclear], to live somehow and manage.

NL: And did you hear from your grandmother in Berlin during this time, do you know?

HF: I don't really recall, I, whether we did or not. Of course later we had a visit from one, from my mother's brother who left for America to Antwerp. And he, a matter of fact he spent a couple days with us in Antwerp before he came to America. And while we were in Antwerp we applied for visas to come to the United States too, and we actually did receive visas in April, 1940, after we were already in Antwerp for two years.

NL: For America.

HF: Yeah. We had our visas, but we didn't have any money for the ticket, because we were refugees. And...

NL: Your parents couldn't save enough.

HF: No, we couldn't save anything.

NL: They couldn't save anything.

HF: And the way it was done in Antwerp, the HIAS would give people tickets, pay for the tickets to come to America. But visas for America were good for a period of four months.

NL: O.K.

HF: And due that we received our visas in April, 1940, we were like on the list to come to America maybe around July of 1940. But in the meantime, on May 10, 1940, Hitler invaded Belgium, Holland, and France. So that's why we got caught up in that dilemma.

NL: You were saying that you learned Dutch. Was that a language of instruction in the Belgian schools?

HF: Well, Belgium actually divided in two halves. The Flemish section, and the French section.

NL: Ah ha.

HF: Now Antwerp is part of the Flemish section, the northern part of the country, where the official language is Dutch.

NL: I see.

HF: And the southern part of the country, the official language is French. But most people speak both languages there.

NL: So you stayed in the school for several years, then...

HF: Two years.

NL: Until...

HF: Two years. I went there in fourth grade and...

NL: The spring of '40.

HF: The fifth grade, until May 10, 1940.

NL: Now, do you remember any discussions either with your playmates or with your parents about what was happening to Jews in Germany or elsewhere? Or do you think your parents knew?

HF: Well, I believe they knew. I mean, by that time I was getting ten and eleven-year old. The only thing that I remember and which was very misleading to many Jews, the Jews in Belgium would always say, "Well, what happened in Poland and what happened in Germany will never happen here, and can never happen." And that, they had such a lull in them that I don't think any Jews from those countries really made an effort to leave Belgium or felt a threat to themselves due to what's happening in Germany or Poland.

NL: Also, well, I'm wondering, I know in America there was this myth about the invulnerability of the *Maginot* line. Did...of course that wouldn't have protected Belgium.

HF: No, because that's one of the reasons why Hitler invaded the low country...

NL: Right.

HF: Because the *Maginot* line stopped.

NL: Stopped. And so you didn't feel any protection from that. And you didn't obviously expect an invasion [unclear] ?

HF: As a child I don't remember.

NL: But, I think that's true also of the adults.

HF: Yeah, as a child I don't remember that. But that, I only remember that, always the saying by the Jews living there. Now most Jews in Belgium were Polish Jews, that I remember.

NL: Ah ha.

HF: Because in Belgium, unlike other countries, you never really became a Belgian citizen.

NL: Oh, I see.

HF: Because the Jews could have, there were many Jews who lived in Belgium were Polish Jews from twenty years, and even their children, and they never became citizens.

NL: Was it because they didn't want to or they couldn't? You don't know.

HF: I believe they probably could not.

NL: They couldn't.

HF: And...

NL: My understanding is that about half the Jewish population was foreign, those who were Polish, and the other half Belgian born. I didn't, but your impression was that most Jews...

HF: Well, it's hard for me. I mean, the impressions were half...

NL: But that was your impression.

HF: But I only remember it that the difference was, you had different ID cards. They had different ID cards and they were allowed to work and had businesses. But they still were not citizens of Belgium. Now, maybe there were some, but most Jews that I remember meeting were Jews that really came from Poland. Although we had friends that came from Holland. There were Jews who came from Holland and lived in Belgium. They were in the diamond business.

NL: Who emigrated? Oh, oh, who just emigrated.

HF: Yeah, emigrated. But not, I mean it had nothing to do with the Hitler period.

NL: Not...

HF: They emigrated for...

NL: Not out of any urgency.

HF: It must have been economic reasons or what. Or they lived in...

NL: Now, Mr. Finder, did conditions for your father improve within those two years so that he could earn a living a little more easily? Or was work still barred?

HF: Well...

NL: Work was barred.

HF: Work was always barred, I mean officially work was barred.

NL: Officially. So, then he and Mother just had to improvise in order to make it.

HF: Yeah. Yeah, they'd improvise. And of course everything was being temporary because with the hope of leaving for United States and...

NL: Yes.

HF: And you had the visa applied and all of that. So...

NL: Now, what happened to your family at the time of the invasion? Do you remember? You must remember that, sure.

HF: Yeah. Well, at the time of the invasion I remember distinct. The Jews that were German citizens, or Austrian citizens, had to report. And they were all arrested. They probably were con-, the Belgium government was afraid that there were some fifth column among them. So my father of course, being that he had a, [unclear] had a German passport, because when Austria was, after the *Anschluss*, I believe he had, he, from the Austrian passport he became, he got a German passport.

NL: What became part of the greater *Reich*.

HF: Yeah, right.

NL: The greater German *Reich*.
HF: So therefore he was arrested. And he was sent immediately to France, to southern France. All those Ger-, all Germans, he was classified, as far as Belgium was concerned, he was classified as German, and he was sent to southern France.
NL: And he was sent by the Belgians?
HF: Yes.
NL: To work in a work battalion or was it just a deportation?
HF: No, no, it was not a question of work battalion. It was a question of removing all German...
NL: All German Jews. [unclear]
HF: Citizens. Not Ger-, he was then really not classified as Jew, but Jews, but German.
NL: German.
HF: And to remove them from the front, or to remove them any contact. So that he ended up way, way in southern France in a camp, near the Pyrénées. Now I don't remember the name of the camp.
NL: But by himself?
HF: Yeah, by him, all men.
NL: All men.
HF: All men, who were German. Now, with the refugees who came from Germany, like my uncle, my father's brother was there, and he was stateless. He was never an Austrian citizen.
NL: I see.
HF: He was what they called stateless. He was not interned.
NL: He was not.
HF: No, only...
NL: He was allowed to remain in Belgium?
HF: Well, we all left. In other words...
NL: When your father left?
HF: Well, after my father was left, two, three days later, before even the German occupied Antwerp, we fled. My mother, with me and my uncle, my father's, we fled together.
NL: To?
HF: And we ended also up in southern France, within a few days.
NL: I see.
HF: We were never under German occupation in Belgium. We fled to southern France.
NL: So this would have been about May 8th or so?
HF: No, this, no, May 10th was the, this was like May 14th, 15th.
NL: Oh, after the invasion.

HF: Yeah, after the invasion.
NL: After the invasion.
HF: After the invasion, but before...
NL: Before...
HF: The German troops reached Antwerp.
NL: I see. Did you know where your father was?
HF: No. No, we had no idea where he was.
NL: And what made you go to southern France?
HF: Well, we just fled Ger-, we fled the German advance.
NL: But, why not...
HF: And it was...
NL: Why not an effort to get to Paris? Was there something in...
HF: Well...
NL: The southern part that...
HF: That the Ger-, we were, first we were, we were fleeing gradually towards the border of France, from Belgium we crossed into France.
NL: Yes.
HF: But then they just gathered those refugees and put them on trains and just shipped them south. The French...
NL: The French did that?
HF: Shipped all the refugees south.
NL: I see.
HF: Yeah.
NL: I see.
HF: And we, we ended up in a small village near Toulouse.
NL: Do you remember the name of it?
HF: Not where we ended up first, no. No. And there we were the, all the refugees were distributed among the farmers. Each farmer had to take in some, now just, not just Jewish refugees. We were, all refugees were like distributed among the...
NL: Ah, you were mixed, then.
HF: Yeah.
NL: The Jewish and non-Jewish refugees.
HF: Yeah, among the farmers in that area.
NL: And who...did that diversion, the French?
HF: The French government. That was all before actually the..
NL: Before the occupation.
HF: Yeah, before even Hitler reached Paris.
NL: [unclear]
HF: He hadn't even, I mean, we're talking about the very early period.

NL: Is it possible that this was a French resistance movement or do you think it was official government action?

HF: No, this was before. This was while the war was actually still, while the fighting was still going on.

NL: Yes. But not the resistance.

HF: It was just to...have, no, it was just a question of something to accommodate the refugees, what to do with refugees who came from Belgium and Holland.

NL: And what happened...

HF: And northern France.

NL: To you and Mother?

HF: Well...

NL: You went into the home of a farmer?

HF: So we were there, yeah, we were there a few days. And then it was announced that all refugees that were stateless, all the men that were even like stateless, had, were interned in camps. And that's when my uncle, who was with us, my father's younger brother, he was then interned in a camp. And he ended up in the same camp as my father later.

NL: Oh my.

HF: And...

NL: Just a coincidence.

HF: Yeah, well this I guess this maybe was the only camp, which, as far as I remember.

NL: Oh, and you...

HF: And my mother decided she did not want to stay there. And she went to Toulouse. We ended up in Toulouse.

NL: Were you hearing from Father at all?

HF: No. At that time we didn't even know anything yet.

NL: No. So you and Mother went to Toulouse.

HF: Yeah. This was maybe, we were on the farm for a very few days.

NL: I see. Were you treated fairly well by the French?

HF: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Of course we had, there was a language barrier. We didn't speak French and they didn't speak anything else. But we didn't, she didn't like it and she thought it would be better if we ended up in Toulouse.

NL: She was a city lady.

HF: Yeah.

NL: Yeah. And did you know anyone in Toulouse? Did she know anyone who took care of you?

HF: No, it was just...there again the Jewish Committees started to take care of...

NL: There were other refugees.

HF: Oh yeah, a lot of refugees ending up in Toulouse. And then it was very hard for her to take care of me. I remember we lived in a hotel room. It was with four other women, you know, who also their husbands were in camps. And we got to know this French Jewish farmer. He was actually not French. He came originally from Russia. And he had emigrated from Russia to Palestine, in the '20s. And he contracted there malaria. And after he had malaria he could not stay in Palestine. He married also a woman who was from Odessa, a Jewish woman, and they came then from Palestine to southern France, in the very early '30s, and they established a farm, 25 kilometers from Toulouse. And they took refugees to their farm—part to work, part to take care of them. They were very, they had no children. They were very benevolent people, very. And they took me as a...I was 11 years at this time. And I went...

NL: Mother stayed in Toulouse?

HF: My mother stayed because she wanted to find out what happened to my father and be more in contact. And that was already in May, 1940, that I went to live with these Jewish, Russian-Jewish farmers in France, in a small village in, 25 kilometers from Toulouse.

NL: Did you work on the farm?

HF: Well, we went to school. [unclear] by that...

NL: You went to school.

HF: And when the next school semester started, that was May, the next school semester started in September, I went to school there. And during the, after school hours, I helped on the farm.

NL: What were they growing?

HF: Well, they were growing wheat. But I at the time had to take more care of the cattle. They had cows. I mean, cattle, and I was with them. And then later my mother...

NL: Were there any other children there?

HF: They had no children.

NL: I mean...

HF: No, no. I was the only...

NL: You were the only young person.

HF: I was the only young person there.

NL: And how many other families were there?

HF: Well, he took in people, they would come and stay for a week or two weeks, and they would leave.

NL: Oh, transients.

HF: Yeah, always. Whoever needed a home temporarily, he would take, he would go to the city and pick up people that had no place to go and he would bring them to the farm.

NL: So how long did you stay there?

HF: Well I was actually there for two years.

NL: And you went to school.
HF: I went to school.
NL: A public school?
HF: To public school, a village school.
NL: A village school.
HF: A very, very small village school.
NL: How were you treated there by the other children? Because you didn't know any French.
HF: Well, I learned, you know, children learn the language rather quickly and I learned...
NL: Were they fairly cordial to you?
HF: Yeah, yeah.
NL: They were. They knew you were Jewish.
HF: Yeah, but in the first village we lived, the name was Pigeodran [phonetic], in the department of *Haute Gar* [probably *Haute Garonne*] I think it was. There was actually no other Jews and they didn't know what a Jew was. Those people really did not, there were no French Jews ever lived in those areas, except for the refugees. So for them Jews were something that they had no concept what it actually meant.
NL: But you didn't feel any hostility?
HF: No. Oh no no no. And then...my father was able to leave the camp.
NL: Did Mother finally...
HF: Yeah, she found...
NL: Find out where he was?
HF: Yeah, she found out where he was, and she...was able, she went to where that camp was, and she found out. And...
NL: He was able to be released?
HF: He was released. After. After the war was over they released a lot of those people.
NL: But we're still talking about '40, aren't we?
HF: I mean after the fighting between France and Germany.
NL: Ah, Germany.
HF: That's what we're talking about. That was over. So then there was no more the threat of the German. And I think she had this farmer promise that he would give him employment. So they released him, and he came to live then with me on that farm, with those...
NL: With that family.
HF: With that family.
NL: And what happened to Mother?

HF: Well she decided she wanted to go back to Belgium, if she could salvage maybe our visas, because, with the American Consulate. Because there was still an American Consulate. We're talking before America entered.

NL: Oh, you still had your visa papers.

HF: We had our visa, which was still valid for several months. So she went back to Belgium and a little bit later, and then we never, we still heard from her, but we never saw her again. Which, she got caught up there. And we were in southern France, and she was in Antwerp.

NL: She was in Antwerp. So the last you heard of, or you said you heard from her.

HF: We heard from her because I had a cousin who lived in Switzerland. We could not correspond from Belgium, from Antwerp to France, although it was all, because we were not in the occupied zone yet.

NL: You were in Vichy...

HF: Vichy France. That was still Vichy France at the time. But she could write to...

NL: Switzerland.

HF: Switzerland, and my cousin would forward that mail to us to...

NL: So you heard from her...

HF: Yeah.

NL: In the early, still in early '41 you heard from her?

HF: Oh yeah, yeah. We, I know, we know exactly when she was deported. She was deported in, almost in September, 1942.

NL: Oh. Oh, and you heard from her?

HF: We, and up until about that time.

NL: How did she manage? Was she able to find work?

HF: I have very little recollection of what really happened to her while she was in Antwerp. We got only very sporadic postcards and they couldn't write, it was all symbols and she really couldn't write well. We lost really, we knew she was alive, and...

NL: But you don't know any details. And so you and Father stayed on the farm.

HF: Yeah, until...

NL: Until?

HF: We stayed on the farm until late August, 1942.

NL: August, 1942. And did Father work on the farm?

HF: Yeah, yeah, he worked on the farm.

NL: So he was able to support you.

HF: Yeah, he worked on the farm.

NL: So...

HF: And for what we worked we got room and board and a little money.

NL: A little money. And you were still in school.

HF: And I was still in school.
NL: And by now you're what, 12?
HF: 13.
NL: 13.
HF: Til 1942. And I helped a little bit. I earned a little money. There were some, children were allowed to travel, whereas adults had restrictions, if you know they are not French. So with, we were on the farm and it was, the city already, like in Toulouse, food was scarce.
NL: Ah ha.
HF: So they would send the children to the city, with eggs.
NL: To sell.
HF: Eggs and chicken.
NL: And you sold those things.
HF: Yeah. I mean we knew where to go. And like 11, 12-year-old children would, it was only like an hour's ride by bus. And they would go into the city and then bring money back.
NL: For the farmers. Or...
HF: For the farmers.
NL: For the farmers. I guess you got a little tip or something like that. Was there any entertainment for you? Any swimming?
HF: No, we lived in a very, very tiny village.
NL: A small village.
HF: Yeah, it was maybe 100, 200 inhabitants there. There was some Jewish, a little Jewish refugees there. But it was a very, very, very...
NL: Small.
HF: Small.
NL: Do you remember reading, or Father reading any newspapers there? No. And he was restricted. He couldn't leave the area.
HF: He was not either, he needed travel papers already to leave, to even go from, into the city or anything. That's why they sent children to do those things, because children didn't then need anything.
NL: Didn't need the papers.
HF: Were not examined or...
NL: Now we know that as of October, 1940, there were already anti-Jewish laws passed by Vichy. Do you remember if you or Father were affected by those?
HF: No.
NL: Since you were able to [unclear], your father was [unclear] you worked on the farm?
HF: Well, he worked on the, for the Jewish farmer. So I mean...
NL: But, and you weren't, you didn't feel anything at school particularly.

HF: No, we were, it was such a small school that one classroom took care of six grades, from the first grade to the sixth. That just gives you a picture of the size of the town we lived in.

NL: Did I hear a click? No, it's still going.

HF: And it was very, very tiny, in other words.

NL: But, I suppose you were getting the same instruction that the children elsewhere in France were getting, since...

HF: I suppose, yeah. Yeah.

NL: They had a very centralized school system.

HF: Yeah, it was very centralized, but I mean one teacher took care of...

NL: Six classes.

HF: Of six classes.

NL: And that continued, then, until Septem-, August, '42.

HF: August, '42.

NL: And then what happened?

HF: Well in August '42 now, of course I don't know how much my father knew. I mean, I can't judge it. I didn't, I mean, I just didn't know. One night there was knocking on our door. And we lived...

NL: On the farm.

HF: On the, we lived, we...lived in an isolated, small farm house. Though my father worked on the main farm, we did not live on this main farm. And my father must have had some inkling because he did not open the door so account that he knew something. And he told me to stay. And he fled to the back. And he, still he had two, the farmer had two farms. And he went two, different *arrondissements*. France is divided into...

NL: Neighborhoods.

HF: No, not neighborhoods. Like states here.

NL: Regions.

HF: Yeah, regions.

NL: Arrondissements, yes, regions.

HF: Regions. And where we were we were only like maybe two kilometers from the next region. For, so the people that came after us was the local gendarme. This was not, there were no Germans yet in that...

NL: It was the local Vichy police.

HF: The local Vichy police. And so he did not open the door and they left. I don't know if they knew, they weren't sure whether anybody lived there or not.

NL: Ah, you didn't open the door.

HF: No.

NL: And no one came in.

HF: Nobody came in and he went out through the back and went, and fled into the, apparently there were already, he must have been aware of what was going on.

NL: There were roundups already.
HF: Yeah, roundups. But he left me behind, I guess thinking that they would not bother...
NL: A child.
HF: A child. And then they came back with a warning. And he was not there any more, but they got me.
NL: They took you.
HF: They took me back to the village. We lived like a couple kilometers outside the village.
NL: Did they man handle you?
HF: No, no, no, no.
NL: What did they say they wanted?
HF: They just wanted me to come along. And as a matter of fact they did like, the farmer we lived with, he was in France longer. They didn't arrest him. They only arrested the recent refugees that came.
NL: The foreign, foreign Jews.
HF: Foreign. Even Jews who had fled to southern France from northern France, like there was Jews in the village that came from Paris. They did not arrest them neither. Only foreign Jews they arrested in those days. And so what they said was to us, if my father wasn't going to come back, they just would take me.
NL: They, did they ask if you were Jewish?
HF: Oh they knew.
NL: How did they know?
HF: I guess everybody in the village knew who was who.
NL: Do you remember if Father ever registered? Did he wear a...
HF: No, no.
NL: A yellow star?
HF: Oh no, we, that didn't...exist then.
NL: Oh. But they knew you were Jewish even though.
HF: Oh yeah, but they knew we were Jewish.
NL: They didn't round up non-Jews.
HF: No, no.
NL: Just Jews.
HF: They just, they had a certain specific people. Now I don't know if we were registered in the...what do you call it...
NL: Precinct.
HF: City hall, their precinct, or how they knew. But...
NL: They knew.
HF: I mean, the knew everybody who lived there. I mean, it was such a small area that everybody knew that.

NL: Father must have had you registered at some point.

HF: Maybe he had to register. I don't, that I don't know. But anyway, they said that they would not take me, that they would take me instead of him, if he wouldn't come back. And then somebody from these Jews knew where he was, because they knew he would be on the other farm, and they sent somebody after him and he came back. And then of course they took both of us. But I think one more Jewish family, they were also from Vienna, who lived there. As a matter of fact, he was a rabbi in Vienna.

NL: Where did they take you?

HF: They took us to a camp in southern France.

NL: Called? Gurs?

HF: No, I don't, it started with a V. And I have to...

NL: Viviers.

HF: Viviers. That was Viviers. We were there two days.

NL: There were other Jews there?

HF: Oh yeah, they were strictly, the Germans called it *Sammellager*, collection camps.

NL: Collection camps, yes.

HF: Collection camps. And we were there for a few days and then were sent from there by train to Drancy. So that's, now we're going back to the beginning of the [unclear].

NL: Oh, the terrible times. Where did they tell you you were going? Or did anybody say where you were going when they sent you to Drancy?

HF: I have no recollection.

NL: You don't remember. But were you on the train for a long time?

HF: No, I think that only took like one day.

NL: From Viviers.

HF: From, maybe, I think we left in the evening and probably got there the next morning. It was not that far.

NL: Were you in a very crowded train?

HF: No, there were not, they were still...

NL: Passenger trains?

HF: Passenger transports.

NL: And there, on the train of course you met many other Jews of course.

HF: They were all Jews.

NL: All Jews.

HF: The whole train was all Jews and all refugees.

NL: All refugees.

HF: And like that other family was with us all from that same little village. And they came with us. And don't know if they took another family from that same village or not. I don't remember. [unclear]

NL: Did you get some food at Viviers?
HF: Oh yeah.
NL: Yes.
HF: Yeah, that was, the conditions there were not...
NL: Not too bad.
HF: No, that was a, I wouldn't say bad at all. I don't remember whether we were there maybe one day or two days. I mean there were still no Germans there.
NL: All French personnel.
HF: All French personnel.
NL: And at Drancy too?
HF: At Drancy I would say was strictly, also strictly...
NL: French?
HF: French, yes. Now that was already then in the occupied. Drancy's right outside of Paris.
NL: Yes, outside of Paris. I think we'll stop there, because it's a whole new...
HF: That's a whole new period.
NL: Chapter, yes. And