

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

BERNARD S. MEDNICKI

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Date: April 27 and 30, 1982

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Melrose Park, PA 19027

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BM - Bernard Mednicki [interviewee]

JF - Josey Fisher [interviewer]

Date: April 27 and 30, 1982

Tape one, side one:

JF: Mr. Mednicki, could you tell me a little bit about your family and their origins?

BM: My father was born in Kishinev, then Bessarabia. My mother was born in Odessa. That's Ukraine. While in the service, in the Russo-Japanese War in 1902, '03, I guess, my father heard of the oncoming pogrom from Kishinev. He was in Vladivostok. He was already married and he had two daughters, Rosa and Sheva.

JF: How old was he when he had gone into the service?

BM: He was born in, I think he was born 1884 [pronounces date in French]. That makes him about 16 or 18 years. See, I always count in French; 35 years in America--that's something to think of. It's characteristic that I think of the other newcomers to the fresh country. So, he married very young and...

JF: He had married before he went into the service?

BM: Yes, of course. He married. He has two children.

JF: And then he went in?

BM: Yes, he went in, not that he wanted to...

JF: No.

BM: You know when the Czar said, and the Jews lived there, and my father was already the new breed, he was already the Jew, the-fighter, he was already no more the Talmudist. He was already the Left Wing of Judaism. That means he believed, but he learned a craft. And he was a fine, all-around mechanic in locksmithing, foundry, engraving. He was a fantastic mechanic!

JF: So he also had his Talmudic training?

BM: Of course, he had his Jewish training! Like every Jewish child from the old days on. Now, my grandfather, one of them--one was a *shochet* [ritual butcher]; and my father's father, he was a cap maker. A little cap maker.

JF: A cap maker.

BM: Cap maker, yes. Those were the Jewish professions of the time. After the pogrom, my father [unclear], my father was very powerful, I mean, physically, like I am. I am very physical. If not, I wouldn't survive the war. And, after the fighting, he took my mother and the two children...

JF: He had been discharged from the Army?

BM: No, no, as a deserter...

JF: He was a deserter?

BM: Of course, most of the Jews at that time deserted! Who could live? When they had a chance, they deserted.

JF: Was not that a dangerous thing to do?

BM: It was very dangerous. It took him one year to escape from Russia to come to Belgium. He stopped in Austria. And for a while, where they were happy, but it was too close to Russia.

JF: He went back to Kishinev? And got...

BM: He fought in Kishinev. He left Vladivostock, came to Kishinev fought the pogrom, took my mother and the two sisters and run away. He run away and he wound up in Belgium after one year of all kind of adventures. He had in mind like every Jew to come to America. But my mother gave birth to a child, and they remained in Brussels. Why not in Antwerp? Because that is where he was stopped. He found a job immediately because he was an excellent craftsman. The language was not a barrier because the ten fingers speak when you know what you do.

JF: About what year was that?

BM: In 1906, he came to Belgium. Six, or seven, six, I would say.

JF: And at that point, your mother had had two daughters in Kishinev?

BM: And a boy, by the name of Natan. He died unfortunately. But that's not, you know. So then after this, my father worked, and his brother, Boris, joined him later on. And he left later on to America. Just on the beginning of the first World War, in 1914, so I remember him as a child. My memory is very awake since I was three years old. So, I can see Uncle Boris come and I was crying, and I loved him; he was the only uncle I had. He was pampering me, and I know where we lived at that time, and he gave me a little, you know, in which you crush medicine or garlic, in a little *shtoissel*,¹ *auf* Yiddish it's called, and he left then. The war started, the first World War. It was very few Jews in Belgium...

JF: You were born...

BM: Before the first World War.

JF: What year?

BM: 1910.

JF: 1910, okay. So, your early memories of your Uncle Boris were of quite a young child.

BM: 1912, 1913, and 1914, of course. And, then, Uncle Boris came to America, and then, I don't know if you are familiar with Strawberry Mansion. He had a studio, Mednicki Studio, a photographer. He has two sons and a daughter. One is, was Saul Mednicki, and his wife is Miriam Mednicki, who was involved with work at City Hall with unwed young mothers; very prominent. And then I have another cousin by the name of Seymour Mednicki, who is also very prominent in his field of industrial photography. And

¹*Shtoissel*: Yiddish for mortar and pestle.

then I have another cousin, Klev Lewin [phonetic], who is married to an American child, of course.

JF: Did your father tell you, as a young child, about the experiences that he had in the Army and the pogrom, the Kishinev pogrom?

BM: Yes [clears throat]. You must excuse me. This is a person who cannot help it, that Philadelphia weather...

JF: That's okay.

BM: As a child my father had a very awakened life. He started reading the materials of the time, who came out with Karl Marx, Lenin already; it was the beginning of Socialism, when he was a young man, of course. And already, he was less than an orthodox Jew.

JF: Was this difficult to do in his family? Or, did they permit him?

BM: No, there was no question of permissiveness. My paternal grandfather was a very mild person, and an understanding person, who knew that the world was turning. Although they lived in a fairly large-sized city, Kishinev, they had a very broad mind; Jewish population in that sense. I remember my father telling me that he would be going to the park, and they would eat unkosher, little, dried salami, *Karnatzlach* [phonetic] he would say. And in my young mind, I would say, gosh, if I would do that, mother would shoot me, because mother was Orthodox. And my father would tell me that, alone, not to the girls. Not to the girls. I was part of everything that he did. For instance, we would go Saturday to the synagogue in Brussels. Now the Jews were concentrating in different bourgs². We lived in Anderlecht. Anderlecht was near the southern station.

JF: How do you spell that?

BM: A-N-D-E-R-L-E-C-H-T. Anderlecht. We lived in Anderlecht. We lived across a park. Now just before the war, the first World War. Across the park, on the top of the park, was a railroad going by. I recall the soldiers going to the front, and [unclear] throwing a--heart attack, you know, right from the source. I don't know, you've never seen it, and [unclear] patriotic songs, a youngster with a Belgium flag, I'll never forget that. And I had been told by my father. He had already spoken to his brother, and then later on, when I was six and seven years old, that often my father in view to have *shalom bayis*, peace in the house, he would say to me, "Berel, don't get Mother's nerves; do what she wants you to do; don't be like I was." That's where I learned what he was, with the *trefe kishkalach*: nonkosher little sausages.

JF: He would tell you these tales of his rebellion, as a young person.

BM: Yes.

JF: But only for you.

BM: Because, eh, the oldest of the boys, then I had to be accomplished, because going to the synagogue Saturday morning, we would take a little street; he turned to smoke

²Bourgs'areas of a place/city.

a cigarette, and he would say, "If you tell Ma about it, I'll--" So, I didn't. Being involved with the confidence of my father was not an easy task, because I had to obey my mother's orders, and she was very religious, to the point that she was called a *tsnia*, [a modest holy woman] who was like a *tzaddik*. There is a *tsnia*. So my mother was a *tsnia*. Mind you that the rabbi would eat in our home, and we were a small Jewish congregation at that time; very few Polish and Russian Jews. It was more Polish Jews from Warsaw, from Lodz, who would change their home, come to Belgium, because it was very close to the border, just across Germany, and that's it. Of course it's large, but nevertheless, the closest that they could come.

JF: So this section in Brussels that you're talking about...

BM: Was a Jewish section...

JF: Was primarily Russian and Polish?

BM: Not primarily Russian. There wasn't such a thing, primarily. If there was 2000 Jews, there was a lot at that time. It was before the Polish Jews and the Russian Jews came. It was whole in this *reformiste*. The Reformed Jews, all of them, were there and they were assimilated. In the synagogue was the rabbi with the high hat. There was an organ playing, and there was a choir, and there was big apparel that the Jews from Russia and Poland has never known. We know a synagogue was a place of worship, where you spoke to God about your problems and your heartaches, and nobody looked at the luxury of the establishment like it was in Belgium. So, slowly, the few families created a Hasidim *shtibl* [small synagogue]. There was Hasidim from Poland and they put together Hasidim *shtibl* where, forcefully, we had to belong. There was no other one that was Reformed or Conservative or Orthodox. And when enough Jews came after the first World War, there was more Jewish people in Brussels. They made a couple of synagogues, and my father belonged to what they called at that time, the Red Synagogue. I refer now to 1922, already. The Red Synagogue was--that was the period of the Russian Revolution, and I remember as a youngster I would listen to my father and his friends discussing. And they would say the ambition was that when the Communists come, there would be no more antisemitism. All people would be equal, there would be no more war, and everybody will have work, no more hunger. And we would dream, and we would take back, not hunger, that was the dream, not hunger, not to be rationed, because during the first World War we were rationed. We would get six ounces of bread a day, period! That's all. We would go for food every second day to the German canteen, and in the canteen they would give us rations or bread. That would go on for four years. And my parents, being kosher, because of Mother, of course. When we received the pork, meat and the fatback, and the pork fat, my mother would exchange with the lady next door. And the Germans would make synthetic products. From coal they were able to extract saccharine, honey and margarine, and it tasted very good. They are geniuses!

JF: From coal?

BM: From coal, yes. From coal--they are geniuses. We would exchange it, and then Mother would try to feed us; it was horrible. During the war, from America, for the children in the school system, we received at that time one little bread a day, like a sandwich roll. And you see, most who suffered was those like my father, who came to Belgium, who had no one in the country. The Jew was a city person. We don't have acquaintances in the country who raises a pig, he has a calf, he grows some wheat, and so on. So we always struggled and my father made surgical instruments, he was a fine craftsman. So, the Germans occupying Belgium for four years, forced him to go work for them, and he would make instruments. You know, at that time there was horses. See, there was a cavalry. They had horses. So for the surgeons, the veterinarians, he had to make instruments. So he was able to bring, once in a while, back home, a loaf of bread, and the bread was the German bread, very heavy and black. But we couldn't get enough of it, of course. So, we grew up with this idea of hunger, and closeness among the Jewish population because we were so few.

JF: The Red Synagogue that you're talking about...

BM: Alright, I'll come back to it. So, in the Red Synagogue was a very brilliant rabbi from Warsaw. He had nothing to do with *politique*, and the only time the Jews could come together and speak of *politique*--because during the week everybody was hustling to make a piece of a living. It wasn't easy because Belgium had nothing. Belgium was steel and coal and farmland and dairy. So the Jews, when they came in, they brought with them small industry; pocketbook making, tailoring, shoemaking, glove-making, fur-making. And from this, slowly they developed a tremendous industry and Belgium became one of the big exporters. And the King of Belgium has always been very benevolent for the Jews. Belgium has always been a heaven for the Jews. There was--Antisemitism has always existed. You cannot escape antisemitism in the best of heavens. Even in the Vatican with the Pope of Rome, there is a tremendous antisemitism. And then it is always going to be because they needed a scapegoat, and we were the scapegoat. So, the point was that Belgium was good to the Jews. My father was making out living, and they would come together on Saturday in the synagogue--and on the way to the synagogue we would buy--Belgium had the Communist Party, the Liberal Party, Catholic Party, Socialism--we had about 26 parties. So, we would buy a Communist paper and a Socialist paper, and on the way we would read the paper. And in the synagogue after you put on the *tallis* [prayer shawl], you make your *bruchas* [prayer, blessing], you speak politics, or slowly you take out the paper, you show this article, and this article. And the rabbi would bang on his bench, and he would be infuriated. And in that atmosphere in which I grew up of freedom and democracy.

JF: Was the Red Synagogue then a nickname for this...

BM: A nickname, a nickname of course. A nickname. The *Roite Yiden* they called them "the Little Red Jews." Then they know, this one is a Communist, this one is a Socialist, this one is a *Polei Zion* [Labor Zionist] and this one is--whatever party there was.

And in the house when you came together, there was no radio and television, and there was no electricity, we still had gas. So when people came together, there was, [unclear] conversation. There was a talent in speaking. There were practically good orators.

JF: Did your father tell you stories--we had mentioned the Kishinev Pogroms, and you were going to tell me about his experience with that. Did he tell you any stories about experiences with the rebellions at that time, the Socialist uprising?

BM: Well, the thing is that he told me in that time, recall, although I didn't pay too much attention. When you are young, you listen and then you think of children's things. But, as I grew older, it came back into my mind that he told me that very few, very few non-Jewish people were helpful to the Jewish population, because the Jew always was able to hack out a living, and poverty was mostly among the *muzhiks* [peasants]. It was Russia under the Czar. So there was a big jealousy; a jealousy was always prevalent, because the Jew for the Sabbath he had to have a *goy* [non-Jew]. So there was a *Shabbos Goy*. See, he was already employed by a Jew, and that's where it came into antagonism. They didn't see that the Jew didn't use them. They just asked them for help. But in the perverted and distorted mind of the *muzhik* they could not understand that. So my father then--I would say one thing, that when he left Russia, my father was trying to, not too much to dwell upon it. He was looking forward. Although I had my grandparents there and uncles and aunts, who died, of course.

JF: In Russia.

BM: In Russia, of course.

JF: In the pogroms?

BM: In the pogrom. Let me tell you, my father, when my father left in the pogrom, after he left, a sister came to America. Bella, Zisla, Hika [phonetic], three sisters came to America, plus this brother, Boris, four of the children came here. Now, I think that was all of the children. And then the grandparents remained. Then I remember my brother, Samuel, was born. And I remember that we see the sad news. Not to Belgium, but from my uncle in America, because my uncle received the news of the death of his father, and thirty days later, after *shloshim*³, after the period of *shiva*⁴ sitting, he had wrote to my father, because my father, I mean, the last family, he figured if he tells him later he wouldn't have to waste a week. But my mother in her fanaticism said, "No, your father deserves sitting *shiva*." So I remember in the house it was like *Tisha B'av*⁵. Sad, everybody sitting on benches. We were young children, you know. So when my little brother was born, a name was given for him. And that's where I remember my *zeyde* [grandfather]. We had no family in Belgium, just my father and mother, and brothers and sisters.

JF: Your grandfather then died in...

³Thirty days of mourning.

⁴The immediate family sits for seven days after the burial--no work and no shaving for men.

⁵Fast day in the Jewish calendar commemorating the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem.

BM: Kishinev...

JF: In Kishinev, in a pogrom?

BM: No, no...

JF: ...or this was a natural cause?

BM: A natural death, of course, caused by the Revolution and everything else. You know, that you cannot avoid. Remember, those survivors of the wars, among the Jewish people, had very strong constitutions. Weak people didn't make it. How I survived is a miracle, but I made it. I am here to tell of that miracle. May she rest in peace, my first wife, she survived, but she died young. Because I don't know how her *organisme* absorbed whatever element was to give her a disease that was not traceable and not healed in America. So she is a victim of the war, and a victim who died young. I had a strong constitution--I could eat anything, you name it, I ate it. If it crawled, I killed it, and if it was dead, I swallowed it. Survival was the key word. It was not pleasant. I have told stories, but no stories--I don't want to dwell--I was in problems. About three years ago, I had a recurrence of nightmares, went to see a psychiatrist and I stopped after two sessions. Then I recognize: if I cannot help myself, a psychiatrist cannot help me. Because they didn't go through it. I always give an example. We know all what it means to give birth. We know everything about squeezing the hand and "what-can-I-do-for-you-darling." But, actually giving birth, nobody knows but the mother who gives birth. So is with experiences. I can speak to you from today to tomorrow, you will understand, you will put your mind to it. What do you know of hunger? In America, you cannot be hungry. I could live all my life--if I would be a bum, I wouldn't have to work; there is so much food.

JF: Tell me, go back to the war years, the first World War, you said you were very hungry.

BM: Very hungry! So when the Germans came into Belgium, they started rationing food. I was in public school, first grade, and to go school was like about a couple miles from the house, a couple kilometers, that's about a mile and a half. And, we would have to be in school at eight o'clock. In the class there was four more Jewish boys; that's all there was. I think that the whole extent of Jewish children in the school was about maybe two dozen. It was public school. And, at that time, when you went to kindergarten, you went with that teacher until eighth grade. The teacher was with you until eighth grade and then you went to professional school to learn a trade, or you went to *atheneum* [possibly he means *Gymnasium*], you went to higher studies.

JF: Did you experience any kind of antisemitism in your school?

BM: Yes, but this was not antisemitism, it was a natural reflection upon the church's teachings. I killed Jesus Christ. I killed, fine, but had he told me my father killed, that I couldn't take. So that's where the fights started.

JF: And you would actually have fights?

BM: Oh, yes, physical fights. But, again, I was really robust, and I loved a scrap. Let's teach the *goyim* [Gentiles]. My friends, the Polish Jews, none of them was Russian.

They were meek, coming from a family who said, "Here's the second cheek; here's the third cheek." "Pull the beard, pull the *payas* [earlocks]." I was no more that. I heard from my father, "fight." Because I heard from my father, "fight," when I was a kid, that was my right. I didn't kill Jesus Christ and I did not change blood into *matzo's*, and there was a lie in the Beilis⁶ process, and Dreyfus⁷ was a maker [perhaps he means victim] from antisemitism. I wasn't guilty of nothing. When I was a child, a youngster I knew that.

JF: Did you ever have a non-Jewish boy who was a friend?

BM: Oh, yes. Plenty of them.

JF: Okay.

BM: Yes, plenty of them, but not to fight with me against the other.

JF: They would never defend you?

BM: For you to have friends, you have to use your head. Friends don't come naturally, at that time. You had to coerce them, by giving them a stand, a couple of marbles. You bought the friendship; but anyway, to have a friend was good to have. You are not alone.

JF: You mean because of your Judaism, you felt you had to...

BM: Right, right. Ignorance. See, the parents didn't know better. The school system was very liberal. We had religious classes in school. Every day--no, three times a week, from 11:30 to 12:00; was religious classes.

JF: What kind of religious classes?

BM: The Jews went to the class where they teach Judaism, and this was by the Reformed synagogue from the center of the city; they had schoolteachers, in French, everything. And the Catholics would go to the churches down on the corner. Three times a week: learn religion, that's important. But there was no discrimination in that respect. Nobody would make you feel--amongst kids, children, that's where antisemitism was there.

JF: Did you feel welcome in these friends' homes, the ones that you did have?

BM: Oh, we didn't go to homes. "Don't go to a *goyish* home. What's the matter with you? It's *trefe* [not kosher], everything."

JF: I see.

BM: The only home I went in was the next door; we lived in little homes, in Old Brussels, near the canals. And there was a family, Swart was the name, and they had one son, Richard, and that family Swart was Belgian; from hundreds of years. And during the war, they would go work to a factory, doing things for the Germans, of course that's how it went. But they had plenty food, and we had a dividing wall in our yard. And Richard, their son, would call "Come over, Bernard, come over, something good to eat." And in the kitchen was a table, like that, loaded with every sweet milk, what do you call that,

⁶Famous Blood Libel trial in Russia, Ukraine outside of Kiev, 1921.

⁷Dreyfus case: In 1894 Alfred Dreyfus was accused of treason, tried and found guilty. He was sent to Devil's Island, later retried and exonerated in 1904.

condensed milk, and they had brown sugar, they had real butter, they had honey. And he would enjoy me making a concoction. I would make a container full of everything, except for the spoon, and swallow it. I was hungry; I was hungry. During the war, in view to deceive the Germans. It was an imperialistic war, it was not antisemitism. And in my father's home was three German soldiers billeted, Jews, and they would bring for the children, cocoa, synthetic cocoa.

JF: Cocoa.

BM: Cocoa, and we would drink it out of jars from jam because there weren't glasses at the time. So, one day I remember they came and they said to my father, "Remove all the copper in the house, and if you have woolen mattresses, take them away and bury them, because they are collecting copper and wool."

JF: Copper and wool.

BM: Because the Germans then, the Kaiser Wilhelm, was running short. So I remember wherever we had beds with copper balls and bars; my father unscrewed everything, and we moved the stove away from the chimney and we shoved everything into the chimney; all the copper. And we took the mattresses, we had three woolen mattresses, and we made in the yard, we unearthed it and buried them, the mattresses, and put soil on top, not to give to the Germans. I remember those people were there then after the War was finished. And then all the Belgians took out their mattresses on the streets, was wormy and everything else, and they took out their copper. It was experiences. I remember then, in going to school, the teachers would teach us patriotic songs like "*Flottent petits drapeaux*" [Flutter, little flags], and the kind you do as a six year with a Belgian flag, so we take the flag and pray, he cannot shoot me. So they give us an illegal paper, called *La Nation Belge*, *The Belgian People*. And we took that paper and we would go and slip, with a pin attach to it to anybody we could attach it. There was propaganda from the Underground. There were patriots who were hidden, in the first World War, mind you, over against the Germans. So then we had icepicks, and they at that time had rubber tires from solid rubber, and we had to put the pick in...

JF: Were you involved in this?

BM: Sure! As kids, in groups of 10 - 12, why? Because we would like to open the doors and steal their bread, or steal whatever there was to be stealed...

JF: How were you organized?

BM: There was no organization; we were a bunch of kids on the street. Then one *shagitz* [non-Jewish boy] would say, "How about if we go and bother the *Boche*?" *Boche* is derogatory for German, and everything to do for the *Boche* is a pleasure, you know. You hate the enemy. We hated their standards. We used to call them *Boche* and always the feel, and the bombing, they were guilty for the war. We didn't want a war. "So okay, let's go. Hey, Bernard." I was already a--I was always like a *gezunte* [healthy, strong] bull, they called me, I was a bonzo they called me, "Bernard, you take whatever you can." So when they opened, I could carry eight loaves of bread, 25 kilo of bread; 25 kilos was a third of

my weight. And I would run, I remember, like a guy with triple strength, but only I would run with the bread just to hide away. And what can they do? They shot, but sometimes they would catch somebody. But we were very nasty to the Germans. And our parents were so afraid of us to get harmed.

JF: And yet you had three Germans living in your house?

BM: Jews.

JF: But they were Jews.

BM: Jews!

JF: So, it was...

BM: Jews, it's different. Therefore, you remember, in Belgium, when you are born a boy, he knows the day he goes into the service, military--he goes into the military, he knows exactly the day. It's not like in America. At that time was defensive war, if you lived in Belgium, or in France; it's not offensive wars.

JF: What about your father? Was he...

BM: No, my father was never, because he was too old of a man. He had too many children. You see, after so many children, they didn't touch you. How did I became a Belgian? You have no privilege of the common Belgian in Belgium by being born in the land. That doesn't count.

JF: That doesn't count.

BM: There was one America in the world, that's the U.S. of America. This America is a heaven for all of those who have no nationality, or a bad one. What is a bad nationality--Polish, Russian, Rumanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, that's bad! American is good! What is good nationalities--Swiss, Belgian, French, Luxemburg, Lichtenstein, Monaco, those are the best nationalities!

JF: How did you become Belgian?

BM: Because I was the oldest of the boys, and I was from a large family. And there was a rule saying that my father was a "*Nansen Pass*"⁸ [stateless]. You know what a "*Nansen Pass*," because there was a tremendous disturbance amongst the population, there was a flow of aliens all over the world. The United Nations [means League of Nations] at the time, in Geneva, decided being there was such a wild movement of nations all over the world, they're going to make...

⁸Nansen passport for displaced persons.

Tape one, side two:

JF: ..the name of the pass--passport...

BM: The passport was a "*Nansen* Passport." And with that passport, the countries where you wanted to go, or they allowed you to come in, they couldn't throw you out again, or they did not allow you to come in, and that's it, period. You couldn't come in. Having his brother in America, my father had cultivated the idea of coming to the States, but America didn't accept him because he had a "*Nansen Pass*." Being that I was a child from a person who had no country, *apatride* that was called *apatride*. I put in a request to become a Belgian national. At that time, Belgium...

JF: How old were you?

BM: Eighteen.

JF: Eighteen. He was not--let me clarify this: he could not come to America because he had this passport?

BM: That's right. No "*Nansen* Passport" could come to America.

JF: Why?

BM: Because then America didn't want an influx of aliens.

JF: And he was not under a certain flag then by having this passport?

BM: Nobody, he was without a country. That's called *apatride*, without a country. And I was an *apatride*, and all the children and Mother. When I found out that I could become a Belgian, I start moving. At that time, my parents, thank God, they left me alone, and whatever I did to become a Belgian, I had to do by myself.

JF: What was involved?

BM: Oh, it was involved to run to the ministers, to the administrations...

JF: You mean the government ministers?

BM: The government, of course, and it was involved of getting all kinds of papers from the city, because in Belgium, you do not move. Although we are a beautiful democracy--they are a beautiful democracy, there is more discipline than an American democracy. We feel that democracy demands order, and without order, democracy is a farce. In America we are 220 million people. I have never had an automobile in my life; I've never driven. I've never had a license, a driver's license. What is my identification? I carry my American passport with me. It's cumbersome. It's not obligatory. If I want to tell you my name is Smith, you have no proof of telling me that I'm not. In Belgium, we all have an identity card. They tried to do it in America, but America with Civil Liberties and everything else, it's so involved. See, America is a big Goliath. When I step on your toes, until it comes to the brain, it takes 12,000 years. Belgium is a small nation. What is decided in the morning, at night it goes through.

JF: You were eighteen, you said, when you applied for this?

BM: Yes. No, I applied when I was sixteen.

JF: Had you been--you had finished your public schooling already? Had you gone on to any other kind of specialized...

BM: No, it was not possible, because my father decided I would be a craftsman. At that time, parents had decisions to make for children, and I was nine years old when I started to learn my trade. Going to school, working with father, and becoming an apprentice.

JF: You were an apprentice to...

BM: An orthopedic technician.

JF: I see.

BM: I was a brace-maker. And I was a glove-maker.

JF: Gloves, gloves and braces.

BM: Gloves and braces. One goes with the other. Belgium, not having a lot of the laws of protection for the crafts, for the working people, we had a lot of people losing fingers in shops and in factories. Was sweat shops! Our capitalism is like all over the world.

JF: So when you're talking about gloves you're talking about for...

BM: Regular gloves and for people who need a prosthesis.

JF: I see.

BM: Cosmetic. So from one you go to the other and you make a very elegant glove, too. But, mostly, I was an orthopedic technician. And I learned my trade.

JF: You were living at home with your family?

BM: Oh, yes, there was no other way.

JF: There was no other way, of course.

BM: You didn't even know who would dare to leave the house.

JF: During these years, in addition to the public schooling, you had gone through the traditional...

BM: *Cheder* [Hebrew school] in Hebrew, of course, and *Malamed* [tutor for Hebrew] and everything else. Then in the evenings I would take a--I would learn in the evening what I had missed, like, for instance, I had missed an History, I had missed in Literature, so I would go to evening classes and try to catch up. There was no points in it, but there was satisfaction, and it didn't cost any money. The time was very short because my day started five o'clock in the morning until eleven. Was long days. In those days, in the morning you had to have your prayers, then you had to help father work before you go to school, then you had to run to school, then you'd come back from school, then you have to pray again, and that's time-consuming. You had never time to play, you played outside.

JF: Was there any talk of Zionism? In your family?

BM: There was. I belonged to, they started a *Hashomer Hatzair* [a Labor Zionist organization] when I was thirteen years old. And my *chaverim* [friends] part on the second *aliyah* [Hebrew word for "going up," i.e. emigration to Israel] or the third *aliyah*, but I couldn't make it. I could not decide it to my father: you worked for your children; I'll work for my children. I couldn't do that. I said, "Pa, that's the way it is." When I start making money, I brought the money. In that my mother died when she was young, and my father

became completely unnerved, lost. He had lost a companion of many years; we were eight children, and--so, at that time I would bring in the wages in the house and the house would live, thanks to my income.

JF: And what about during the twenties in Belgium? What atmosphere?

BM: The twenties was the atmosphere; we always neighbors with Germany, it was when VonHindenburg, the Treaty of Versailles, political troubles, the USSR and Poland antisemitism. And once in a while my father would get letters from America from his brother and his brother would say, "Try to do something to come to America." And my mother was not to travel, she said, "America *ungliecken*,⁹ America *ungliecken*; why struggle in America? We are already here; we heard of antisemitism in America and then gangsters, and everything else." So my mother didn't really think of America, and America to me was so remote. Like for you remote is now Uganda. I had no dreams, ambitions, or desire of America. The only thing we liked from America is that pictures where everybody was happy: scrubbed houses, everybody was always making a good living. But when we start reading, and we read of Upton Sinclair, and we start reading the tragedies of life. Then we saw that America was really not such a heaven, but was really a heaven for those who were bloody, like the Vanderbilts, and the Rockefellers, who could step on ours and brains and toes.

JF: Were you reading in English at that time, or were these books translated into French?

BM: French, always French. My English was American, I don't speak now better than after three years in America.

JF: You were speaking Yiddish at home?

BM: Yiddish, French, Flemish and German. That's the languages we spoke in the house. Now for Mother and Dad, they bought the Flemish paper, because Flemish is similar to Yiddish. So I learned to translate, to read because of Mother, she lost her sight. At that time, we did not know much about, oh, modern diseases like diabetes, and God knows what else she had. So when she became blind I would get the papers, sit on her knee, sit on a little bench near her and read the paper in Yiddish. So she would say, "*S'is a Yiddisher Zeitung, Barel?*" [Is it a Yiddish paper, Barel?] And I would say, "Yeah, Ma," and then one of the children would say, "Ma. *Es is a lig'n.*" [It is a lie]. "No Ma, he doesn't tell the truth; it's a French paper." Mother would say, "Why don't you tell me it's a French paper?" And she would compliment me. And I've gained that knack, and today I can do the same thing: translate automatically three, four languages. We Jews have all kinds of talents.

JF: A valuable one.

BM: Oh, I admire you girls.

JF: Anyway, in 1928, you were trying to get your...

⁹Yiddish: Without good fortune.

BM: In 1928, so after...

JF: ...Belgian papers.

BM: Yes, I had made all my necessary requests and so on. And I had brought proof that I was an honest man, because in *vertig* [in reality] I didn't think, like I said, you have an identity card. The identity card is a little--I have one, an old one. It's a little booklet in which there is your picture and there is written the names of your father and of your mother, where you were born, the street on which you live, what is your occupation, when it was given to you. And then there is a number that says in what book and city where you are registered. You carry it in your pocket, and every policeman has the right to ask you, "Can I see your papers?" And you show it, that's all. No big deal, it's not a hassle. He just wants to know your identity. He's entitled to--and we don't see anything wrong with it. In America, harassment! We have to admit we are a young nation here, we need another five hundred years.

JF: Did this mean that you were a Belgian citizen to have these papers?

BM: No, if I were Belgian, I have a green card. If you are an alien, authorized to live legally in Belgium, you have a green with a white stripe.

JF: So did you get a green card then?

BM: Of course.

JF: You did.

BM: Absolutely. I had a white, I had a green with a white stripe until I became a Belgian, then I received a green one. Well, among the Jewish population, that was something. "*Unser zin ist a Belgium*." [Our son is a Belgian.] "Bernard Mednicki is a Belgian." That means "Everything is open for me." I can walk in a bank; I can become a street cleaner; I can drive a trolley car; I can become a policeman; I can open my own store.

JF: You can vote.

BM: I can vote. Well, vote is the last thing that we thought of because we never had that privilege. We never had that privilege, but then when I start getting that privilege, I became very much involved in political life because it's in you. Every Jew is an activist, this was so. If we wouldn't, we wouldn't be eat. I don't have to tell you, you know that. And I had joined, of course, the union, a syndicate, which was a guild from craftsmen belonging to the same profession.

JF: This was a Jewish guild?

BM: No, no, no, no, no.

JF: This was not?

BM: We are not that big, we cannot organize. For Passover we had to bring in the stuff from Antwerp. There was a nice Jewish congregation. But, we had, I think, one Jewish grocery store in the whole neighborhood, that's all. We were restrained. And, so I received authorization and at that time, Belgium is very prolific--a family of 23 children is not abnormal. In Webun [phonetic] there was a royal society of large families--you must have a minimum of six children. We were eight, so we belonged. So we had privileges;

we didn't have to wait in line for a trolley car. When the trolley car came, I showed you my card, you moved and let me go on top of it. If I went to a store, I would get a reduction in prices. On the train I would pay half a price and things like--all kinds of privileges.

JF: This is automatically for any family?

BM: That's the law; that's the law. More than six children belong to the "Royal Society of Large Families," and because of that...

JF: In order to belong to the "Royal Society of Large Families" you did not have to be a citizen.

BM: Right.

JF: Okay.

BM: And my father belonged because the privileges were there. You could get clothes for children; reductions. And Belgium always give children subsidy. For instance, if you are a working man and you had a child, you would get so much a month for the child. That's called "children's money." And, if you had six children, you would get enough because they were logical in the sense that if you and I would both work on the same job--you are a bachelor; you make \$100.00 a week and I make \$100.00 a week and I have four kids. Now, you will live much better than I will, but I have done much more than you have done for the country. So, therefore, you and I, we both paid a very small fraction of our wages, plus the employer, in a fund who would send "children's money" to the mother, not to the father. With that money she buys shoes, the necessary food and clothes for the children. And that was controlled by social workers. They would come and see the children are well dressed. See, we lived a very ordered way. The police would run the street and every policeman would know everybody in the houses. He would knock on the door, "Good morning, how come you did not wash your pavement today?" Extremely clean. No guns at that time. They had canes, the policemen. It was, of course, a more civilized world after the first World War. And then, after they told me I can become a Belgian--I had the papers--it's called *opter*; I had an option. And, I optioned towards Belgium citizenship. As I became a Belgium citizen, I knew automatically I have to make my nine months of military service. So, the military service in Belgium was that, you went in the morning at eight o'clock with your uniform into the *Kaserne* [barracks], where they give you all kinds of drinks and at night they gave you money for the trolley car, for a couple of glasses of beer and a pack of cigarettes, and you went home. That was deserving. So they trained like in Switzerland, you know, National Guard. And when I went in for training, after four weeks, there was too many soldiers, and being I was from a large family, they let me go. That means that at the end everybody was so proud to be a Belgian soldier with a little hat with a pompon on front you know, and my brothers and sisters. My brother is a *soldat* [soldier] and it was like, you know, it was something! Anyway, my father's name, Mednitzky's son--Belgian. After me, all the children became Belgian. Because I had put in that my brothers and sisters, who were born in Belgium, should become Belgian

automatically; at least have a nationality. But my two sisters, Rosa and Sheva, they couldn't because they were born in Russia.

JF: You could get citizenship...

BM: I, no, I worked that my brothers and sisters should get the papers...

JF: I see, I see.

BM: ...the nationality. But my two sisters, they couldn't. So my father was without a land, without a country, and we were both citizens.

JF: There is no way that someone who was born in another country could have gotten Belgian citizenship?

BM: Buy citizenship; yes, you can buy...

JF: You could buy it?

BM: You can buy naturalization. If you have a lot of money, you buy small naturalization. That means you can vote locally, for the local elections. If you have much more money, you have done things for the country, like many Jews have done, they give you the big naturalization--you can vote for Congress and Senate.

JF: But in order to become a citizen, if you were born in Belgium, was not as complicated if you were born there?

BM: Well, also you had to be able to prove that you were an asset to the country. Had I been a no-goodnick, they would not have allowed me to become a citizen. Had my father been disreputable, they would not have allowed him either. You know.

JF: You had to pay for it though.

BM: No, I did not.

JF: You did not have to?

BM: No, I did not.

JF: Your sisters would have had to pay.

BM: If they would have so chosen to become.

JF: I see; okay.

BM: But it was of importance. It was important to the young people born there. You see, my sisters being already aliens, then Mother died when I was 18 years old, 17 years old, and life has changed then.

JF: In what way?

BM: Well, in every way; father lost completely the desire to live. We were a large family. Only one sister was married and being that he lost all ambition. He still had Rebecca, Morris, Chara and Zula were still going to school and I was working. So, I brought my pay home and I worked very hard. I dropped my apprenticeship--I was an apprentice from nine to twenty one. Eleven years of apprenticeship to become a craftsman.

JF: From nine until twenty one?

BM: Yes, because it was a very rigorous training then. See, being a Prosthesis Technician was not an easy trade. That's paramedical; I had to learn, then I had to go to evening classes and learn, anatomy, whatever pertains to it. And, I was working with

masters who were very rigorous. After this, I worked but I couldn't make enough money, so I quit the job. And I start unloading barges on the canal, who paid good money.

JF: This was in what year?

BM: 1928-29. I would unload barges of soft sand, coal for good money. So you carry 50 kilo on your back, going up the ladder from the road, then you go empty them, all day like ants climbing up and down the ladder. Men, chain of men, doing it, unloading the ship. Today they have compact machinery, empty a ship in no time. Then, it was a job. After this, that job finished, and I went to construction. I was a mason's helper, carried the bricks on the third floor on the shoulders, and there almost broke the neck many times. After this I looked for a job--I needed money--so I went to a steel mill and I was working with a sledgehammer seven hours a day, breaking of the old foundry pieces. But like I said again to you, I was physically strong like a bull, and I worked with a rage and that rage helped me to survive. I was a big eater, when there was food.

JF: When you say you worked with rage, what do you...

BM: Rage--that why is life--mad at my mother? We had a good God. We were raised in Judaism. God is my father and here he takes my mother away, a mother from eight children. And Mother always in her fanaticism would say, "This world is a valley of tears. The real world, the world of life is *Haolam habaa* [world to come]." And we couldn't understand our Mother wanted to go. All right, we all love God but stay with us. So when He took her away, she died before *Chanukah*. Bitter winter. When she died, something happened to me. And in my heart, I hated God, and I didn't like it anymore. Because we did not learn Judaism was a philosophy, we learned Judaism was a fact of life, that is it! We're grown, of course; we understand better, we hope! In fact, who understands anything? Absurdity, all life is absurdity. So anyway, to go back to the story. I worked there for a long while, but my sister Rosa was very unhappy that I broke my training. In the meantime, Sheva became engaged--that's my second oldest sister; Rosa was the oldest and Sheva was the second. When Sheva became engaged and she married--in fact I found her children later; they are now in America, with us here--and she moved out from the house. So Rosa was responsible, and Rosa was like--in fact when I was born, Rosa was my Godmother. There was no Jews enough to have somebody being Godmother, so she was my Godmother. And you know, in families of large, of children, there is affinities [favoritism]. There was a clans. I love you both and I love her--oh no, but I don't like her, she is my sister. But I would side with you in case of something. So Rosa and I were one piece of flesh; we were one. I looked up to her; she was a short one and I was not a good boy, so she would say to me, "Maybe I should hit you, [unclear] until you feel better, Rosa." She was like a mother--unfortunately the Nazis destroyed her. So, in the meantime, I start getting--I worked until nine-ten o'clock at night, on my boss, and went back to my trade. And that boss had a big contract for the coal mines, to make special gloves. And there was those little things in between the fingers called in French, *fourchettes* [forks]. And those little things was a very tedious job. You have to cut them and match them to the color of

the skin. So, I could get this to take home to work at night. So, I would take bundles of scrap leather and I would stay on my bench and pull the leather, it's soft leather, and I would work on it until eleven, twelve, one o'clock in the morning. Because every time I would make an extra franc, it was more money to make it easier in the house. We were not *pauvre* [poor], but we didn't have the facility of having a franc in your pocket for spending.

JF: This was when, in the early thirties?

BM: No, no, no, no. Not the early thirties, 1920-'28, '29... [counts in French]

JF: '29.

BM: '29-'30. No, '30, in fact, I met my first wife. And things were getting better then; my sister Rosa found a young man and she married. Then in due time, a young woman came to the house, and she fell in love with my father. Well for us children, a young woman would fall in love with Father! It's like a six year old would say to you, "I want to marry you." But, nobody would tell Father that. And she was the daughter of a rabbi from Poland. Father took a trip, went to Poland to meet her parents, and he came back and he said, "Children, I'm going to marry. As I was 13 years a widower, or 12 years." No, no, no, no, not that long; he was a widower for many long years. And then he said to me, "We are going to get married, so will all the children will--Look, it is Father's desire." In the meantime, before he was getting married, I met a young woman, in the synagogue on *Yom Kippur* looking over to the girls' side, because the synagogue was a room divided with a blanket in the middle, and that's it! That young woman was in Belgium illegally. There was many illegal Jews in Belgium. The rules is like this in Belgium--if you come to work in the coal mines, you can work two years and get papers to become legal in Belgium. The Jews, they all came to work in the coal mine, but in two weeks there had our diseases, lung diseases, they all find diseases and they never work in the coal mine. Polish Jews, [unclear] weak parties, there was nothing, it was not the Jew of America. Do you, you are a golden product; you are a tall girl *kein ahora* [don't invoke the evil eye]. Where do you see girls like that? You are a giant for the Belgians of Franks [Flanders]. I'm the tall men in Belgium, small people. During the pogroms and the wars and everything else, we have been cleaned out. So, I met a beautiful young woman in the synagogue and she was here illegally. She was working in the lingerie, and I was friend with the boy of that Mr. & Mrs. Glicksburg. And that lady, she was extraordinary. She was extremely beautiful. Eighteen years old or nineteen, and she had two sisters in Belgium, who worked in factories. There was no other work; depression was there. And, I met that young lady--at that time she had brought a Jew from Cuba to sell her away; not to sell her, to marry, then get a nice piece of gold because she brought a pretty girl to an old man. So, when this young woman saw me getting very pleasantly influenced by her, and I asked her to go out. She said to me the first thing, "I'm not legal." "Oh." I feel that's good, if she is not legal; I can marry her and make her legal. You know, I scheme, when you love somebody you scheme. And, so my father said, "Why do you want to get married; you aren't even 21?" I said, "Pa, I will wait." And I waited, and I waited until I was twenty-one and a-half. And then, for the first

time in my life, my sister, Rosa, said, "Bernard, you must tell Pa that you want to get married now. If not, Pa's going to hold you until he wants you to get married." So, it was; I married, and I split my pay with my father, so that he should not suffer too much financially. In the meantime, he was going with that younger woman. And I rented one room, furnished. Started very modest--a bed, and a table, a little stove, and my bench. That bench followed me. I have my scissors here, my tools, everything.

JF: You still have your tools.

BM: Oh yes, [tsk tsk sound]. No Jew goes without. And you know this, I bless my father's memory. My father said a Jew must have a trade wherever he goes, should make a living. Now, assuming, God forbid, that you have to run away and make a living in Okinawa. What do you do? So you work. What can you do? You know the weaver, you know the pocketbook maker, you know the shoemaker, or a baker and a tailor? And my father had a good idea, he made a craftsman out of me, and I was always thankful to him. And I was always respectful, and I split my pay with him but I worked home very much. After work, I would bring home work and *Shabbos* [Sabbath] you not work. But some day I would work Saturday night and Sunday. I get no free time, but don't bother me, I was in love. So, the first year we had a baby. After one year married, we had a baby. And my father get married. And that made a complete change. He started making a living; he went back into what he did, and then he had a little boy, my little brother. My father was then fifty some odd years old. But of all the children we were, he was the most gorgeous one. He had teeth like pearls and eyes like jade, black, fantastic! And he was just unbelievable and everybody loved him, my little brother, Jacko. He was killed by the Nazis, of course. And then, I moved out from that one room. I had a good job, and I was a hard worker, and I rented an apartment. In Belgium you don't buy homes that easy. You can live all your life in a nice apartment. A house in Belgium goes from generation to generation. And, I was involved politically with the Socialist Party, like the democrats in America. I was an activist. When Hitler came to power in the beginning, in 1933, I start getting active against Hitler's political activities. We had in Belgium our own Hitler: our Victor Leon de Grell. Leon de Grell was the Belgium *Gauleiter* [Nazi district administrator]. He was ours, *Seyss-Inquart*¹⁰, a traitor. And, we bodily fought him.

JF: He was running for office as well?

BM: No, he was not running for office, he wanted to become the *Gauleiter*, like Hitler in Germany. Don't forget we were poisoned everyday by the news in French and in Flemish.

JF: There was a Nazi party then also?

BM: It was a National Socialist Party. *Partie d'Unité Nationale* de Belgium, they called themselves, National Unity Party of Belgium--against the foreigners, against the Jews, against the blacks, against the Free masons and the Judaic *Kabbalah* [Jewish

¹⁰Seyss-Inquart, an Austrian Nazi, was appointed Reich Commissioner of the Occupied Netherlands by Hitler on May 19, 1940.

mysticism]. That is what it was for, like "*La Kabale Judaique*." So, we start fighting bodily against them. I remember coming home with a split face because we fought with-- we had belts with big buckles.

JF: You had belts?

BM: Oh yea, we had groups--workers from our union and we would go fight meetings when they had.

JF: You would fight at political meetings? You try to break up political meetings?

BM: Sure, because you see the people is-- we always have found in the population a certain amount of people who are open to all kind of subversive permissiveness, hooliganism. If, today, I would tell my neighbor that he has a free hand to kill and rob, it would be he is a Jew hater, because he has no moral fiber. He is an alcoholic, and you have many like that, all over the world. America is no special privilege in that. It was the same thing in Belgium; so we were trying, if we cannot get him, it won't get poisoned by his propaganda. The police, of course, was trying to remain neutral.

JF: So they did not arrest you?

BM: They were disturbing us; they were chasing us; the *gendarmarie* with their horses and their long swords. They would, you know. We would attack them. Being the attacker, we were wrong. It's like when somebody hits you in the rear, and you are even guilty because you stopped brusquely, and see he was guilty in the back. And so, my son Armand was born and he grew up in an atmosphere where we had refugees already from Austria in the house, because we had to hear of fatalities of those who were running away.

JF: Your son was born in what year?

BM: [counts in French], '33. Is it '33? Yes, that's right. My son is 49, *keyn eyn horah* [without invoking the evil eye]. [unclear]

Tape two, side one:

JF: You said your son was born in 1933...

BM: Yes, he was born in 1933...

JF: And his name?

BM: Armand Mednicki. Armand, and he teaches here in a private school--Oakdale Day School. He lives in Doylestown, has a wife, has a son. He went through his share with me later on, of course, also a refugee in France. When he was born, the union paid for the maternity and, of course, paid for the crib and for the first week of nursing and everything else. It was part of the union plan we had. He was born in the center of Brussels, in a maternity. He was born in the month of January. We took the last trolley car to go to the maternity. And the water bag broke standing in the trolley car. "Bernard," she said. And I said, "Breathe and hold it, don't let the baby come," and so it was. The baby was born, an hour after she came to the maternity. At that time, the rumors of Hitler were not known. We started rumbles already because the German economy was totally decomposing. The mark, at that time, was like a million marks for a cent. It was paper and ink. And, already antisemitism was starting getting *Fluchtlinge*, refugees from Austria. Then later on the *Putsch*; then later on refugees from Germany, from Poland some. And in the house we slept six, on mattresses on the floor. And I would go to the bakery and I would buy yesterday's bread. It was three for one, and I would cook big batches of soup with bones and [unclear]. And Belgium was very lenient, they all accepted them. Gave them momentary identity cards; they shouldn't be illegal. And, at that time, some of them, see, were able to come to America. Some went to England, France. And in the meantime we kept agitating against fascism, against DeGrell who was the Gauleiter of Belgium. And, they start putting together their black list of those to be arrested first when Hitler would win. They knew that Hitler will win, because our democracy was a trustworthy democracy. We had signed a pact of neutrality like Holland in the First World War. Neutrality means that nobody touches you. But, Hitler didn't listen to that. In May the 12th, 1940, my little daughter, Eliane, one who spoke to me now, was one year old. And that night, May 12th, on a Wednesday, she was weaned from the breast, and I was walking the floor with her because she was crying, she wanted the breast. As I walked her, I hear muffled explosions--and we lived on the high point in Brussels, "in Foret" its called. I looked out the window and far away--about 15 miles away--I see little silver lightnings. And I put on the radio, and the radio said we were being attacked. Our neutrality has been broken. I woke up her mother, and, at that time, Armand, my son. The year before we went swimming. The first time we open a solarium in Belgium--we never had anything like that--so we went swimming all day in the sun. And Armand had a spot on his lungs from the sun, decalcification. So in Belgium is very conscious about tuberculosis because the Queen Elizabeth suffered of tuberculosis. Because of the coal mines there was a lot of tuberculosis. So when a child had it, right away they took him away and they sent him out

outside, outskirts from Brussels, in Vallee St. Lambert. And, there was a beautiful installation for children--they had everything they need--good food, good care, the fresh air. And I lived already very nicely. We had a nice apartment, four rooms, nice furniture. We lived very comfortably, I made a good living. And I was working for an employer who wasn't too far away from where I was living. And I worked for a Jewish employer. And the first thing is I have to go get Armand. Armand is like from here to Camden, New Jersey, and only by trolley car. We don't have automobiles, because there was no need. There is enough public transportation in Belgium to go from Belgium to France by trolley car. So I took Eliane in a basket--in the meantime, the *Stukas* [dive bombers] already start going low in the streets and dropping explosive bombs to scare the population. That was their tactic. They made panics, then they dropped the Fifth Column. Parachutists dressed like priests, butchers, bakers, and they would disturb the system.

JF: You had no idea that this was going to happen?

BM: Of course not! We were neutral.

JF: You were neutral.

BM: Are you believe that your husband is in the taproom drinking beer now? If somebody would tell you, what would you say? It's dumb. My husband is a responsible person. He is working.

JF: Did you feel that neutrality was that secure that you...

BM: Definitely! Because Hitler had promised that he would never break any country who would be neutral. But he didn't break our neutrality, he came to defend us on the help, on the call of Leon de Valant. Leon deGrell called him to defend Belgium. Belgium was in the hands--in almost the hands of Communism.

JF: I see. That was the rationalization.

BM: Of course.

JF: Before this time, did you talk at all about leaving Belgium?

BM: No. Of course not.

JF: You felt that you could stay there.

BM: Sure, it is my country. I am a Belgian. I vote, I counted, and I speak--I was an organizer. When it was depression and there were strikes, I was not afraid to manifestate because if you are an alien, you don't manifestate. This is not America where everybody has the rights here. I am flabbergasted and outraged at all the aliens taking privileges in America, like the Iranians manifestating in Washington. They are not even nationals of America. We say in the parallel, you are a guest in my house, you behave like a guest. You marry me, then you are a co-owner. But if you are a guest, then you are a guest. You have all the rights, but don't mix in my family life. So, is with America. Political--they have no rights, until they are citizens. We give them the privilege to live and work and study and do everything, and pay taxes, yes, because those taxes protects those who are here. And, believe me, I am not an empty nothing, because I went through everything. But that's my way to see democracy. Of course, I understand America being very young. We

still need a few hundred years to polish everything that we have and this is time alone can do it. There's no question of rushing, you cannot plant tomatoes today and reap tomorrow. You cannot get pregnant yesterday and have a baby tomorrow. It takes time. So is democracy. Takes time but we will and if, God forbid, America will not wake up to defend that beautiful democracy, then we are doomed. And, we all have to work together. I am trying to convince the people that we are in one little globe, one world, nowhere else to go. Black, white, Christians, Jews, we all have to work together. And if, God forbid, we are not going to do it, then it is not going to be good, because there are people looming in the shadow, waiting to take over.

JF: Let's go back to that time when these people were dropping out of planes, and it became...

BM: The parachutists. Well, Belgium became wise to them and they eviscerated them. They waited for them on roofs, jumped them, and just sliced them open like pigs. Throw them down from the sixth floor, the fifth floor. This is what we do.

JF: Who are you talking about now? Which Belgian?

BM: The Belgian. Any Belgian.

JF: Any Belgian?

BM: Any Belgian.

JF: Not just the Army.

BM: We were watching already the parachutes coming down. You see, the Germans they would come with their gliders, and we wouldn't hear them, because they would be gliders. You would just hear "swish" so they would drop parachutists dressed, like I said to you, with sabotage and everything else, ammunition to blow up and disturb the normal ways of life. But the Belgians became wise, and, we get watchmen on roofs. And when we were lucky to catch them, oh they just maimed them terribly because there was no more neutrality. And there was no convention of Geneva working because there was no act of war. That was sabotage. And this went on until the Belgian government--that was the 12th. Then my employer and his family, and my wife also, had her sisters living in Paris. They moved from Belgium to Paris. So, I took my wife and my two children, after I came back with Armand--terrible ordeal until I was able to get them to the trolley car as transportation, the alerts, the sirens going on every time there was another plane coming over. We put them on the train on the south station to Paris. Now, she was a Belgium born in Warsaw from Poland.

JF: Who is this?

BM: My wife.

JF: You were putting your wife...

BM: My wife and the two children...

JF: ...and the two children...

BM: ...on the train going to Paris.

JF: Under what protection? Or...

BM: The protection which should be had from Belgium. France was not fighting yet.

JF: Alright, there was no problem then?

BM: No, there was a problem. The trains were getting short. Because, remember, it was a *Blitzkrieg* [flashwar].

JF: Why were you not planning on going with them?

BM: Because I was a Belgian and I had to serve in the land in case they needed me for the military.

JF: Okay. Legally you had to stay.

BM: Absolutely. And, I didn't want to break the legality because if I am going to run, then everybody is going to run. Then there is no country.

JF: Was there any place for them to go in Paris?

BM: Yes, her sisters.

JF: Okay.

BM: So, I put them on the train going to Paris, and the trains were already horribly crowded, because the Germans destroyed, right away, transportation and everything else. I put them on the train and I went back to the hou--to the center of the city to listen what the news are. And, as I come back to my house, I was only away one night, in the morning the house was empty. In the same house--we were a house of four, five floors - already the neighbors had taken about everything. They took the bedding, and they took the linens, they went through the closets. And, I just found...

JF: Your neighbors had emptied out your apartment?

BM: Sure, all Christians. I was one Jew in the house.

JF: Had you ever experienced any...

BM: No, never. Never, because we did not expect it.

JF: But before with these people you had not experienced any kind of...

BM: Never. "Good morning, good night. How are you?" that's all.

JF: Do you think they did it thinking you had left, or do you think they did it because you were Jewish?

BM: [unclear], it was good. nobody would punish; no it was a Jew. Nobody would punish you.

JF: Before that time there was no expression of...

BM: Of course not. Of course not. So, when I came back to the house and I just saw from my *Bar Mitzvah*, a tray with 12 little *kiddush barel* [kiddush glasses]. In the commotion, I grabbed them, put them in my pocket and I took an alarm clock, and one coat was left in a suit. I had three [unclear]. So, I grabbed what I get and I run. And I went back to my employer and I said to him, "The house is empty." Oh yes, one of my neighbors said the Belgian Gestapo came. "Leon deGrell's armed men came for you." That was the second day.

JF: The second day after...

BM: Yes, the 13th of May. They came to look for me, the Gestapo, the Belgian Gestapo.

JF: Would you say the Belgian Gestapo...

BM: Was the men of Leon deGrell.

JF: Okay, they had been organized before the invasion...

BM: Of course. of course, they're paramilitary.

JF: But they had had no power.

BM: No, they had no power. But, you see, they were helped by the rich, the powerful in Belgium who were afraid of communism and propaganda. If you hammer long enough a lie, it becomes the truth. So, they were hammered by Hitler that the Jews are the one who own the world, that the Jews, the Jews, the Jews. So of course, every [unclear] and every capitalist--Belgium was a wealthy country. Belgium is one of the rich countries in the world. So after I saw that I went back to my employer. And the radio, at that time, said, due to the speedy attack of the land and we are unable to reconstitute our troops here, we all have to go into France, and reconstitute in Montpellier. "Go by your own means." So otherwise the 13th and 14th I was on the train. Come to the train station and my employer had a son about my age and his wife was expecting a baby. So he said to me, "Bernard, take my wife, I am staying here." I said "Alright," and I took his wife and I pushed her into the train from a window. There was no room to go in. And I pushed my way to the train, pulled up and swung into the train--there was no room. There was just room to be able to stand up. Finally, we come to the Belgium-French border. All those Belgians born in a foreign land, could not cross over to France. And my wife was a Belgian, born in Warsaw, Poland, so they had kept her on the border with the two children.

JF: Did you find her there?

BM: And I found her. That was the first time the coincidence made it that I found her. My little Eliane, the baby, because she just weaned her and she couldn't get the milk, she had water, so at once she became--she had an inflammation of the stomach. She had enterite [enteritis] and she was very sick. As I came, I start making a lot of noise. I am a Belgian, that piece of green paper. And, my wife "What's the matter [unclear]?" See, then, they would send all those foreign-born Belgians to France, but to another side, not a direct route.

JF: Your wife was not automatically a Belgian then by marrying you?

BM: Right. She was a Belgian by marrying me but she still was born in Poland.

JF: But this didn't make any difference at the border?

BM: On the border, no; it's like in America. Assuming that you are from Italian parents, born in Italy, you cannot come to America where there is a tremendous quota. Right? But, if you are of Italian parents born in America, you are an American automatically. And if you go back, you are born here, and you go to Italy and you live all your life, you have automatic right to come back here.

JF: What were your children considered?

BM: Belgians. Of course, from Belgian parents. And, even my youngest one has dual nationality. She was born in France. So, she is Belgian-French, now she is American. So, she says to me, "Papa, what am I now?" Typical Jewish.

JF: You are Jewish.

BM: Typical Jewish. And...

JF: So what did they tell you once you started protesting?

BM: Well, you have to bring your protest to the *gendarmerie* [French police].

JF: This is the French. Now...

BM: The French, the Belgium. You try to play it dumb because you don't know who is an antisemite. So, finally we went through. We come into Paris--the trains were packed; it was...

JF: They let her through then?

BM: Of course. Hey, I am there, no? I am a big noisemaker, who, *tochte lieben* [dear daughter], when I have to defend myself, I scream. I'm not a rageous person, but I speak frank. Cold. My French is good like your English. My English is not so good but alright, I manage. So, we came into Paris and my wife's sisters were waiting on the train station, knowing that we would come in that train, or another train, but two of them come. They were waiting for us. My brother-in-law was in the French Army. He was from Poland, but, he was a French citizen. In France, it was easy to become a citizen. And by becoming a soldier, he was, of course, a big citizen. And he was there, he was on furlough. And we kissed, we embraced, but you couldn't go out from the train station. We were going to Vichy.

JF: What were the arrangements for you to go to Vichy? That was required for you to go that far?

BM: Yes, we were 15,000 refugees from Belgium. And, in Vichy they prepared the race track. They had cleaned out and they had put fresh straw and [unclear] stables per family or they would put men together and women together.

JF: And at this point the Germans were glad to get you through France...

BM: The Germans were already swallowing Belgium. They were not in France yet. The Belgians put up a fight; well, this is history already. And after we had to eat--we saw my brother-in-law that time, the last time, he was prisoner of war for five years. He was on the Line Maginot, and that's it. Then after this, my sister-in-law remained in Paris and we wound up in Vichy. When we came to Vichy, the French treated us very nobly. We were French, there was no question of a Jew or non-Jew. [Phone rings. Tape off, then on.] We were in Vichy and we received a stall for ourselves because we were a family of four.

JF: You received a stall.

BM: Yes, a horse stall. You know, a stable. It was the stalls where they put the horse between the races.

JF: This isn't the town then of Vichy?

BM: That's in the town, the city. The town of Vichy in season had 400,000 people. Off season, 40,000. And Vichy is known for the waters. They came from all over the world for their waters. And, of course, Belgium and France is like a brother and a sister because we have a lot of affinities and there was always that alliance, French and Belgium. They received us royally. At that time, that part of France has always been very rich in everything; in farms, and in everything; butter, wine, grain, everything. So, they received us very well and we were receiving our three meals a day there. And they registered, on the loud speaker, intercom: everyday they would call up being that the population had swelled so much, they would look for a shoemaker, baker or whatever they would look to. They never came to me for a job because there was nothing that--then, suddenly, one day, they came out and they said that those who are Jewish should please register so they could get kosher food. So, I said to my wife, "You know what this, now we are Christians, now we are Catholic." See, I grew up in Belgium where Catholicism is the official religion, with Judaism and Protestantism. But I knew much about Catholicism, growing up near the church, in the church practically, with all the boys. In the street lived a priest and we were one Jewish family in the whole street. So my wife said, "Do you know what you are doing?" I said, "I know *autrement* [otherwise]; I know from fact," I said, "that this is not because of kosher food." We were but few Belgium Jews, and I said, "Listen fellas, everybody does what he thinks is necessary." See, before leaving Brussels, I went to my father, and I said, "Pa, let's run." Before that, I have to go back a little. We had a *seder* in April, was Passover, I think, ya, the end of April was Passover and that Passover precisely I wanted to go on my own. Already, I had two children, I want to be my own *balabos* [my own boss]. So, my father said, "God knows what's going to be next year, with the rumbling of war and everything else, let's have a *seder* together." I said, "Fine," and we had a *seder* together. At that time I had said to my father, "You know, Pa, when we run, we all run." My father said, "No son," he said, "what God will do with all the Jews, he will do with me." I said, "Pa, it's not wise," I said, "now." I said, "We all have to look," I said, "to save our lives, and running is the thing. We cannot remain here and be like sheeps." My father said, "You have your family. You do what you think you think you have to do."

JF: So your father stayed?

BM: My father stayed. My sister stayed, everybody stayed. When they run, was too late. I lost 87 people in the family. I lost 87 of them. My father, brother, sisters, uncles, aunts from my first wife's side, of course.

JF: All of your siblings stayed?

BM: In Belgium.

JF: In Belgium, and all of them died?

BM: My two nieces, my two nieces and one nephew. Coming back from school the parents were taken away--that was my sister Sheva and my brother-in-law Roger. When they came back from school, the neighbor said, "Your parents have been taken; quick run away and hide." The children were youngsters, they didn't know where to hide, so they

run to a neighbor. And, the neighbor gave them to somebody else who sent them away to a convent. That's where I found them later. And my nephew was in the French border, French-Belgian border. There, he was hidden in a monastery.

JF: Did these children know you, or did they...

BM: They knew me but when I found them later on, of course, they knew me. I'll tell you this later. So, yes, we'll come back to, of course. So, we remained in Vichy and we became Christians. Every other day--I didn't say nothing to Armand, because it was not important. I was with all the children and playing around. And we would sit with everybody else, and the Jews they would sit on an [unclear]. It was 15,000 people eating and it was the month of May, June, it was beautiful weather already. One day they would call out and say they need a man to work in the dairy plant who knows how to make butter and cheese. [That's my mailman.] During the war years the instincts say that you should always be near where food is. So I went for the butter and cheese job. As I came to the butter and cheese place, I said to the man "What is the reason that you need somebody to work here?" He said, "Well, the person I have steals a half pound of butter a day, and our population is so big, I need every piece of butter I can get and its money." He said to me, "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from Belgium." "How did you learn to make butter and cheese?" I said, "My grandparents were in the dairy business." Because when you lie, you must lie with knowledge what you lie. And I said, "Only thing is you have to show me one time what system you use because we make it differently from the French." He said, "Fine." And he told me, because he steals, I said, "I will never steal from you." And, I never stole, I took. Between taking and stealing is a difference. When you steal, it's for selling; when you take, it's for your own. But he never missed it because I was working very conscientiously. I worked there for about three weeks. Started 3:30 in the morning, received all the milk down from the mountain, and he had a regular dairy plant. I would sterilize, I would sterilize the milk, pasteurize the milk. First the milk would come down to me and I would test it. What is for human consumption, clean; what has to be treated for butter and cheese. There was a certain acid that you turn into the milk, turn the color, and so on. And you pour the milk in separators, the sweet cream, the heavy cream, falls in a bucket, and the skim milk falls in big, huge containers. In those containers, you put a little bit of rennet--that is made from the lining of stomach from calves, to gel the milk. Then you pour it in large milk vats and let it stand all night and molds and you let it ripe, you salt it, put it in shelves, in closets who are closed with special doors where the aeration can come in. And you salt the cheeses every day, you turn them over and you make a Saint Chevremont [name of cheese]. Delicious cheese. And I worked there for three weeks.

JF: In the meantime, where were you living?

BM: In the meantime, because we were a family, we had received an attic in a hotel. In a beautiful hotel. The people were beautiful.

JF: This is still in Vichy?

BM: In Vichy, of course. After the third week working there, I received a paper from the French government that they need my skills, to go and work for the war effort. And they send me away about 800 kilometers from Vichy, in La Vieille Sèvres.

JF: In where?

BM: La Vieille Sèvres.

JF: How do you spell that?

BM: V-I-E...

JF: Vieille Sèvres.

BM: I have never been a good speller.

JF: Two separate words. Yes, now in the meantime your wife and children were still...

BM: Remain there.

JF: In Vichy.

BM: And they would get a stipend, the same thing else a refugee from the Belgian Government. See, because the Belgian Government--the Red Cross was looking over us--hey, we were not just like that. You know. So, they sent me away to Vieille Sèvres. It was a tragedy: Armand didn't want to let go and Eliane was a little baby. She was only 14 or 15 months old. I was sent away. I come to a--that was a four hour ride, it took 50 hours. The bridges were blown and the trains with soldiers coming back from the fields, and we were going and coming, it was crisscrossing, it was sad. And, I left my wife who spoke French like I do speak English, with an accent. She was a Polish born Jewish girl and she was of the quiet, timid type. Like I was outspoken and I was outgoing, so she was calm. She was a *balabatish torte* [a good housekeeper], they call it, of noble upbringing. Like you would say in America, a JAP. She was a fine lady. And finally I reached my destination. In the meantime, I have received a paper and on the paper was said I have been requisitioned by the French government to go into work in that and that company, and the document said in the corner, "Secret." Secret document! I didn't see anything secret, but, alright, everything was secret at that time. Took the train, came into the place, then I came into the city of Niort, who is the capital of La Vieille Sèvres. N-I-O-R-T. I come into Niort and there was a tremendous amount of refugees. They had put up refugee camps and so on. So I need a sleeping quarters because I had to go another twenty kilometers out of the city, about fifteen miles. So I go to one of the employees there. I said, "I am a refugee and I need sleeping quarters." "Oh," he said to me, "we have plenty; sleep with all the refugees." I don't feel to sleep with 2,000 more refugees, with the pigs and everything else. So, I took out the paper from my pocket, and I said, "No, I cannot--Secret." "Oh," he said, "we have room for you." So, they gave me to sleep; a husband was taken prisoner before so the wife had a little grocery with her daughter. So they gave me sleeping quarters there. They received me very nice. And the house was one of those very, very old houses. And all night, in the wall, little mices were running up and down, up and down, you could even--So five in the morning I was up and I had to walk up to go to that

tannery where they make chamois skins. That is where I was sent. So I start walking on the road and here comes a heavy truck. I said to the fellow, "Where are you going?" He said, "I go to the chamois." So he takes me, he gives me a lift. I come to the chamois factory, and a whole village of 3,000 people would live from that factory. And, why the chamois factory was there? Because they have a special water stream running underneath the chamois factory and that water was to tan the skins. It was a special quality of the water, that was hundreds of years old. You know France is an old country. So the employer received me. And he said, "Crazy," he said, "the Germans are maybe 100 kilometers away, they send me people." I said to him, "Don't blame me," I said, "I have followed orders." "No," he said, "I have nothing against you; however," he said, "alright so go upstairs and work with the fellows." So I started working with them; they seemed very nice. Of course, nobody knew that I was Jewish. As of then, I never spoke of religion. And, after working there for about four weeks...

Tape two, side two:

BM: And I worked there for a while.

JF: You said that you just did not tell anybody that you were Jewish.

BM: No, that's all. When the subject would come up I would keep quiet that's it. I would like you to realize this was 40-odd years ago. And when 40 years went by I was much younger; in fact, I will show you pictures later. I had hair on my head, nothing on the chin. I was younger and I was not white. I was *chatin* [auburn] and I was not bad looking, and I could pass for anything you want to. I had nothing of the characteristics that the people know that the Jew has to look like. So therefore, I could pass very easily. With my languages, I was a natural, so that was very easy for me to be what I wanted. In the meantime, I have received, from the city, living quarters. I had received a slice in the dungeon of a circular room, where they had made like pie slices for refugees who would come. And be that I was employed in the factory for the war effort, so saying, they gave me that room. Now they know that my wife and children will later on join me, so they gave me two bunches of straw for blankets, an hygienic pail, because there was no facilities, so they give you a pail with a rim on it for the women and children to sit down for physical needs. And the men, they go into the fields. It's natural. And I was given box of candles; there was no light; and two boxes of sugar. That's what I received. And in the meantime, I was going to work. The fellows treated me very nice. I was invited every other night to go to another guy's supper and so on. And one evening, going back to my sleeping quarters, room or whatever you want to call it, I see a woman on the road, sitting with two suitcases, crying. I said, "What's happening?" She was a refugee from Paris. I said, "Can I help you?" She said, "It's the third night," she said, "I sleep outside." I don't tell where to sleep; there was no room to pack anymore refugees. They run away when the Germans were coming back; they were running from the Germans. And I explained to her, I said, "Listen," I said, "I'm waiting for my wife and the children, and I didn't realize that they couldn't make it." "But," I said to her, "I'm expecting them every day." "If you want to, in all due respect, if you want to split, I'll give you part of the room where I sleep." Oh, she thanked me very much and I helped her with the suitcase to come upstairs and she said to me, "Well, don't you think it's odd, a man and a woman in a place?" I said, "There is many more men and women in the same circle," I said, "there's nothing--that's your concern." "Believe me," I said, "I have no intentions whatsoever, I just want to share, I know what it means to sleep outside." She was altogether a teacher from Paris; she was 76 years old. She was still afraid to sleep in the room where men were. So she accepted and she shared with me. I received a letter from Paris, by Anna, first wife, from Vichy, by a miracle; I don't know how it came. And in the letter she said she is taking the train and she is coming to join me soon. And that's all I heard. In the meantime, my sister-in-laws from Paris, they had run away from Paris, because the Germans would go into Paris. They didn't run away alone. In the court where they lived, was about ten families. And one of the people of the ten

families was mover and he had a huge van. A big van. It was a twelve-wheeler. He loaded that van with about thirty people, and he moved away with them, away from the Germans. And he wound up in the town of Saint Liguère, no, in Marie Boussais. Saint Liguère is where I worked. He wind up in the town of Marie Boussais. And I still don't know how she found my address, my sister-in-law. I received a note, we are in Marie Boussais. That was only 90 kilometers from where I was. That's 60 miles.

JF: But your wife was staying in the stall...

BM: My wife was in Vichy. No, my wife was in a little room.

JF: Oh, this attic room.

BM: That's right.

JF: In Vichy.

BM: And she was trying to join me. As I received that letter, and the Germans were coming closer, my employer had to let me go. And, I didn't want to stay, because I didn't want to become a prisoner of war, because the Germans would pick out any man that they would see. They would pick them to send them forced labor to Germany. They didn't want any men to go around freely, young men. So, when they told me I can go, I have a map. In fact, I still have the map. I'll show it to you later, if you wish. And, on the map, I made a plan, how to go back to Paris, to Marie Boussais. I want to see my sister-in-laws, only being 60 miles away. God knows when we see each other again. So I plot my way, and I start walking, that's the only way of communication. And I made it, sixty miles in eight days. Walking the night and hiding in the day. But on the road I had found two other fellows. So I was sharing my sugar that I had, and the candles. And I gave some to them. And they had sardines and butter. One had a hunk of bread. We stopped in farmhouse at night and we could sleep in a shack. The farmer was very cooperative, very helpful. I took one of them to Boussais and it was very hot; it was the month of August. The heat was murder. I wear a heavy coat and I carry the coat on my arm. And I walk, and, in my heart, I figure the life of the Jew is always an eternal return. My father was running away from the Kishinev pogrom, struggled with his family. Now, here I am on the road, my family one way, here I am I'm going to see my sister-in-laws and as I walk, I hear the rumble of a heavy truck. And I put myself in a covert, I don't want to be seen. And it is a platform truck which stunk. So I stand in the middle of the road, stopped the guy, and he takes me on his truck, and he said, "You know what?" He said, "The Germans are on both sides. So when we pass, when we come there," he said, "lay down low." But, my curiosity made me not lay down low; I had to look. There was SS men running around naked in a stream of water in the ideal bathing, beautiful bodies. All naked. A huge amount of them, I don't know. Then I lay down and I figure, my God, look where I am going, in Marie Boussais, thinking I'm running away from them. As I come into the town of Marie Boussais, by accident, my nephew was there on the street. David. "Uncle Bernard," and he ran into my arms. And, I asked, "Where is Mama?" And he told me, "Mama," he said, "*est en grande queue* [in a great line]. [unclear] with all those people, and the farmers are pigs; they

exploit them just for sleeping in the stables, and a little bit of food, and everybody is working." And, my sister-in-law was a seamstress, and the other one was a fine housewife. So, everybody was working to the bone.

JF: In a pig farm?

BM: Yeah. Because nobody speaks French with French accent. They all speak French like Jew who speaks that is not born in France. And David was then 14-15 years old. And Albert his colleague, the son of the owner of the big truck, he was the driver, the sixteen year old boy, Albert. I come in and Mr. Sonder, "Ah, Mr. Mednicki." He knows me from traveling to visit my in-laws in the olden days and we spoke Yiddish, he said, "We fell in," he said, "we are afraid to speak, we dealing with *antisemiten*. They found out that we are Jews and they are exploiting it; we have to beg for everything." I said, "Fine, that's the end of it." I come in and I said to my sister-in-law, to my two sister-in-laws, "That's enough; pack *deine Sachen*, pack your stuff." And I go to the farm and I said, "No beef from you," I said. And I had an angry look. I said, "No beef from you," I said, "you exploited for the rest of them; I'm going to fix you." I don't know; I was speaking through my head. He said, "Here, take them." And we loaded the truck. And the outside wheels were good ones, the inside were flat, there was no tires. So mind you, we are thirty people, elderly, 78-80 year old people, young mothers with babies, and a...

JF: How many people are you talking about?

BM: 30.

JF: Were these...

BM: Refugees from Paris going to run away from the Germans.

JF: Okay, this whole group?

BM: The whole group. It's the old people living in one court. They lived in Montmartre, and my sister-in-laws were right there and my nephew was in there. So everybody was settled. So I came to them and I said, "Listen," of course I speak in Yiddish now and I said, "for the safety of everybody, when the children are ready to cry, you must pacify them. Those who get the breast, feed them. Even if the breast is always in their mouth. Those who have little babies, give them the bottle, but no squeaks because we don't know where we are going to go through." In fact, I was right. We had to go through the most populated Nazi region, in view to go back to Paris.

JF: The truck that you were in...

BM: Yes.

JF: Was it enclosed?

BM: Of course. Like a van, you know.

JF: Was it labeled in some way?

BM: It was a mover.

JF: It was a mover?

BM: Mover.

JF: That's all...

BM: It was a Parisian mover. That is all you saw in the war was movers. Movers. And huge trucks of--and then--the farmers with eight horses and a big wagon. On that wagon was six households. And that's all you saw on the road. So Albert was the driver, a sixteen-year old kid, and he was scared stiff. And it was up and down the mountains. So I stood on the step, on this side, and I said, "Look, I'll tell you when to close the..." We had no gasoline. I said, "I'll tell you when to close and go in speed." Because when we went down the mountain you could go just on the speed and I had a piece of wood, and when we would come on the bottom of the mountain, I would put a piece of wood underneath the wheel. See, that was a--don't ask--it was a very risky thing between no alternative, we had precious cargo in the back. And he became scared and frightened. In my pocket I had the top of a bottle, from porcelain. You know those French bottles that you open, beer bottles, soda bottles. I think and I said, "Albert, you know this?" "Attach it," I said, "to the *volent* [steering wheel], to the wheel." "This," I said, "is a talisman; it will carry you over anywheres. When you feel that you get weak, hold it in your hand, like a rabbit's foot; you will have the courage to do everything." That kid was driving and my heart was pounding. We had no gasoline, we had no wheels, and we came into the town of Saumur. Saumur is a big military school. In French, one of the schools of cavalry. And there is a lack for gasoline, from here to Camden, New Jersey. Park the car and I let them go off the truck and I said, "Disseminate, go two and three together but go different ways and come back in a couple of hours." So that we can aerate the truck and clean up. Diapers and everything else. Was no disposables then. They had old shirts and whatever *shmattes* [rags] they could find. As we snoop around I come to the gasoline station and I see Belgian SS men, from Leon de Grell, with the Belgian emblem. Oh, I come to them and I--"Sieg Heil--I am a good brother, I am from Brussels. So what are you doing here," I said, "when the *Fuhrer* will us allow to come back. See, I was sent away," I said, "to work for the French," I said, "but I am going back to Vichy to pick up my wife and kids and go back to Belgium, when the *Fuhrer* allows us to go back. You are a good citizen, you are a good Belgian." "Sure," I mean I spoke slang, Flemish slang. And, to speak Flemish slang you must be a regular guy. It's like, do you speak the [unclear]? No, you cannot speak like KNL. That's the language I spoke, KNL.

JF: They didn't check inside the truck?

BM: The truck was empty because all the people were going away. I had them all disseminated. I gave them three hours.

JF: I see, I see.

BM: Couldn't afford to leave. David was sitting in the truck with Albert, because you don't leave a truck alone. And Mr. Sonder and I were working. And Sonder said not a word because his French is like my English now. You understand me, but there is a terrible accent, and that's, of course--if you would be here, I would say this is Pennsylvania Dutch. So I said to the guy about gasoline. He said, "Don't buy it now because we mix with a lot of water." He said, "Now we trying to make money, but come tomorrow morning

at 4 o'clock, we will have fresh gasoline and we will be here, and we will give you. After all, you are a blood brother, you are a compatriote, and we treat you well." Fine. In the meantime, the people in the line, they, if they could have shot me with their eyes, they would have done it. I speak to the Nazis. And my heart was beating; you have no idea, because I was playing with fire. See, the Nazis were very suspicious. But, if you had the guts, and *mazel* [luck], that little bit of *mazel*. I was so lucky, all through the war, I was lucky. And so, we go away, everybody comes back to the truck and I said, "Now we going to look for food." And you cannot discern me from a Frenchman; I wear a beret and I look like them and I behave like them and I slouch like them and I speak like them. And I pick the accent very fast from wherever I am. When I am in Marseilles, I speak with an accent meridional; when I am in the North, I speak with the heavy accent, and so on and so forth. And I see people going to a café. Little door, one by one coming out with bundles and so on. I go into the café and there's tables loaded with bread and butter. I mean bread and butter. And they drink coffee and they have omelets and everything else. So I sit down on the table and the waitress comes to me. And I said, "How much do you want?" She looks at me; she says, "You stranger." I said, "No, I'm from the old village." "Oh," she said, "okay, but don't want anybody to know other places; they are just for us, we don't want to feed the refugees." I said, "That's fine with me. I said maybe you feed me, but can I take some." She said, "You buy what you want, you pay me, that's all." So, I sat down, I ate myself nice and round and I bought a bundle of bread, you know the flutes [slim long fresh bread], and she gave me a hunk of butter and I had money by me, I had received from the place. I go out. Then I sent David and Albert in and they ate and they brought out bread and butter. And one after the other, those that I deemed necessary, no, those that I saw could blend without the characteristics that the French know that they had to look for. So we were able to feed everybody. But for the night, there was announcements that there is sleeping quarters for refugees in the big castle. We don't want anybody to sleep in cars, in trucks and on the street. They don't want the Germans. So I said to my two sister-in-laws, you know what I said, two old ladies I don't want to go upstairs sleeping. The mothers with the babies, they can go upstairs. [Aside to interviewer] And my sister-in-laws took those young women and children and very slowly went up to that castle where to sleep. It was an old castle, round rooms, you know, straw on the floor, and they were there in the morning; about 5 o'clock, everybody was back. Because it was not so much the sleeping, them to get out from the car. I kept two old ladies in the car, and of course, my nephew, my boy, Mr. Sonder and I. Three thirty in the morning, Mr. Sonder and I would go with big pitchers, five-gallon, for gasoline. And there is a line. We make believe we don't see the line. My heart breaks, but I cannot help it. This is *pikuach nefesh* [for the sake of saving life] and I have to save my truck. I come to the front and I see the guys and from the line came out, "Traitor!" "Nazi!" "Boche," "Vendu" [sold to the enemy]. But, I don't see, and I told Sonder, I said, "Don't you ever look on the left side; if you look, you are finished, keep going." We come and the guy fills me my two pitchers. And he said, "The

best bet for you, when you come to Paris, go to the *Kommandatur* and tell him; they will send you home and they will bring your wife and children later." I said, "I'll do that. Good idea," I said, "because the *Fuhrer* can use me in Belgium, I can work for the government." When I was a youngster, I belonged to an acting group. And when you are an actor, you know what to do. And I was a natural. So we take the truck, we load it, and we are on the road. Now, we have to cross a river; la Loire, and on the Loire, the bridges were blown. So the Germans had made pontoons and the pontoons are just wide enough for our truck to go by with about six inches on each side. And I go to Albert, and I said, "Albert, listen, I'll stay in the back. I want you to ride and look in your mirror, watch my signal. You make one move and it is goodbye for all of us. So, remember, hold that Jig-jig in your hand, in one hand, that bottle cap, that will give you the strength." And he rides, and I am in the back, and I control him, and my heart fills up and that pontoon waves. And here was that big truck. Finally, I am already on the other side and we have to climb up and it's a sharp thing. And I see that he is going to go down and coming back at me and I pushed the truck like I would be friends with the giver. And the Nazis standing on that thing, they start laughing: that *dummer Franzose*. That stupid Frenchman, look what he is doing. Finally, he had the grip on the edge and he pulled themselves up. That is where I turned white and bold. That's where if I don't die, it was a miracle. We came up into Saumur. Now we are not far from Paris. Now to go into Paris, you know there is all kind of Portes, Porte de Clignancourt, Porte Saint Jean, Porte Saint Denis [areas on entry to Paris]. The Germans had forbidden anybody to come into Paris. They wanted a closed city. They want to know who is left, and who is not there.

JF: This was about what month?

BM: It must have been August, September. Yea, around there. Was still very warm. Mr. Sonder, being a mover, he knows little ins and out. And we came into Paris. We come into Paris, we go back to the same place where they lived. Everybody goes into their home; nothing has happened. But I don't want to stay. So he gives me a lift to the east station and I take a train to go to Vichy. And I want to buy a ticket. There is no train going to Vichy. Nobody goes to Vichy: it became the zone *non-occupée*, unoccupied zone. So, until, where do you go; they go to Orléans. [Mr. Mednick asks Ms. Fisher to hold a map so she can follow him.] Well, I just wanted you to see where I went. See what I mean?

JF: When you got to...

BM: So when I came into Paris, from Paris I went into the train station and went to Orléans. From Orléans I had to wait, and in the evening, with a group of men, we jumped in open wagons, when the train start moving. We pulled the door closed and we start riding. And we took the train and went all the way to Bourges. And in Bourges was a--the demarcation. We couldn't go any further, because the French would check the trains to see what comes in. So we jumped off the trains and slowly we slide on because there was German guard on this side and French on the other side. So we go down and there was

always a farmer on order, helping passing the people because there was the width of the [unclear] river. On some spots you could walk and some spots was lots of water. It was in September, you know, August, September. So we disrobed, made a bundle of the clothing and put it around our necks which is better than the belt and we waddled through the water--we swam part of it. We come to the other side. There is French people who help you already. And there was a French flag floating and the motion, the tears running, and they are embracing and everything else. And then, there were trains going already, radiating all over France. So I took a train and went to Vichy. As I come into Vichy, I had already--I wasn't shaved for a few days. Took me 19 days altogether, that was walking, and crawling. And one night we were so hungry we were during the day in a shack with a herd of goats. They were keeping them inside because if the German sees them, they steal them, you know. We were so hungry and we took goats and we washed the udder with a little milk, and then we took the udder, and we just drank from the udder. The taste of it was horrible, but in the meantime, we had full stomachs of milk. And, we survived like that. Going to Vichy, I got a few francs with me. And the farmers couldn't sell their stuff because the traffic was disrupted, so peaches and tomatoes were very inexpensive. And this is my nature; I am a food buyer. So I am going to the wife and children so I will buy a basket of one and a basket of the other. And I am so happy, I'm going to the hotel. As I come just in front of the hotel, *Source de l'Hôpital* was the name of the hotel. The people on the street, in the tears from the newspaper, the vendor knew me, they call me *Le Belge* [the Belgian]. I was always different than anybody else. I have a little moustache, and I was always the friendly type, I was always the speaking type. And, he sees me come, he says, "Belge, where are you going?" I said, "What do you mean, where am I going? I am going to pick up my wife and children." "My poor friend," he said, "your wife went to join you." I said, "What do you mean, join me?" He said, "Sure, she went to Niort, [unclear]." Ah, when I heard that, I dropped my peaches and I fell on the floor. I was just--so, they brought me back, took me to the hotel, and the lady said, "Your wife is in Riom." But, Riom, you know in the confusion, I said, "How did she make that long trip?" She said, "No, she is only 90 kilometers from here, 60 miles." "Oh," I said, "thank God; how could I go?" She said, "Let me tell you. When your wife left with Armand and Eliane, she had a little suitcase, and I had given her plenty food for the baby, and plenty food for the road." She was a nice gentile person but they knew we were Christians, of course.

JF: They thought you were Christians?

BM: Oh, yes. The word Jew never came into our mouth. First of all, they never spoke of it. And because they never spoke, we never mentioned it. Remember the old proverb, "Don't steal the nest."

JF: What about your name? Your last name?

BM: It doesn't mean anything.

JF: It had no connotation?

BM: Mednicki means nothing. It will be any kind of Woesburg, Bernstein, Silverberg, Cohen, Levy, maybe. My wife's name was Anna. In her passport it was written Chana Leah. But in France, where we moved later on--I am jumping the gun, but that doesn't matter. In the village where we lived in Valvic, where most of my story happened to be. This is only preliminary, coming to the real stuff. In the village of Valvic was a forest called Les Bois de Chana [phonetic]. And, it was hard to spell it. Was Shana; spelled like Chana. There was villages, you have seen Montluçon, Saillat-Lajin [phonetic]. The name Leah [pronounced Lailla] was spelled Lajin. So Chana Leah, to them, was not unfamiliar, Chana Lajin. So, and she had the personality of the people who lived there, [tapes stops and starts] so therefore she was very fortunate in that respect. And the children were children. So, when I start looking for her, and they told me that she is in the city of Riom--a train was bombed in Gannat and the Red Cross took the people to the nearest city, that was Riom.

JF: The train that she was on was bombed?

BM: Yes, the train she was on was bombed. She was on the train to go to join me to Niort but the train was bombed, so they took down the people. At that time, Armand took a wrong suitcase, dropped everything, they were completely destitute. They had nothing left. They were taken in by an attorney's wife, very kind person, who gave them hospitality. The lady from the hotel, who told me that she is in Riom, said, "Your wife is in good hands; she is with a lawyer; takes good care and don't worry; your son, everybody is well." To travel, at that time, you needed a special permit because the government from Paris was all in Clermont-Ferrand, in Vichy. And they traded on all the buses passes. In order to get a permit, you needed time, so I had no permit. And, you can understand, I was dilapidated. Dirty from the trip, from those long days traveling, [unclear] I was indecent and it was very hot. So, I stood--I go to the bus station and I look at the people there and I said, "Listen." And, I explained to them my case. All people well dressed, all *Fonctionnaires* [government employees] from the government, and I explained: my wife, children--am away for months. And they all had pity and they squeezed together and gave me a room. I come into the city of Riom, go to the house of the lady and a maid lets me in. She said, "The lady wants to speak to you." I come in, she received me very gracefully and she said, "Mr. Mednicki, when the train was bombed, your wife was alone and we gave her the guest room and we had a little carriage for the baby, and your son was taken care; he wasn't well. But, then refugees came a lot. We had about 600, so we had to clean out the stables in the back of the house. They are big stables and they cleaned it out and made cots and they gave us [unclear] 500 women, 700 children; and I couldn't make a difference so your wife is there with the children." But she said, "Your wife knows, we told her, the lady from the hotel called me that you are coming, and your wife is waiting for you."

JF: Let me ask you a question. At this time, it is still assumed that your wife and children are Christian?

BM: Oh, all the way.

JF: All the way.

BM: All the way. That's it. That's all. Nothing. That's it, all the way.

JF: You just knew that it would have been dangerous to have identified yourself?

BM: Of course. You see, when in a situation where there is license to kill and to rob, people are looking out for that. Not every individual can make the judgment, it's wrong or right. And I knew that, from the experience of Austria and Germany and Poland. And I thought it was the wise thing to do. Although it was not in my best wishes, but that was *pikuach nefesh* [for the sake of saving life], to save my life we have to do it.

JF: And you never had official papers?

BM: Nobody. No, I was very lucky that in the beginning, I had my head on my shoulders. Of course, at somebody, but we will come to that.

JF: Okay.

BM: So, I go and look for my wife. As I come into the yard, children, women, sanitary conditions, *épouvantable*, awful. It is September, the heat is fantastic. I come and look for my wife, and all the women jump on me. Man. All the men were arrested or were in jail, or whatever it is. And all the questioning: "Did you see that one, that one?" I saw nobody, "Where is my wife?" "Your wife went to the train station." I came by bus. The train station was just across the street. As I turn around and go on, I see my wife with Armand and Eliane in her arms. Armand saw me and gave a scream, "Papa." And he run to me in my arms. "Please," he said, "don't go away ever." He was sick when I left because we were very close, one to the other. Eliane was a baby that did not walk when I left, but now she is already walking, you know, like a baby, like a little duck, wobbling. Armand runs to me, grabs me with kiss and hug. And the little one runs and falls, her mother picks her up, comes to me. We are a family again. So the lady from this house had a small little shack where she kept a little donkey. So she cleaned it out and made it for me special; I had my own shack. The refugees in the village--in the town of Riom there were about 1,500. 1,000 were eating at the hospital. Three times a day they had to feed the refugees, they were nothing, destitute, because there was big poverty. And I said to my wife, "Where do we eat?" She said, "Well, we are fed at the hospital, breakfast, lunch and supper. And I didn't want to go to the Red Cross here because I was hoping to see you." I said, "Fine on me, that is the second time we found each other." "That means you must have *mazel* [good luck], that's what counts."

Tape three, side one:

BM: We go up to the city of Riom to meet the Belgian representative from the Red Cross. I was entitled to get some help from my compatriot. As we came, there was a young man by the name of Robert Duhin, a Frenchman born in Brussels, very sympathetic, extremely magnetic. And Eliane was a beautiful little child, and a child is always a bridge to a lot of sympathy, understanding. It can open doors, and so on. And, Armand, was a cute little boy. One day I will show you pictures. So he put me down on the rolls and we spoke. We spoke of Brussels, he was from Mixelles, I was from [unclear], and so on and so forth. We became buddy-buddy. In the meantime, we went to the hospital to eat. Riom was always a city of lawyers and great orators. We became acquainted with the director in charge of the hospital. And after I eat my supper there, I asked him for a job. He told me that I could work, if I wanted to. They needed a dishwasher. If, I know what to do. I said, "Of course." I know how to work. It was long hours with not much money, but the food I received compensated, at that time. For lack of many things, job of this quality was to take the food through the nuns. I was working, washing dishes, for 15-1000 people a day--metal plates. I started in the morning at four o'clock. Then, the cook was already cooking for about two hours. We had big copper pots, those old-time copper pots. The hospital in Riom is a hospital built at about, I would say, about 600 years ago from lava, black lava from Volvic and beds are alcoved come into the lava. That's old. The refugees were fed in the corridors from the hospital. In the kitchen they would prepare for breakfast, the food for the hospital. No, first for the nuns, the best food was for the nuns, the second food was for the hospital, and third for the clinic, the fourth was for the maternity, and then the food for the refugees. For refugees, they would make coffee from the fifth pouring of water over the same grind. They gave refugees stale bread, they shouldn't eat too much. They gave them butter with margarine, mixed together, although they had butter. And it was rationed. I came for supper and they had string beans cooked with sheeps heads and sheep legs and tripe. It's food. My son cannot eat it, my wife cannot eat it. They eat the dry piece of bread and they drink a glass of wine. I eat everything. I am a big eater and I eat everything. My son wants another piece of bread. I asked the Reverend Mother. She said, "No, my son, tomorrow is another day." "Thank you, sister." Before going out I go to the guy from the hospital, the Monsieur Jean, a little guy, and I said, "I need work." Dishwashing, fine. He gave me there a little salary, but it was for me just a question of being near the kitchen to be able to feed my family. I came to work the following day four o'clock in the morning. And in the kitchen was a young chap, about 23 years old, 24, and he was from the southern part of France, very garrulous very alive--outspoken. Received me with very big friendship and he was a communist. And there was a big crucifix hanging in the kitchen. He said, "Let's bomb Jesus Christ!" Here I come, I want to work, I have problems, and he is going to bomb Jesus Christ, and he is a young chap, 23, 24. He had nothing to worry, he doesn't have to serve, because he's a cook for hospital. He start

throwing eggs on the Jesus Christ. I said, "Throw my way, I'm hungry, could you feed me?" "Sure," he said, "what do you want?" "Make me an omelet from twelve eggs." And he made me a steak, a big one; that's four in the morning; and a bunch of french fried potatoes, a bottle of milk, a bottle of wine, a hunk of bread, and I polished everything off. Ya. He said to me, "Bernard, if you can work the way you eat," he said, "you are going to help me tremendously." Well, I start washing dishes. He fed me well, but I worked. My job was to feed, from the kitchen, where he cooked. Where I washed the pots and pans, on the other side, was a door giving to the dining room for the nuns. And a nun would take the pots of food what I would give. And between there and there, I took enough down to feed my family delicious food, no tripe, legs and heads. And we had to do everything with *sechel* [good sense], it shouldn't show. Now, my son Armand came to see me, and Armand was only six years old. So I would get from the cook, sugar in a handkerchief and I would attach it to Armand's suspenders and put it in his pants like a big package in the pants. I said, "Armand, you don't talk." "Papa, I don't talk." Armand didn't know anything that we were Jews or Catholics because it was too soon for him. He did not start Hebrew school. And he was not involved. We spoke Yiddish, but, here they show us like Flemish.

JF: So he was not told that he was Jewish?

BM: Armand was not--not yet, if you'll wait, I'll come to that too. And I worked there for a while but to sleep in that stable was horrible. The rats were so big I had to fight the rats the whole night, they shouldn't nibble on the children. There was a lady in the hospital who had a house in the mountains. Now, the mountain is just there. A huge mountain, it's an extinct volcano, it's called the mountain of Volvic. And just there you can touch it six miles. So she said to me one day, she said, "You know, *le Belge*, I could rent you a room for very little, just that you should live like a human being, with your wife and the children." I know my wife must love her, she is a beautiful person. Quiet, don't speak too much. But from appeal, she knows she is attractive. And the children were beautiful little children. She said, "And I can give you the room, you pay me what you want." I said, "I'd like to see it." She said, "So go up." And going up to me was--I thought it was a walk from an hour; it takes two hours to go up, and it's all up the mountain. But I was a good walker. I never drove or rode or anything else but walk. I came to the room. And in the mountains, the mountaineers are very hard people. They live a hard life. They are hard for everybody, for themselves, and they don't give you friendship. They are just civil enough to say "Hi" to you, period. And she tells me "That room there." The room is beautiful. It is square; there is a spring-box on the floor, one table, two chairs, a stove. And the stove has a bucket full of water, to make it; when the stove cooks you have heat. There is no other way to cook but this stove. There is plenty wood around. And we have near, a non-operating railroad, who has stopped operating because the quarry are using other transportations. So I had just the sun in front of me in the mountains, beautiful! On the right, I have a room for the children, downstairs lives a man who works in the quarries during the day. At night he is a poacher. There is a lot of poaching to do there, deer, rabbit

and pheasant. And he was around poaching. But that don't bother me. There is no facilities. There is an hygienic pail. When the pail is full with human waste, you go to the fields and it is fertilizer. The men don't use that, the men go into the field, period. Very primitive. There is one shower in the village and it's never used because you don't need it. Once a year you went to the vat to crush the wine anyway. So it's not necessary. And we decided we move up there. As we are ready to move up there, Armand gets a fever. In the meantime, that fellow, that French-man, Robert Durain [phonetic], I will call him, as of now, Captain Durain because he was my Captain. As of now, Robert Durain said to me, "Bernard, we stay in touch." And he had brought toys for Eliane and Armand. As we leave for the mountains, the French Red Cross help me to go up with the children and we received a few blankets and a few little things. We had nothing. We come into the room and that night Armand had a very high fever. Well, he has a high fever--I heard of a sanitarium behind the mountains. I know that I took him out from a sanitarium because he had a spot on his lungs. All the tests were negative. He had not tuberculosis. And his fever was so high that he starts speaking in his fever. I was scared, so I took him and I walked up five kilometers [about 3 3/4 miles] into the mountains with him to that sanitarium. I came there about 5:30 in the morning and there was a guard at the door and he let me in. I said, "I have a sick boy in my arms." "I must speak to the doctor," I said, "tell him that we are Belgian refugees." When he heard you are Belgian refugees, he made a phone call. He said, "You can go in." I go in and there was a lady doctor. Dr. Rechauzier. She received me and she said, "What's wrong with your son?" And I said, "He has a high fever." I told her the story of the sanitarium, that he had a spot on the lungs from the sun, so I was told. "And now, I don't know what I am doing. I have a little girl at home and my wife is not feeling well, and I don't have nothing to go by." She said, "All right." She disrobes him. Before going with Armand, a couple of days before, I had said to Armand, "You know Armand," I said, "the only way that you will know that you will be Jewish is first of all your name is Abraham, you know that." We always called him Avraim but now I said, "Now, your name is Armand." And then I said, "You have been circumcised. Only the Jews and the Muslims in Europe get circumcised, not like in America, every male baby. So therefore, in case anybody would ask you, "Why are you circumcised? You tell them when you were three years old you had an inflammation of your penis and you had to be operated; you know, if it's called circumcised or whatever, you were operated and that's all. Now, remember, we are Catholic." And, I spoke to him and he is very precocious for his age; I guess we mature very fast, some of us. And I said, "Armand, if you ever tell anybody that we are Jews, our life is in danger because we are Catholics from Belgium." And he shook hands with me, and he hugged me, and he said, "Papa, I will do everything I can that nobody never knows." The doctor looks upon me and I told her I am a Catholic. She said, "I understand." She knew. She was a Protestant, a Huguenot. She knew that we were Jews, but she did not say a word. She said, "Mr. Mednicki, this is a woman's sanitarium, of a lot of patients who came from Paris. They are from the regions around

France that Germans occupy, so we are full. However, I'll take your son." And she took him in. And she wrote me a letter that I should be able to travel, because you needed a special permit. I have the permit, I will show you in due time. You need a special permit to travel between one village to another, orders of the *Gendarmerie* [police]. So she gave me a paper in which she stipulated that my son had tuberculosis and in each case, and that I should be allowed to see him because the child is very ill. So, starts traveling. One of the neighbors saw Eliane, she was adorable and pretty. And she saw that we were not pushy people. She lent me a little carriage for my baby and we travel up to the mountains to see Armand, and that went on for about six, seven months. They kept him; he was alright, and he became the mascot of the women in the hospital. I have pictures from them. And in the meantime, when I was in Vichy, I wrote a letter to my father's brother in Philadelphia, not having an address or nothing, just trusting that Mednicki's Studio would be enough. And I wrote Mednicki's Studio, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He received the letter, and about eight months later, I received through American Friends Committee, through the French Red Cross, and another group of American Friends or French Friends, I don't know, I received a check of \$15.00. At that time that was the Taj Mahal. Was like an estate, a fortune. Just at that time, in the village, I was doing odd jobs. I worked on the quarries, I chopped wood, I keep busy; I have to make a few francs. And I made myself the reputation as a Belgian, as a hard worker. You can trust a Belgian. Now the French people are good drinkers. They make their own wines. I am not a wine drinker, not an alcoholic. But the necessity when you dance, when you dance, you dance with music. So I made myself a reputation of being a regular guy. I drink well, I work hard, and they looked upon me with a little bit different eyes than in the beginning. And I was working for an entrepreneur who had received a contract from the French government to clean up the walls of the ravine going to a railroad track that goes through the tunnel. There is a long tunnel from Volvic to Clermont-Ferrand. And to work on that ravine is "Ooh la la." Maybe 10,000 feet deep, the ravine. So you attach yourself with a rope on one tree and with a hatchet you cut down the trees and then you have to clean it and, and, I was working. The winter came; I was working very hard. In the meantime, in the village, I learned the ways of life, their procrastinations, I learned their idiocies, their ways of everything else, and I was able to go along with them very well. And 1941, that's [in 1940]. In 1941, I received a letter from the French government and I should present myself in Clermont-Ferrand. We lived in Volvic. I should present myself in Clermont-Ferrand with three days food and three days work to go help out in Germany for the war effort. I was to be sent out from France. That was not in my book. So instead of dressing up like go to work, I dressed up with the best I had. I had one suit and I had one collar. And I dressed up and I didn't take anything but a satchel underneath my arm, a sandwich for the day, what with a sandwich, a piece of old bread, whatever I had. And we come into the city. As I come into the city of Clermont-Ferrand, in front of a huge building like our football field where they play soccer, you know, baseball, what do you call it there, you know the field in JFK. Well,

they could get 20,000 people in. In front of it, was about 15,000 aliens milling around waiting for the doors to open with the same invitation. And they carry bags with clothes and food and they have shovels and picks. It was people from Alsace-Lorraine and from Les Vosges and from Normandy. It was Polish from the coal pits, and the iron pits, and the coal mines, you know, and they were ready to go. As I come to the place, they separated like they thought I was part, a part from the government. So as they separate, I kept walking. And I jumped to the door, the first one. And I opened the door, and I go in, close the door in the back of me and I look around. The hall is immense. And all around are chairs with tables and young ladies sitting in front of books and papers. I said to the first young lady, "I have an invitation: do you know what this is?" I said, "Do you know who I am?" Of course, we speak in French now. So she said, "I have nothing to do with this." I said, "You send me work." I said, "*Ah oui* [ah, yes], do you know who I am?" She said, "Sir, I don't know, but tell me," she said. And she looks in her book, "I may have other jobs. Do you know how to make pocketbooks?" That's a crazy idea like I would ask you suddenly, "Do you know to blow a trombone?" So, I said, "Yes, of course." I never say no. I will have time to correct later. I said, "Yes, of course, what do you want me to do?" "I need," she said, "some craftsman to make pocketbooks. It's for the German Army." I said, "Where?" She said, "Here in Clermont-Ferrand." I said, "Give me the address." And she said "Clermont-Ferrand."

JF: How do you spell that?

BM: C-L-E-R-M-O-N-T - F-E-R-R-A-N-D. And that's in the P-U-Y - D-E - D-Ô-M-E. Accent circumflex [accent ^] over the Dôme. See, the city is Clermont-Ferrand and the department of le Puy de Dôme, and the region is called L'Auvergne. You heard of La Seine, good! and that's L'Auvergne. In L'Auvergne, the people are very hard and L'Auvergnais they are a mixture of Sarazilians¹¹, and Turk and Italian and Spanish. They have been occupied for the centuries by all those nations in the mountains. So, she gives me four addresses, and four names. And I look at the names and I see three Jewish names and one non-Jewish name. Like I told you, pocketbook making is in the hands of the Jewish people, because it's a clean, small industry and it's a tedious job, and the Jews are patient. I figure why risk everything now that I have been able to escape everything: why go to the Jew? I go to a non-Jew. I go to Monsieur Orléans. Monsieur Orléans' place was "Eye of the Mountains" and as I come in that street, Eye of the Mountains, I open the door and go in. And in front of me stands the most gorgeous specimen of my people, beautiful curly hair, gorgeous black eyes, rich sensuous lips--I mean just the beautiful type of a Jewish man. "Monsieur Orléans," I said, "here is the paper, I need a job. I have been sent by the order of obligatory work." "Oh yes," he said, "I'll send you my foreman." And I see it's a big thing going on. Young man comes in, well dressed, beautiful, elegant, thin. "Mssr. Mednicki?" "Yes." And he looks, "Mednicki, Bernard?" I said, "Yes." "Born in Brussels?"

¹¹Sarazen: Saracen in English, of Moorish descent; *Webster International Dictionary*

I said, "Yes." He doesn't read the paper. "Born in Brussels. Did you live in this and this street in the first World War?" I said, "Yes." "Did you live on the fifth floor on top of a family called Zlotnick?" I said, "Yes," I said, "in fact Rogers Zlotnick was my friend, we grew up together," I said, "but after the war, in 1920, his parents left for France." "Bernard, I am Rogers." And we fell into the arms of each other. Well, what can I tell you? The emotion of it made that we both collapsed. After we calmed a little bit I said to Rogers, I said, "I'm not a pocketbook maker, I am a technician, an orthopedist." "It's all right Bernard, I'll teach you." "Do you know how to steal?" I said, "What do you mean by stealing?" "Well," he said, "you see, we work for the Germans. So they give us a quarter, we have to make so much from so many skins and so many materials, but we turn and we connive and we combine and we piece together--what they don't see, they don't know. And we steal, and what we steal, we sell, we pay those--we give subsidies to those families from the men in the resistance." That was my first knowledge with resistance. I said, "When it comes to stealing," I said, "you--I'm your man." So he taught me how to work. And I would travel--I received a special permit because I had that special German paper. I am working for the war effort for the Nazi empire. And I travel up and down, up and down. In the meantime, then, at night before going, a Jew was called a *dentiste*, or a Normand or a Breton. When, for instance, I would see you on the street, and I would think maybe you are Jewish, I would ask you, "Are you a *dentiste*?" Would you be Jewish, you would know and then you would say "Yes" or "No." If you would be not, then you would say, "I have never been a *dentiste*", or whatever. Second question is "Are you from Brittany?" It was like a password, like, you know. And in the shop, it was about eight of us, Jewish boys. Was two of them were craftsmen in the profession. They taught me. Then after two weeks I had three apprentices already myself. But the main job was to steal the stuff at night. You unroll skins all over your body, put your trousers on, put your jacket on, you walk out very stiffly. And he lived across the street. So we would go on the second floor and get unrobed [disrobed] and put down whatever we took and from the other side of the house they would sell it to the black market. With that money they would keep resistance families alive. So we are already, almost spring. And we sit outside after I came back from having my lunch--I was having a bottle of wine, a hunk of cheese and a piece of bread in a café, down the mountain street in Place de Jote. And as I was--the guy from the café liked me. Was two people, very elegant couple. About middle 40's, a little older than I am, and they took me under their wing. "*Le Petit Belge*" [little Belgian] they called me. I was pleasant to look at, let's put it that way, I was good looking. Well, I cannot help it, the truth is the truth. Look, self praise is not agreeable but you have to say the facts like they are. I can say that you are pleasant, agreeable, pretty, but, if you have to say it yourself, you have to. So, anyway, they liked me very much. And they said to me, "You know, *mon Petit Belge*, there is another Belgian coming here once in a while. We'll tell him that you come, maybe he can wait for you." So one day after coming back, we stood outside the place of business--we didn't have to go in for a moment--and it was cool, but nice. We see an old man,

Jewish fellow with a beard, an old man, trying to push a wheelbarrow with coal up the street. Now we had Spanish refugees from the revolution of Spain--maybe you heard of the revolution--who would be working with us. And we had a few *shicksas* [gentile girls] from the neighborhood, cheap labor, you know, apprentices, and they were laughing from the poor man who couldn't lift. I said, "You know what, you want me to play a dirty joke to that Jew? I'll tell you what I'll do; watch me." I go down, and inside, my heart, was tearing. I thought maybe my father, could be my father. So I go down to the man and I said, "What are you trying to do, eh, old man?" I had to be vulgar. "You want to put it up; do you know how to pull a carriage? Have you ever worked in your life? I'll show you," I said. And I give him a shove, took the wheelbarrow, ran up in the street and put it on top of the mountain. I start laughing and I said, "You see, that's smart, you are not." And the fellows thought it was a beautiful thing. Inside, I was crying. It hurt me, but the man didn't have to struggle anymore to bring the coal up. The Jewish guys, they knew it. And inside, they bawled me out, "Don't you ever do that again. Let him struggle."

JF: Did you ever clarify with your employer that you were Jewish?

BM: Of course, he knew it.

JF: He knew?

BM: Rogers Zlotnick knew it because we grew up together.

JF: So he told him?

BM: I suppose so. Of course, I suppose he told him. Hey...

JF: And was this man, was the employer open about his Jewishness?

BM: No, he couldn't help it. Yes, he was open.

JF: It was known?

BM: Oh yes, it was known. He was under the protection of the--see, the Germans used whatever they needed. And they protected you.

JF: Was Zlotnick known as a Jew?

BM: No, Zlotnick, no. Zlotnick was not known a Jew. Because, he didn't look at all. Not at all. So...

JF: They kept your secret?

BM: Oh yes, they kept it secret of everybody. Oh yes, definitely. So one day in the café I sat, and here comes in Robert Durain, from Riom; big man; armband; Special Service. And he came to me, "Bernard, Monsieur Mednicki?" He said, "Now we see each other." And he said, "what are you doing here?" I said to him, "I'm working," I said "for *Le Service de La Guerre* [war service], for the Germans." "Ah," he said, "and I," he said, "became now as the head of the department of recruiting aliens to send work in France and Germany." When I heard that a collaborator, my heart stopped beating. He was very sympathetic, very lovely and everything else, but, he was contact with the Red Cross. I had to watch my p's and q's. And I had to go to work; goodbye, we see each other again. And his office was not far from where I was working, two streets further. He said to me, "Instead of the café, come upstairs and have a bottle of beer with me, or a glass of wine."

So I said, "All right." Because I had to keep up some kind of friendship with somebody. Not knowing exactly if he was collaborator, so, it scared the hell out of me, but I had to. Come to his office and he had a lot of beautiful young women working in his front office; typists, steno, you know that, so on. I said to him, "What is that?" He said, "They are all from Paris, and they are my office help. This one's father is a minister, and this one's father is the ex-director of the Upper Rhine: it's all personalities." It was gorgeous women. He was a good looking chap who was full of magnetism--I will show you pictures, you will see yourself. And, we talked and here in the back of his office is three pictures of Pierre Laval, the French dictator, and Darlan, and then another guy from the government, Marshal Pétin. And I look at them and we speak--we speak of little things, a million little things. In the meantime, we received rations of wine, and tobacco was rationed. And we received like one ounce of tobacco, cute amount. Usually I would sell it for black market to buy food for the kids, for my wife, for myself. But here, I am dealing with a non-Jew, who is a big smoker and a drinker, and you remember the old saying, "Little gifts keeps friendship alive." So, I used my head and I brought him tobacco and he became very good friend to me. And like this, we saw each other. In the meantime, the events were going on. In the village was the resistance going on. And I would be traveling day and night, up and down, the food wasn't there, and it was bad. And one day coming down, I go to his office, and he said to me, "Bernard, I'm going on a mission to Brussels. I want you to give me your parents' name and address, and I will be going to them and bring greetings from you and the children, and your wife." That is all I needed. So, I said to him, "I don't know," I said, "and I don't think it is necessary for you to divert yourself from your official obligations to go to see my family; they live so far away." "Oh no," he said, "I have a car." He had an official car with a flag and gasoline. Because the cars, at that time, were going on charcoal, special system. I said, "Let me think it over." So, I come home at night and I said, "What do we do now, Anna?" And she said, "You know, Bernard, we trusted him that much, and nobody knows that we are Jewish. Maybe it is written, maybe that's the way it should be. Tell him." And the following day I come to his office and I brought him two bottles of my wine, that we had rations. And I said, "Robert, I have something to tell you of very grave importance and I like to close the door to your outside office." He said, "Very well." And I closed the door and he said, "Now let me hear; what do you have to say?" I said to him, "I would never have told you anything that..."

Tape three, side two:

JF: You said...

BM: I said to him, "You know that until now we were good friends. What I have to tell you may change the whole situation. In fact, what I am going to tell you may put in your hands the life of my family." So, sitting in back of his desk, he looks up to me and he said, "What did you do, kill somebody?" I said, "No, I didn't kill anybody, but I am Jewish." And with this, he looks up to me, stays up, he comes around, grabs me and kisses me on both cheeks. For a fraction of a second, I thought he was Jewish too. And he squeezes me to his heart and says, "Bernard, I am looking for guys like you." And he goes and turns the three pictures over. General de Gaulle is there, and two guys from the resistance, Marshall, and another guy. He said, "Bernard." He said, "I'm the coordinator of London [*Coordinateur de Revenants*] here in that section; I'm resistance, FFI, *Force Française de L'Interieur* [Internal French Force]." Well, I had to cry and he had to cry. And I said, "Thank God. I found somebody that I can do something for." He said to me, "Do you want to help me?" I said, "What question," I said, "If I have to die, what's better than to die fighting." "No, Bernard, we speak of life," he said, "no dying." I said, "What can I do?" He said, "It's like that. We pick up parachutages [things parachuted] from London; they drop ammunition, explosives, weapons, in the mountains. Our friends pick them up and they bury them not far from where I live. I am the coordinator and distributor." Because, you see, there was political parties; there was the Communist and there was the Nationalism, there was the Royalist. And everybody wanted to put their fingers in whatever came from London. And he was the coordinator. So, he said, "Bernard, I need you badly." So, in his car, after work, he would invite me. Of course, he had plenty of everything. See, he was with collaborators who did not know that he was not a collaborator. And those collaborators had everything they needed, wine, women, food, everything.

JF: About what year, what month?

BM: That was '41, the middle of '41, I would say. That's right.

JF: And can you tell me how to spell his name?

BM: Robert--you know how to spell. D-u-h-i-n.

JF: D-u...

BM: ... h-i-n. And he had a mother, he told me, she is sworn antisemite and an elderly school teacher, he was no youngster.

JF: He was no youngster?

BM: No, he was about five or ten years older than I am. Of course, at that time, to me he was old; he was 40 when I was 30. And I started working with him. I didn't come home at night.

JF: You explained, I assume, to your wife, what...

BM: I said to her, of course, "Listen dear. Now." You know we spoke Yiddish, like I told you, and I said to her, "The 'Passionar' [*La Passionara* - Spanish Civil War] in Spain had said a very good word. That we translate in a Jewish song, "Instead of living like the slaves standing up, no, instead of living like the slaves crawling on the floor, it is better to die standing like a man with a weapon in one hand." Therefore, I said, "Remember, my father before me, and through the generations of our people, somebody has to start, and, I'll start in my family." I said, "I'm gonna fight." And she said, "Bernard, what you have to do, you have to do." Armand was still in the sanitarium, Eliane was a baby. And I said, "I will take care the best I can with you," I said, "and don't worry."

JF: And you were still in Clermont?

BM: No, we were in Volvic. I worked in Clermont-Ferrand; we lived in Volvic.

JF: V...

BM: V-O-L-V-I-C

JF: Okay. Let me ask you a question at this point. Had you been able to have any contact with your father during that time?

BM: I wrote a letter to my sister; the letter came back. I have it. I have a letter. Came back censored and everything else. Nothing; that was it.

JF: Did you have any specific knowledge of what was happening outside of France?

BM: No. First of all, I lived in a remote village. The news were very strongly censored and I was in contact with no one; by necessity. There was a Jewish *Maquis* [French underground] near the Spanish border and I wasn't in touch with them. Through our *Maquis*, many people came through our village of Volvic and they went further south to the region of Evian. And, of course, you heard of Le Chambon. They went to Le Chambon, those people, but we didn't know. Later on, we find out. And so, I would come home twice a week, once a week., I would come home for a long weekend. Then Robert Duhin sometimes would drive me home. And he would bring food. And, in the village seeing that, I received a reputation of a collaborator.

JF: While you were with him, you were getting these explosives and burying them--this was your...

BM: My job was to go with him, pick up the explosives where they were hidden by the mountaineers, who picked them up in the mountains when from London it was parachuted. See, they had different type of mountains, you know. We lived in the massif central, near Clermont-Ferrand. There was mountains in La Correze, there was the mountains near Plaines de Limoges and there was the mountains of Le Puy. And all those--there was a centralization point, because if they dropped the detonators here, the plastic came here, if they dropped the machine gun here, the [unclear] of it was not there.

JF: So you picked these up before the Army was able to...

BM: Right. We picked them up and put them together and distribute them. That was Captain Duhin's job, to distribute, to see who gets it. Because we didn't want--see, it

was like this--there was the regular Army of General de Gaulle (FFI), then there was the FTPF, *Francs Tireurs et Partisans Français*, who were members of the communist party. They were actually the doers. If real jobs had to be done, they were on the top and we had to wait for orders.

JF: In the resistance?

BM: Yes, in the resistance. They were not part of our units. We were a legitimate unit of the French government. They were a faction, fighters for liberty for the French people. They in view to get weapons and everything else, had to scheme, had to do all kinds of things. We had it.

JF: So, his, Robert's job, technically, was...

BM: Coordinator and distributor.

JF: Of these weapons?

BM: That's right, of the weapons.

JF: Did...

BM: And all kind of, yes, explosives.

JF: And in his facade, in his job as the Germans saw him, did he have something to do with these explosives? Or this was totally on the side?

BM: Of course not. He was hunting the alien to send him to Germany.

JF: Can you tell me what it was like gathering these explosives?

BM: Well, I will tell you. At night we would go out about 6:30-7:00, and we would go out of the outskirts of the city. And it was lots of mountains and caverns and there would be containers about one meter long, more than a yard, a yard and a half long, and weighing about fifty kilo, 100 pound. One container was with explosive called plastic. It was a very potent dough-like material, smelling like almonds. Another container was detonators. Then another one was, cartridges for machine guns, rifles. We had small weapons. And we had two or three pick-ups a month. Those pick-ups were in the mountains. And until they reached us, we had a daily, practically, three times a week, pick-up.

JF: In other words, there were...

BM: You see, one came to Camden, New Jersey.

JF: Did you go...

BM: No, we did not. Somebody from there. We only worked in our region. Chamaillère, we worked. Everything came to Chamaillère. But, Chamaillère was out--mountain, in mountain--and instead of loading his car with a few, we could load really maximum. Then, around where he lived was caverns and mountains. Near the place where he lived, and in front of his door, was two Algerian guards, bodyguards. They would have sliced the throat of anybody trying to go through.

JF: So you had resistance working in the mountains who picked these up, brought them to his...

BM: That's right.

JF: ... his home...

BM: To his neighbor... to his neighborhood...

JF: ... to his neighborhood.

BM: And then, we would take it and bring it to his home.

JF: And then you reassembled...

BM: And, then, from there other guys would come with carriages with straw, or on a bicycle with containers of milk, and they would take their shares and go. That was the center of distribution.

JF: Okay. So that this ammunition was refed into the French Resistance.

BM: Absolutely. Absolutely. We were only the gathering point. And we worked like this quite a few months until one day he says to me, "Bernard, I have another job for you. This," he said, "for the time being we leave alone, I can use somebody else. I need somebody in a factory." In the city of Riom is a factory, who was making signalization apparatus for the subways of Paris. That factory is quite an old one since they installed the subways in Paris. That is all they made, signalization. I need laborer there. The Germans took over the plant with the craftsmen, fine, old French craftsmen. And the machinery, and all the stock, it was all copper and brass. And they start making--fitting out trailers with emission stations, and detecting apparatus where there will be illegal radio stations. And they would outfit this and send them in the field. He said, "We need somebody to sabotage this." I said, "What sabotage can be done?" He said, "There is the little oil shafts where they pour the oil to the motors. In this, you pour a powder we give you. And after working for a couple of hours, the whole thing goes bad." Of course they tried; it's good it goes out. It is still good. But once it's in the field, there it goes. Now, I live in Volvic, and I have to go down two and a quarter hours, the mountain, and go up three hours, and I have to be 3:30 at work in the morning. Because I have to start. Then already it was September, October. Now, of course, you realize we lost completely touch with anything pertaining to anything in Judaism. In the village, they know I was a Protestant, because they were Catholics. Robert Duhin knew I was a Catholic. His mother knew I was a Catholic, cause I am a Belgian. In the part of Limoges they know I was Protestant Huguenot because they were Catholics. I mean, we get to confuse them.

JF: And yet Duhin knew that you were Jewish.

BM: Of course. So after a while, Duhin said to me, "Look," then he gave me the job to go to work in the factory. I go down, I present, they look me over, I'm strong, I can get the job. When you take a job for the Germans, you could not miss a day, or you must have a good excuse. They would send the doctor, they would send the soldiers to pick you up. I don't know, Volvic is like the snow belt in Syracuse. In the winter, it's horrible. It is so cold that the bark on the tree would explode in the middle of the night, so cold it was. Now, I was underfed, there was no food. We would live on the rations. In the rations, sometimes we would get, for instance, hundred grams of beans, not even a half a pound, three ounces of beans, per person, a month. And I would collect that amount of beans and

you come home and you look at them, they are crawling full of maggots. But I wouldn't say nothing to the family.

JF: How often were you able to go home?

BM: Well, every weekend I would try.

JF: On the weekends.

BM: Yes, but from that factory, every day.

JF: Oh, from the factory...

BM: Oh yes, I would walk, I would leave in the morning and come back at night.

I would never stay out at night.

JF: And the factory was in what town?

BM: In Riom.

JF: In Riom, which is R...

BM: R-I-O-M

JF: M?

BM: M, yes. And in the factory I came in touch with friends. I was wondering where the powder would come to me. He said, "You go to work." So in the morning I started, and I lugged I--the factory was not modern; it was old. So they had rooms like my little house. And in the middle of the room there was a big potbelly stove that I had to stoke with coke. Outside the yard watched by the Nazis, by two soldiers, was a pile of coke, that I used to warm the factory. And I would go from one shop to the other, all day, stoking the fires. Or I would carry steel from one place to another in my wheelbarrow. Or I would go--on my shoulders carry a couple of bars of metal. I was busy all day. And I was working, and I was well known in the yard by whoever was watching there. "*Der dumme Belgier*," the dumb Belgian is there. Because whenever I go by, I would greet them, you know, like a dumb-bell. Don't ever show that you are smart when it is not necessary. So I didn't have to look dirty like the people of the village; I was wearing clothes received by the Belgian Red Cross. I had a jacket six times too big. But it was very good for me. I had a pair of pants that two men could go into it. It was good for me because, I could steal copper wire. I made myself, with ropes, suspenders, and I would slip a roll of copper wire, put in my pants and I had about 150 pound of copper wire, to steal. Like from here across the street was an old English dentist. And he would take the copper that would go out from the back of the house and he would take it up into the mountains. They needed telephone wire to throw through the city. See, the resistance was telephone operators, gasman operators, electricity operators. Everybody was collaborating.

JF: No one ever checked you to see that you were not.

BM: "*Der dumme Belgier*. *Der dumme Belgier* [the dumb Belgian]." I was running in and out with wheelbarrows always.

JF: You were such a terrific actor.

BM: I was good. I was dumb. I was never well-kept. I was always filthy and I was always with a piece of cigarette hanging from the lip. And I would always say, "*Gibs*

mir ein cigarette. [Give me a cigarette.]" And then he would speak German, I would say, "*Je comprend pas mon vieux.* [I don't understand old man]." [Probably meant to say, *Je ne comprend pas mon vieux!*] So I was able, like I told you, I was able to survive. Often, I would reflect and say, we have been told as children that our ancestors are always watching over us. The *neshamah* [soul] of our ancestors is watching. And I would always say, "Ma, please don't remove your eyes from me." Often, I cried. Oh, do I cried. One day I was going to work and it was bitter cold. And going down the mountain I was wearing wooden shoes, the *sabots*. I slid and fell right on my coccyx. And the night was dark, you don't have light--no way. And far away you hear the night owls, you know, "Whoo, whooooo," and then, a couple of wolves high up in the mountains, the barks. And then the droning of an airplane, and by the droning we recognized what it was and suddenly I feel things falling. Propaganda from an English plane who came, but I couldn't pick it up, it was pitch dark. And I am going down, ravines on both sides with my foot. If this was soft I know I was ready to fall off. And I would walk with my eyes closed and listen to the step of my feet and I was a fast walker. When I would come down from the forest into the factory, I was soaking wet. So fast I walked! And in my bag with food, I had a bag with rutabagas, turnips. That's all, I had nothing. They had meat and potatoes and bread and wine. I had nothing. And I walked with anger. And the fellows in the place were very nice to me. One day, one guy said to me, "Bernard, I will sell you fifty kilo potatoes." The small baked potatoes that they cannot cook, it's too much time. I said, "Good." So he lent me a little bicycle cart and I attached it to my wrist with my red handkerchief, and I was wearing a brown heavy jacket and my blue beret. And the feet I had with rags like ace bandages around the pants that should keep warm. And in the shoes I had straw that my feet should be warm, the wooden shoes. And here, I pulled out and suddenly a storm comes down. The rain and the hail and everything else. And I pull and I grab the ground to pull my potatoes. And my beret, the dye was giving out and there was no light in the house; the village light went out. So, when I came home, finally, God knows what time it was, my wife was listening on the door. She heard my step, because in the village it was all stone. And I was wearing a pair of shoes received from the Germans with hobnails and I had an automatic step, *un, deux, un, deux*--that was my step. So she heard me coming already. So she said, "Thank God." And there was only a small piece of candle, so when she light the candle when I came in, she looked at me, she almost fainted. The dye had come up on me, but that is nothing. I said, "I have potatoes. I have potatoes." So we brought up the fire; I had a lot of wood, and we put the potatoes in the fire. Half raw, we swallowed them. We had food. And in the morning I took the carriage back to that fellow. That fellow was an amputee from the hip. He was working in a pylon and the pylon was made from aluminum. And inside the pylon the guy had little envelopes and little bottles, dynamite, diamond powder, emery powder. And he gave me--he was my contact in the shop, to put the powder in those things, those machines. After working one year like that and I have certificates to prove that I tell you the truth because I couldn't leave from there. I had to leave; I couldn't

stay any longer. Robert said to me, "Bernard, I have a job for you, you try to leave now." And you can not leave until you are legally discharged; they don't discharge.

JF: So you worked in Riom for a year?

BM: I worked in Riom for a year. How am I going to go out? I know what I do. One day, I was watching in the court that the commanding officer of the guard, of that place, was speaking to the main engineer of the plant, a Frenchman, Monsieur Mathieu. And I see him speaking on the other side and I load the wheelbarrow with a ton of metal. And as they were there, with an effort, I throwed it on the ground, made a terrible noise and I fell down and I yelled, "My abdomen!" And I curled up like in a fetal position. And I screamed like I would have torn my *kishkes* [abdomen]. And they came running to me and they want to touch me. Nobody can touch me. I scream. I know what the hernia looks like, I should know, I make enough trusses in my life. And I know the symptoms and everything else. So they finally--four men--slipped a board underneath me and carried me upstairs to the infirmary. Doctor, nobody can touch me, I'm like this. So finally the doctor said, "I'm going to give him an injection." Then, I figure, "I better move my hand." And the doctor looks at me, he said, "Yeah, that looks to me like a torn abdomen, it's like a eventration. That looks to me like a double hernia. I think he should go home and wear a bandage, and lay in bed for two weeks." They drove me home in a truck. That things never happened, I could walk!

JF: The doctor examined you?

BM: Yes. But how could he examine me? I couldn't allow him. I just allowed him a little bit. I held my *kishkes*. I said, "I let my hand go and I'm dropping my intestines." And I was thin then, 160 pounds. So, I was able to do that. They drove me home. In the village was Dr. LeBlanc. He was a French doctor, a five by five. He was a good wine drinker. He died young from cirrhosis of the liver, but happy. And he came to see me, but he was resistance, so he put down a certificate to send back to the shop that Bernard Mednicki will never be able to do any hard labor again, being that he has torn intestines.

JF: Upon these examinations, doctors did not see that you were circumcised?

BM: No, because they removed only--hey, doctors have to be decent too.

JF: I see.

BM: You know he removed until the abdomen, that's all, you don't drop your pants like that. The French are very prude people, very prude. When men went to the men's room, was little things, not together like in America. You went to a big men's room where men is men and woman is woman. No, I was fortunate in that respect. That's what I was always afraid of. And I came home and the doctor gave me a certificate. I sent it in to the place. They discharged me. I was two weeks home. I went to the pharmacist with the truss prescription, and he was resistance too. And he bought the truss for two boxes of milk, powdered milk, and two boxes of formula, child formula. And he gave me a pound of saccharin, and I gave him the prescription from which he collected from the government about twenty five francs. Now I was invited by the mayor of the village. At that time, they

start making stamps, food stamps and the mayor of the village said to me, "Mr. Mednicki," they held me in high esteem, because they saw I am a worker and mind my business, I don't go to the cafés, and they see the way I behave with my wife, and I don't scream. "Mr. Mednicki," he said, "we are going to have to give out food stamps, and I really have no one to trust to give them out. We are only allowed 5% mistakes." That's the time when I received that money from my uncle and I held on to that money like to life. I had about 600 francs. Today, it's about \$7.00, \$10.00 maybe. And I received that privilege to work in the city, all I organized. First, I put [unclear]. There was 3,000 people. There was about 2,000 families, no, 1,500 families, so there was 1,500 booklets. So I took down my forty-five booklets first, and I left them 2% to the errors. At least we are. So when I finished giving out the books to everybody and I said, "Monsieur, the Burgmeister, Mr. LeMaire [mayor], we only had 3% errors." "Oh," he said, "that's beautiful." And I had enough booklets to buy stamp. With the food, the money I had I bought food, and I sent to my sisters-in-law to Paris. This you can do. You could ship food from out of the city to Paris, the Parisian reach.

JF: And that was not checked?

BM: That was not checked because it was legal. And because they wanted the population to be--and my sister-in-law had the right to remain in Paris. Also Jew, because her husband was in the French Army, prisoner of war. But my sister-in-law, her sister, was a Polish nationality. She was hidden in her house, in the bathroom, in a corner, three feet by three feet for two years. Only at night would she open a window to breathe a little. When the war was finished, she was yellow like an egg yolk, from the lack of anything, and the lack of food. So this came in handy for me to work for the city. After this, I was getting well and the doctor discharged me that I can do any kind of mild labor. A fellow from Alsace-Lorraine, resistance, had bought into an orthopedic shop in Clermont-Ferrand. And that fellow from Clermont-Ferrand who owned the orthopedic shop was Monsieur. D'Astugue, a Gascon man of 92 years old. He was in business from his father's time. Mind you, I found chastity-belts made from silver when I went into the place for the first time. Chastity-belt! If I had the brains then I would have a fortune, but then, when he said to throw it out, I crushed it and sold it 'cause I had no money.

JF: How old were they, do you think?

BM: The chastity belts?

JF: Yes.

BM: Two hundred years old at least, then, 250 now. And we throwed out everything. So he had a lot of wax dolls from Napoleon's time. I broke them and put them in containers, in bags, took it home to melt them, make candles. Hey, you had to live with everything you could find.

JF: Wax dolls?

BM: Yes. Wax dolls, you know, mannequins.

JF: Oh, mannequins.

BM: Mannequins, you know, orthopedic with trusses and corsets, and amputated and so on and so forth. And it was old, the man was an old man. You know, he was 91 years old and I see him one day come because he stood with us to give us the *courant* [news] from the *baille* [rent], and so on and so forth. And he said to me one day, "Bernard," he said, "I may die." I said, "What's the matter Monsieur D'Astugue?" "I can have no more sex," he said. Ninety-one years old, he can't have any more sex. I said, "That's it?" "Sure," he said, "no sex, no life." I had to laugh. And he died after that, short while, but he was a marvelous person. And then, the store was a big store. One was cosmetic, all ladies' foundation and apparel, and this side was orthopedic, in which I was in charge, with Dr. Streisgood. Dr. Streisgood had lost his voice. He had an operation and his voice was--he was speaking like that [words were whispered]. So I was his voice and I was his right arm. I was his alter ego.

JF: This job was also part of the resistance..

BM: Yes, that's right. Because there in that shop they had accepted a contract to make arch supports for the officers and the men from the Luftwaffe. Hitler was already after scraping the barrel of the men. He used everything that was crawling and walking. So in the Air Force he figured he don't need men who can't walk, but, so we made arch supports. So, I would take casts, I would take tracings, and while I would do that I would speak German to them. "*Ich bin ein Blutbruder. Habe schon so viel gesehen und das werden Sie nie sehen* [I am a blood brother, I have seen so much, you will never see] and I would ask, "Where are you from? Where do you come from? I'm from Brussels. And my family is from the Flanders. And I have a grandfather who lives on the German border in Malmédy." Ah, then I would get where he comes and when does he come and what is the name of the plane and how many men are there. And every little bit would help. Then, one day, Robert Duhin, who was not far from me, came. He said, "Bernard, I have an invitation for you. You are going to have supper with the elite of General Franco's officers, the French collaborators, and German officers." There was a big fraternal evening. He gave me a small camera, the size of a matchbox. Now, I was known amongst them that I was a good Belgian, a patriot, but my wife was not well and my son is in a sanitarium. Armand was no more in sanitarium. Armand was then in preventorium. After the sanitarium, they took him out and a preventorium is where they get adopted back to civil life. So I have pictures from that too. You know, it's funny, all those little things I could take pictures. I have, not, I didn't have a camera. But pictures I would love to have, I don't have any because there was no moment to think of it. And I went to that evening--home we had nothing to eat, just the bare minimum. And I come to that big feast of food. The best in bread, butter, meat; oranges, tangerines sent by Franco from Spain. We didn't see an orange or tangerine and I was collecting the peels where one German said to me, "What are you doing?" I said, "That's for my children." "Ach," he said, "Please." And he gave me a whole bunch of stuff. Now, I was wearing clothes six times too big, I told you, but I was dressed up. I had lost a lot of weight, so my clothes were--whatever spoon or plate I could

put into my pants I would steal. And because there was nothing--a young couple who would get married would get from City Hall stamps enough to buy two spoons, two knives, two forks and one pot, one ironing iron and a pound of nails. And of course, everything was barter. That, for instance, in the village was a woman, a nymphomaniac. [To interviewer] You have enough room? There's some gory details now. [laughs]

JF: Go ahead for a while, then we'll stop.

BM: That nymphomaniac she could throw, over a day, twelve young men. She was that type of a woman. She had twelve children from fifteen fathers. And she was a very well-to-do farmer. And her husband was always working. And they were collaborators, but not officially, they were swimming in the middle. And in the village the baker said to me, "Bernard, you are so hard up for everything, why don't you go to Marie Jalouille and sleep one night with her, she will give you all the food you need." Well, that's all I had in my mind, of course, you know. Here I am trying to survive and it's not in the making of--first of all, not in any circumstances, but now especially not; I love my wife. And my wife and I, we had made an agreement--also, we were young people, whatever shouldn't be, we'll try to remain honest one with the other. So I see that I have no alternative but to bring food in the house. I said to her, "You know," I said, "I'm going tomorrow play," I said, "with dynamite. You trust me, and I am proud of it, and you know I'm not going to cheat on you, but, remember," I said, "have confidence, let me play my cards," and I go down to the woman in the morning, 6:30, with the hugest basket I could find. And I took two huge...

Tape four, side one:

BM: And I go down to that lady, and like I said, I took huge basket and two huge containers like they put more than two gallon milk in it, and I walk the necessary four kilometers up to the castle where she lived with her family, lots of children, a huge farm and a lot of cattle. And the baker had told her that I would be coming. Of course, like I told you previously, I had all the necessary challenge to survive. And of course, it's forty-five years ago. We had a special, not so much sex education, but we have the knowledge of love. We know how to love a wife, we know how to love a mistress; we know how to love a friend; and we know how to love children and parents. I come to her and she was drooling and standing outside. She was a forty- year-old woman, and I feel, oh, heavens, I'm going to have to play very tidy. She's pulling me and I say, "Hold it! This is a rush. First of all, I walked so far and I'm very hungry. I must have strength. And then, after we're finished, we'll fill the basket. Later, I say. "No. Later, there is no later. You know better than that." I said, "First of all, let's be calm. If we're going to be calm, it's going to be charming, delightful, we will both remember. So let's sit down and eat." She put down on the table smoked ham, salted pork, a hunk of butter, and a big bread the size of an automobile wheel, once a week. But she had good bread, and a pitcher of milk, and a bottle of wine, and a big hunk of cheese, *Fourbe du Cantal* [type of cheese]. I'll never forget. And I took out my knife of the pocket--in fact, this is the original knife! I always have a knife in the pocket, and with that knife, I can sharpen it to kill a bull.

JF: This is the original knife?

BM: That's the original knife, yes.

JF: You were using then?

BM: And then you do like that, you take a piece of bread in one hand, like that, and a piece of cheese, and you cut and you eat, and then you put the knife down and sip on the wine, sip on the butter. And I sat there for about an hour and a half. She sat there and she was bursting on the seams, but she said nothing. She was watching me. How I was shoving everything into my mouth. I wasn't chewing properly, I was just...

JF: Inhaling.

BM: ...inhaling the food, I was hungry! And I cleaned the table maybe of five kilo of food. Now, of course, realizing the fully belly and my spirits, I wasn't hungry first of all, but now I have to see, to get food for the family. I said, "Let's fill my basket." "Oh," she said, "later." I said, "Look, later you will be tired, I will be tired. It will be a long time, and it will be time for me to go home." And she was having the hams hanging, and the salamis and everything they prepared themselves, everything. "We fill the basket like Bernard likes it." I had maybe 30 pounds of food; I had two containers full of milk and a hunk of butter. She had everything in the world. Now, that I'm ready for the amorous adventure. I said, "Don't pull me now; let me see the house." There were so many rooms, you know, and in the meantime I wanted to cool her off a little. She was so excited. So

we finally came to her bedroom, and I said, "Don't disrobe, it's cool, sit down with me." You read the story of Tarzan in one night, Scheherazade. That's what I did. I was a salesman, I promised the moon; I gave her the sunshine, I showed her the stars, we had no physical contact, like kiss and hugs, and that woman, she flew half a dozen times. She said, "The best time in my life," she said. "Never in my life have I had such a sensation," I said, "Marie, see, listen to the Belgians. We know how to make love." I said, "Now, remember, you can look in my eyes, I can look into your eyes; we have behaved like normal adult human beings. Nothing has been done that I should be ashamed to look at my wife, and you at your husband." Like her husband knows everything, but he has no alternative. It was a disease with her. Like I said, she threw over 10, 12, 15 young men a day. She was, as the way, she was a sickness. And before leaving, she says to me, "Do you know how to make soap?" I said, "Of course. Why do you need soap for?" She says, "There was a shortness of soap." I said, "Where are you going to get the fat?" She said, "We're going to kill a cow." "Ah," I said, "you're going to kill a cow," I said, "Well, you know what?" I said, "you keep a piece of the liver for me and a piece of the loins," and whatever I wanted her to save, I said, "save, and I'll make you the soap. Keep all the fat for me." I had about 100 kilo of fat, two big burlap bags full of fat. I *schlepped* it home on the wheelbarrow. Where we lived we moved and we had three rooms, one, two, three. The house was built 900 years ago with blocks of lumber the size of this table; not a drop of cement or mortar, just put one block on top of the other, three stories high. It's black lava; in the summer it's cool; in the winter it's cold. But we have a fireplace the size of the wall, in which you put one whole oak or one whole chestnut tree. And I *schlepped* this home. Now we have no water in the house and there is no sewer, there is no sink. We have a slab of stone going through a hole in the wall, where it runs into the sewer... in an open sewer. The water runs constantly from the *la source*, what do you call a source, the spring. Because there is a spring of water bringing the water to the village. I bring it home. And I start cleaning that fat and putting in all the pots I had and I started rendering it. I made *grieven* [rendered fat]. You know what's *grieven* are? That's delicious, you know. I never missed an onion because there was plenty in the fields, so I grilled the *schmalz* with the onions, and I jarred it, put everything away. Now I received from the Belgian Red Cross, two warm shirts, I took one shirt and went to the city. I went to a hardware store, and I said, "What you can you give me?" He wanted to give me one kilo of nails, and I wanted five kilo of nails. He gave me the five kilo of nails. I took two kilo of nails, and I went to a dairy store, and I said to the guy, "What can you give me?" And the guy said, "I can give you cheese;" I said, "No, I want butter." So for two kilo I collected five kilo of butter. I split the butter in two, and I go to a guy who was having a laundry. He was washing laundry for *les chantiers de la jeunesse* [youth groups]. When the Germans started taking the men, Marshal Petain at the time decided that all the young men between 16 and 22 or 23 must go to the *les chantiers de la jeunesse*, youth groups, and that fellow was washing the laundry and the sheets for that youth groups. All the sheets were made from 100% pure

linen, good for 200 years, at least, and he was washing. He had his own electricity, because he lived on the foot of the mountain, and the water coming down activated a dynamo that activated the electricity for the machinery. So I go to him with the butter and I said, "I need soap." Now in view to wash the laundry, instead of using the good soap the Germans gave him, he was using pulverized powder from the mountain's volcano. It's called *pusilan* [phonetic]. And he would mix ten kilo of *pusilan* with five kilo of soap, and he would clean the laundry, but it would tear apart in three months, and he didn't give a damn. So I said, "I want ten kilo of soap, for two kilo of butter." He said, "You're crazy." I said, "I'll tell you what, make a deal, I'll give you a kilo of nails, and two kilo of butter. I want 25 kilo of soap," and he gave me that. Now, that soap was synthetic, full of *pusilan*, it weighed a ton, but it was more dirt than soap. I take that home. I had *grieven* and the *schmaltz*. Now the *schmaltz* you cannot eat because it solidifies on the tongue, you know, that's beef. But in the village there grew a lot of walnut trees, and there is a mill who makes walnut oil, so you mix the walnut oil with that grease and it comes up like margarine. Turned out delicious, beautiful. So I would go to the fields with Eliane on my shoulders; she was then 2 years old, and I would say, "Tatala, pick that" and when the farmer would come, I'd say, "It's a child, what does she know." And I had a sweater ten times too big, attached with a belt and I would shove it in. I came home and I had fifteen kilo, thirty pounds of walnuts in my sweater.

JF: Thirty pounds of...

BM: Walnuts. And we sit at night with that knife, open them up, take the meat out and then I would go to the mill and I would get my three liters of oil. You had to live by the "noodle!" And then I came home in the village, the Belgian with the reputation--some stud! Because she had amplified. So when I came home, I was ashamed, of course, because when you love your wife, you do not try to deceive, but here it was, a question of trust. I came back and I looked in her eyes, I said, I called her *Chanelah* [phonetic], "You know, *Chanelah*" I said, "we did not cheat." She kissed me, she hugged me. We spoke Yiddish, for the neighborhood it was called Flemish. They never had seen a Jew in the village. We were playing with dynamite three times a day. And so, after this, there was a little episode in our life.

JF: Did you continue to trade?

BM: Always, always.

JF: With this woman you're talking about? Or was it just this one?

BM: No, that's the only time I would go to her, eh, how much--I'm only a man. I'm only flesh and blood. I can hold my head on the shoulders. There were so many occasions, I don't want to speak of it, it's not even nice to be told, but it was war time. In the orthopedics shop, we had allocations for elastic and rubber, for you know, varicose veins stockings. In view to get it, or ph--what do you call it, condoms, you know, *preservatives*, [French: condoms], we had allocations. So when the farmer would come down and he would ask me, "You have any condoms?" and I would say, "We have a few

but we cannot get them." I would say, "What can you give me?" We didn't want any money. He would bring a side of pork, a half a sheep, a little trundle of butter, or a bag of flour, or a little bottle, five liters of cognac. Not for--to barter. Money was of no idea. So here comes in a very elegant woman, I mean real *crème de la crème*, because over there was the old noblesse, from the olden days. And she had prescription for stockings for varicose veins going into the groin. In the orthopedic field, to me the human body is like for a physician, my comments I keep to myself, because that's all there is to. Anatomy is anatomy. A woman is a woman; a man is a man. It's bigger, it's smaller, it's pretty or it's agreeable. That's all. Here comes a woman with I mean, chic. And she has a prescription for long stockings. The first thing you ask, "What is your occupation?" Because the money is not important; you want to know if she bakes bread or if she makes catfish. So she said, "My husband is *chef du ravitaillement* [chief of food distribution]. He is the one who controls the inbringing of food in the department and the distribution to the commune, the neighborhoods." Well, that's all I had to know! I said to her, "Madame," I said, "because you have a prescription, but to the prescription, we don't get the necessary allocations to get the elastic to make it. For me in view to have that allocation of elastic, I will have to bribe. And in view to bribe I have nothing." "What can I do for you?" That's what I was waiting for! She brought me down a case of condensed milk, and she brought me down a case of children's cereal and bags of sugar. A man drove down a car and brought me maybe ten boxes. Then I measured for the stockings. Now you know, it was wartime, many men were missing. And women are human beings too. French woman is not worse than another, but a little bit more *osée* [daring]. Her husband was always on the road. She was very charming. So I measuring the stocking, and I measured. She was laying down on the osculation bed. And I go from the groin to the ankle. And she passes her fingers in my ear. And I figured that's it. It's not the first time, but I'm always scared of it. You never know with whom you're dealing. I lift my head, I said, "Is there anything wrong?" She said, "You are so beautiful; you are so charming. Do you have evenings off?" "Oh," I said, "I'm married; I have a wife and children, and I live in Volvic. See, my insurance!" "Oh," she said, "*En tout bien et tout honneur*" [with honorable intention]. I said, "*Je comprends naturellement*" [I understand very well]. I said, after all, I'm going to make her a woman of low morale, now, and...

JF: Translate it for us.

BM: After you shut off the machine.

(OFF RECORD)

BM: ...be made and sent to Lyon. So I take the measurements, and send away the stocking to Lyon, and I told her, "When I have the stockings for a fitting, I will call you." She said, "No, when it's ready for fitting, let me know, my chauffeur will pick you up. I don't have reason to come up here, and it's easier for me." Well, already I have experienced, and I know how to behave, because I have my love for me and my security; I am Jewish. This is a big thing. Nobody knows. Three weeks later, I get one stocking.

Call her up, "I'd like to fit." She said, "Would you like to have supper?" So I had no telephone in Volvic, so I called the post office and said to the post office, "Call my wife that tonight I cannot home, I'll come home tomorrow night." I go up for supper. She has the table set. "My husband is in Vichy, won't come back until tomorrow." I said, "That's nice." I start speaking of the children, of my wife, how beautiful you are. I said that right before supper. And in the meantime, I eat. Because I can talk and eat, you wouldn't believe it, I can outeat a storage meter. I ate. When the war was finished, I came back to Belgium, and I received my rations of food for the five years I was [not] in Belgium, and I was allowed to buy 600 kilo of bread or 6000 kilo of bread and I was allowed to buy 20,000 herring. I bought, my sister gave her my apartment. I didn't have anywhere to live, and I used to buy my food in a certain point where I lived before the war. I carried in my rucksack a pail in which I had sixty herring, and I bought three loaves of big, three loaves of bread and two kilo of butter. I could take a loaf of bread from the pound, slice it in two, put a half of butter, squash it, and take a bowl of coffee, dunk it and before you had time to say Constantinople--so hungry. I ate twelve herring with the bones, the skin, the heads. And when my wife told me "Bernard, where is it?" "Oh," I said, "I was too hungry, I couldn't see it." So that's the kind of a guy I am, people enjoyed watching me eating. Thank God, I got all my teeth so far. And then she said, she again came to me, she said, "You know, it's a lonesome evening." I said, "Madame, you know I have to deal with you. It's against policy of the company that I should get involved with people: it is too *dangereux* [dangerous]. Your husband comes in, my employer will find out, I'll lose a job. Do you want this to happen? Why don't we remain good friends?" "Good friends can kiss." So I kissed her, and she was a happy woman. And I measured her stocking. I gave her a *kitsle* [a tickling squeeze]. You have no alternative. And when I came home the following day, I told my wife and she laughed. She said, "Bernard, are you going through temptation!"

In the meantime, my wife became pregnant, and we expected a little girl. And this was the worst period in our lives--not to get pregnant. But look, we cannot do anything else, so Yvette was born in April '42. And I was operating the Resistance. Now, we're going to stop now because it is 2:20.

[This is a continuation of the interview with Mr. Mednicki on April 30, 1982.]

BM: So when the pregnancy went through, we were, of course, very concerned, having very little food, and I was very involved in the work with Capitain Duhin. So when the time came, I was able to scrounge together, from French refugees from Paris, a few little medicine bottles, eight ounce bottles of gasoline; and one fellow took out his car from underneath the hay, and he took a chance and drove me down to the maternity in Riom. In the maternity of Riom, the hospital was called *l'Hotel Dieu*, The House of God. It was very primitive, built, God knows, maybe 900 years ago. The alcoves, instead of beds in the maternity, were cut out underneath, underneath staircases from stone. And that's where little Yvette Rolande was born. Luckily, my wife was able to breast-feed her. After

spending ten days in the maternity, while I was involved taking care on the children; I had Armand home already.

JF: How long was Armand in the sanitarium following hospital?

BM: Just before Yvette was born. He was home just before Yvette was born.

JF: He had been away for how long?

BM: From September--until September the following year. From '40, to '41, Armand was away.

JF: A year?

BM: Yes, a year, between the sanitarium and the preventorium. And the preventorium was *in chamallière*, of course, in the city of Clermont-Ferrand. That's where they recuperated the children.

JF: Let me ask you something. You had questioned before whether or not Armand might be identified as a Jew during his hospitalization? Did anything like that ever occur?

BM: Never, no one has ever questioned it.

JF: No one ever asked.

BM: I think that there must have been some kind of a--let's not mix up the troubled waters, even if he is a Jew. They don't ask, I don't know, and there was nothing happening from it. And Armand never told me about it. So this period went through very quietly. So we brought back Yvette in a horse and donkeycart, and she came home, and the neighborhood couldn't understand how come the refugee has another child, but that was life.

And at that time then, after I secured everything home, I went back to my occupations. And slowly, Yvette was doing very well. In fact, the lady next door who had everything she needed, very wealthy family, long generations evolving, was wondering what Yvette was fed with, so good-looking she was. And we practically had no food. Like I told you previously, we had to stay in line for everything we could get, for stamps. And financially, I wasn't well; I was living on a subsidy from the Belgian Red Cross, where Capitain Duhin was instrumental, plus I was able to get from Capitain Duhin once in a while, something. So Yvette came home, and in the meantime, I went back to my occupations. And I was working at Streisgood. And working at Streisgood then this attack of the Gestapo happened into the town of Clermont-Ferrand, that's the raid where the University of Strasburg was raided, and arrested. Most of the leaders of the Resistance were from Alsace-Lorraine. When I came down that morning, two of my friends in the bus were arrested. The Gestapo was waiting, and they picked them both up.

JF: That was in what year?

BM: That was in '42.

JF: In '42.

BM: Yes, it must have been September. September, '42,¹² yes. See, dates are not very clear, because the truth is that when the events happened home, I never had in mind of tabulating or keeping track or holding a record, or putting down on paper anything. I never thought that it would be of family importance. The importance was the moment that we lived. So therefore, the fact that I have no documents besides official papers that I have received during that period, from Capitain Duhin, and later on from, different administrations, I have no pictures--I have nothing. Sometime I wonder how come people have pictures, but to me, at that time, it was not important. Of course, now, when I travel, I know better. I take and I keep a diary, and I keep a day-book, and so on the log, but then I had nothing, so therefore, with dates, I am very much mixed up. I only know what happened at that time when it happened, and when I went to the office that day of the raid--in the city you see that the news not widespread. Radio was not there, we had no radio; television didn't exist, of course. The paper was controlled, only was printed what they wanted, and then we didn't buy the paper because we didn't have the means. So we actually did not know much of the news what was going on. So when I came down to Clermont-Ferrand and I saw that the city was full of SS, and soldiers running back and forth, it was something disturbing. I went to my place of business, to the orthopedic shop, and as I come in--there was a corridor in two places. Like I said, an orthopedic shop on the left, and the ladies garment shop on the right. They made corsets, bras, *combinaisons* [slips], you know, underwear for ladies, and there was about twelve or fourteen ladies involved there. I had nothing to do with that department. And as I come in, there was a man in the back, and I was asking him, "What can I do for you?" I thought it was an Alsacian, because we had many refugees who would come to the store, or they would bring in information, or they would come to ask for some help, and Dr. Streisgood was from Alsace-Lorraine like I told you previously, so I was familiar with those people. And that fellow in the back was wearing a typical outfit of the Gestapo. He was wearing a loden coat, leather, a black beret, and two hands in his pockets, and you would see the point of guns. He approached me and said, "*Geheime Staatspolizei*." And *Geheime Staatspolizei* means Gestapo. I said, "What can I do, what do you want?" Right away, you know, all ideas run into your mind. "Streisgood." I said, "Dr. Streisgood is not there." As we spoke he came up from the basement where he was putting a guest, Dr. Streisgood. And he arrested him, and he made us in, in the right side, I didn't know, but there was huge group of Gestapo on the right side, and as I came in, with the Gestapo, and Dr. Streisgood, I see two Belgian young fellows; otherwise there were some other nationality, Gestapo with them. And they were all discussing, everybody was under the commandant employees. I looked at the Belgians, and I asked them, "Do you speak Flemish?" And they said, "Yes", so I started speaking the slang of the street, and to them, it was like a delight, to have somebody to speak the slang. So they asked me what am I doing here, and I said, "I'm an orthopedist, and I work

¹²The Germans occupied southern France in November 1942, *The Holocaust - The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945*, Nora Levin, p. 426

here, and my wife lives in the mountains, and I have a son who is very sick, and a baby who was very sick," and you know, you make it very pathetic. And of course, I said, "I'm waiting for the Führer. To make a way for us to come back, and to get out from France," I said, "We don't like it here. We want to go back," I said, "to live in the Fatherland with all the Belgians." "Oh," he said, "that's the spirit." In the meantime, the German turns around and he speaks to him in German and he said, "What's that?" "Oh," he said, "this is one of my good brothers," he said. "He's a national." I showed him my identity card, Bernard Mednicki. There was nothing to tell him who I was and my heart was beating, because in the orthopedic shop, I had a bunch of documents belonging to *Capitaine* [Captain] Duhin, but it was between stockings and between orthopedic appliances on the shelves.

JF: You mean documents saying that you were part of the Resistance?

BM: No, no, this was nowhere written.

JF: No.

BM: Oh, no. That's one thing you never do.

JF: There was nothing in writing.

BM: There was nothing; but there were some documents, propaganda dropped from the English; and I had a label that I found, from London you know, little momentums, but it was documents, enough to incriminate. So after they put everybody in the van, there was no room for me, so the Belgian said, "Wait, we'll come back for you later; we need you for the inquiry. But you are clean." I said, "Fine." As they left, I went in and took all the papers in my pocket, and called up Duhin on the telephone and he said, "Bernard, last night was bloody murder, they arrested all apparel of the Resistance in Clermont-Ferrand. And they arrested the student group, and they dissolved everything, and it was murder. A lot of killed." I said, "What I do now?" He said, "Bernard, listen, you take to the mountains; go to the *Maquis* now. And as you go to the *Maquis*," he said, "you will become part of the Resistance, but what part of the Resistance; you are finished working with me." "But in Volvic I have a lousy reputation as a collaborator." He said, "I know, but the commanding officer," he said, "from Volvic, by the alias Fox. I will give him a call." See, they had telephones, put from different spots through the farms; the Resistance nest, through the entrees of the telephone, we would go in the Resistance. And, so...

JF: This man's alias was again...

BM: He was the head of our company. His name was Soleavoup, that's a French name, Soleavoup, but his alias was Fox. F-O-X. That's Fox in American.

JF: Was that with the meaning also?

BM: He is a fox, that's right. He was a smart cookie. And you must be; if not he couldn't be the head of our department, the head of the group, you know, he was a *Capitaine* [Captain].

JF: So he was with the *Maquis*...

BM: Naturally, he was a seasoned fighter from another region, and we never asked questions, because in case you have to fall in the hands of Gestapo; if you don't know, you cannot tell. So we didn't ask, and we didn't tell. So this was about 10:30, 11:00 in the morning, and the bus never leaves before six o'clock at night. So I walked about twelve and a half miles up the mountains, back to Volvic. Came to the house, and I changed my clothes, and from the Belgian Red Cross, I had received fatigues from the Belgian Army, I put this on. And I kissed my wife, and I told her what's happening, and I said, "We cannot help it; don't cry, it's going to be all right." Armand was then going to school, public school, in Volvic; Eliane was a baby, a little girl, and Yvette was in a crib, of course.

Tape four, side two:

BM: I took off from the house, like I said, dressed in fatigues. And I had said to my wife, "I'll see the best I can do to be in touch with you." And I left. I am going to pass by the emotional impact of this departure. If we have survived without major defects, it's a miracle. I climbed the mountain. I was smart enough not to take the roads, because the roads were patrolled by some Germans. There was always a little plane flying, we don't know why, a spy, he would come from the airport of Clermont-Ferrand and he would fly around the woods, to try find where was the Resistance nest. So therefore I took through the woods. And as I was climbing, after about an hour, an hour and a half, I heard, "Stop! We've got you covered!" Now, I know that the Resistance had a file on me as a collaborator and I know that I was on their list. So when I heard, "We've got you covered," I stopped and I hollered, I said, "Don't shoot, I came to give myself up." Well, I know the rules are shoot first, and question later; my hands went up automatically and they start poking me in the ribs with machine guns. As I told them, "I want to see your commanding officer, Commander Fox." They relented a little bit; nevertheless, they thought it was a ploy for my sight. And another one came and said, "Finally, we got him, finally we got him." Must be very unpleasant and I was scared, terribly scared. As we came up from through the bushes, an immense plateau, where walnuts and chestnut trees were growing for many, many decades, immense trees. Underneath those trees, was the camp of the Resistance. There were shacks, stables, hovels. And as I approached from one of them to the other, a man came out from one of the houses, shaking his arm, and hollering, "Welcome, Bernard." As he hollered, "Welcome, Bernard," the fellows removed their guns from my back, and I run, I did not walk, we fell into the arms of each other, and he said, "Robert just called me and told me about you." Well, then the fellows, of course, started getting very happy about finding out that I was not a collaborator. After the first time the rejoicings went over, I was given two hand grenades and a pistol, and with this, I was told to go and get my own weapons. Because we were not rich enough at that time in our *Maquis*; because there was more important places where ammunition and weapons had to go. We were very rich, was in explosives, in sabotage material, because that was the purpose of the Resistance. To sabotage the war for the Nazis in any angle; blowing railroads, electric, supporting the cable support, dams, tunnels, bridges. Naturally, the price was paid, because every time something like this happened, in their brutality they would come to the village, take ten men, twenty women, shoot them, without question; trying to stymie our enthusiasm for sabotage. It is not in the nature of a Jew to be bloody, and I knew in the village a farmer that showed me that he had saved his weapons from the first World War. So I went to him, and with gentle persuasion, I showed him my two hand grenades on the belt, hanging, and I said, "Please give it to me without me forcing to get it."

JF: What was the name of the village that you were...

BM: Volvic.

JF: This was still Volvic. You were still central there.

BM: Everything was in Volvic. The farmer gave me the rifle, who was a French *Lebel* 1914, and a bottle with fifty cartridges, kept well. And I took my weapons, climbed back to my mountain and I asked the commanding officer, "I can understand the pistol, but two hand grenades, but why two hand grenades?" He said, "In case you would be attacked, you would throw one, and the other one, under your belt, you open and blow yourself, because you don't want to fall in the hands of the Gestapo or SS." It made sense.

JF: Were there any other Jews in this group that you knew of?

BM: There was one, a Russian Jew from Paris, who was not a Jew, at least he declared himself not a Jew, but he wanted to play the role of a commissar. He was a communist, and he wanted to play the role of a commissar, but we just left out of him. He was not a tactician, and he was not a planner, and he was not a diplomat. He was just a little arrogant snip of a Jew, and I made believe that I ignored him. And he wanted to impress. And like I said, a little dictator. He wanted to be a commissar. That didn't work.

JF: Did you ever talk with each other about being Jewish?

BM: Ummm, mmm [no].

JF: Or you both pretended that you were not.

BM: I could see that he is Jewish, because his name was Jewish, and I think that he was known as a Jew. And I didn't recognize him, and I didn't tell, because once I took that tremendous responsibility of denying what I am, then I could not until things went better. See, because we had to make allowances in case Hitler wins the war--what happens then? So we decided, we'd climb all the way up, really in the mountains, and get close with farmers and sit to survive as much we can, and go to church, do like our ancestors did in Spain. For survival purpose. It never happened. We were very thankful for that. So, after I get my weapons, the fellows admired the *Lebel*--it was a huge rifle, very clumsy, very heavy, from the first World War. The commanding officer said to me, "Bernard, you know how to shoot it well?" I said, "Of course." Never had a gun in--I was besides in the carnival. But this was something else. I put a bullet, an accurate bullet and after I gave the first press on the trigger, the ricochet made me fly back fifteen feet and everybody laughing. So as of then, I never carried a rifle; I always had a bag of grenades. I became a grenadier. The hand grenade was the best weapon for me. And that's the way I became Resistance. Now I needed a uniform, and in view to get a uniform, our uniform was a *brassard*, an armband. I don't know from what miraculous way, but we stick together enough material from a bag of flour, to make an armband from old hats. We had girls with us, too. From old hats, we were able to cut out pieces of felt, and we sewed on, and we made FFI, *Force Française de L'intérieur* [French Force of the Interior] and then with a rubber stamp, we had an official stamp, the FFI, the *Croix de Lorraine* [Lorraine Cross], and this I have.

JF: You still have your armband?

BM: That's my uniform. This I carry with me. If you stop the machine, I'll bring it to you.

(OFF RECORD)

JF: Tell me the reason for using the armband in terms of the treatment that you would get if you were caught wearing this armband.

BM: It was a known fact that as of the occupying of the Nazis whoever was in the Resistance was a terrorist. A terrorist was summarily tried and shot. So, therefore, for us to be regular army, of General de Gaulle and called *Force Française de L'Intérieur* [French Force of the Interior], we wore armbands or a patch. It was a distinction between those who were from the FTPF, *Franc Tireur et Partisan Français* [French Shooter and Partisan], the left wing of the *Movement de Resistance*. They were extremely active, but they were not supported by General de Gaulle.

JF: They were considered the terrorists.

BM: They were considered terrorists, so were we! Not that they give us special treatment, but for history, and for payment of later on, the justice, we could claim that we were officially the Army of France, fighting the enemy. De Gaulle had said we lost the battle; we did not lose a war. He made a statement that the *Force Française de L'Interieur* and his army in France, where he cannot come, but then when he debarcated, when he came into France, automatically, the French Army had sovereignty over the FFI. And that's where, because I was a Belgian, I could legally step out. I could have served in France, but I did have the tremendous desire to go back and see what's happening to my family.

JF: If you were then under De Gaulle's...

BM: authority.

JF: Had you been captured, would you have been shot, or would you have been treated according to the laws of the Geneva Convention?

BM: Shot!

JF: You would have been shot.

BM: We would have been shot. They wanted us to observe the laws of the Geneva Convention. They screamed bloody murder if we didn't, and I must say in all fairness, that we didn't. Because there was no way we should, after what they had done. They approached some of our friends. He was a pharmacist and she was a pharmacist; and she was pregnant. They inserted in her body, in her vagina, a machine gun, and we found her body with nineteen bullets shot into her. We found him later, his lungs floating outside his cavity. They had opened the rib cage and pulled the lungs out. We found them dead like that, both of them in the forest. We found the bodies of our friends, and remember those two friends of mine that were arrested coming down from autobus, from Volvic to Clermont-Ferrand before the raid, we found their bodies. They were tall, six footers, and they were so tall that they broke their legs, to be able to put them in boxes, and they buried them in the forest underneath the trees. Later on, their bodies were found, and we made national funerals in Volvic. And I was one of them who carried the boxes on our shoulders, and I was on the night honor watch. There was no embalming and there was no metal caskets. In view to remain awake, we were drinking gallons not liters, gallons of brandy,

because the stench of the decomposition of the body. And the morning was the funeral, and it was a state funeral in the village of Volvic. And there was done by the Nazi, but then they wanted Convention of Geneva, and that Americans gave it to them.

JF: These people were all in the Resistance...

BM: Yes, the Resistance.

JF: ...the pharmacists, and this is what happened during the war by the Nazis.

BM: In 1943! So you understand, I have never been back in Germany--never! I traveled all over the world, and I was by accident once, our plane was detoured because of bad weather, and I wind in Frankfurt, and you wouldn't believe how my heart was pounding. And I felt the blood seeping from the stones of Germany. Couldn't go back. Of course, it's very hard, when you are emotionally involved, and when you have paid so dear, with the ones you love, and all your people, to have much love. But that's part of being Jewish, I presume. We cannot keep hatred, if not we would have to hate humanity, and we are not a people with hate. This is part of our problem, I am afraid. We should have a little bit more, although it's not possible. We are what we are.

So, let me come back to my story, now. So, I had my uniform, my *Brassard*, and life in the *Maquis* was not easy. There was a group of fellows scrounging the countryside for food. They knew the mountains, they knew the farmers; was very rich land. And they would bring down whatever they could. Sometimes we had wheels of cheese, and barrels of wine; sometimes we ate a pig that we had to stick. While the pig was still squeaking, we tore it apart. Sometimes we had bread. We went into actions at night, most of the time blowing up electric stations, and sabotaging railways, railway signals.

JF: You mean putting explosives...

BM: Naturally, yes, plastic explosives with detonators, that we received from London, of course.

JF: From London.

BM: Yes, London with parachutes, like I did previously with *Capitaine Duhin*. Now *Capitaine Duhin*, later on, was part of intelligence on the higher level. And, in one of his operations, around France, around Montarg is exactly, he was wounded, and he was wounded badly, and he was smuggled out of different departments until he was smuggled into Switzerland. From Switzerland, he was able through Portugal, to go to London. When he came to London, I do not recall exactly how, but I received notice that I should wait for a message from him through the radio. See, up in the *Maquis*, we had a radio. I don't know if you recall, if you ever read, maybe, because you are too young to recall; you weren't even born and, you were a baby maybe, so at that time London had signals and coded message. Like, for instance, "The Black Cat from Bliteriss [?] danced twice," and they repeated it twice. Then we had a message who said, "The Black Cat has arrived; everything is good," and repeat it twice. The Black Cat was my *Capitaine* Robert Duhin was in London, and he could sent a message to tell me that he was there--I was not only the one

who was anxious about this behavior and his going and coming, so we knew that he was in London. I am jumping ahead of the story.

JF: How would he get to London?

BM: I told you, from Switzerland, he crossed over from Switzerland, Evian and the French-Italian border, and went up to the Pyrenees, and he went through Spain, and from Spain, into Portugal, and from Portugal to London.

JF: On a boat?

BM: Of course, Portugal was neutral. That's the way he came to London. Then later on, he was in the occupation army of France, and he was a judge in Schweinfurt. He was presiding over the destiny of traitors and Nazis, and when...

JF: He was a judge after the war in...

BM: He was part of the French Army *d'Occupation*, and with the French Army *d'Occupation*, he was a judge and he was able to distribute justice, and order and distribute justice, doing it in a justifiable way. He couldn't just allow his emotions to take revenge, you know what I mean. He was part of French, German--French, American, English and a Russian, quadruple tribunal always. But nevertheless, later on, when we saw each other, we met twenty-five years later. Twenty-five, that's a long story, I get involved, okay, I get side-tracked. So after we fought, we went on expeditions. And once in a while we were able to come home, and we would bring food. And the village was considering, my family with more kindness, and with those in Resistance, we were a large group of fellows from the mountains, where we lived in the village, and there were merchants of cheese and wine, selling groceries, and their wives would support the wives who were didn't have, you know. And I wasn't of no help of course, I was a refugee.

JF: Did the people in the village then know that you were in the Resistance?

BM: Of course not, they didn't know I was in the Resistance. And the priest of the village, Father Mathieu, he was an elderly man, and all the refugees--and he was bothered by the fact that I never went to church, or sent my family, because I wasn't Protestant, but we were Christians and that satisfied him.

JF: Did you know of any priests who were helpful to Jews in the areas in which you were living?

BM: No, there was no Jews in Volvic, period. There never was; they never saw any.

JF: So you were not acquainted on a personal basis, then, with any of the rescue operations or hiding?

BM: No, but I know of people coming to Volvic who were not officially Jews, that I could in my emotions, feel that they were Jews. And they would go further--we'd direct them to Evian, from there to Chambon. You've heard of the operation at Le Chambon? Many people from Volvic went to Le Chambon, and we were aware of this. Le Chambon, but in a very vague way. We didn't know the name of it. We know it was somewhere and that's it. The rescue operations--no, Volvic was a dangerous nest. The

Gestapo occupied the village and Hotel Martinon. You know, every village has a main street. And we had two hotels, one across the city, also one on the main street. The main street, you had the fountain and you had the church, and on the left side just *Place des Vieillards*, the old home, then below was the priest's home and the fields. It was only a village. They grew vineyard and lots of vegetables, but mostly that was a quarry town; they exploded the lava from the volcano that was extinct for 25,000 years. And after all that time, I start knowing the people; they start knowing me and they were not a friendly bunch, they were "correct." They were not garrulous, they were not like the *Marseillais*, who was all songs and dance, and they are mountaineers working hard for everything they have. And life was not easy, although we managed to go by. Because I was bending according to the needs. I would break my back to help everyone, and in return I could get a little bit.

JF: Were you able to see your family?

BM: Once in a while. I would come down every few weeks, but I would get a report from the priest who would come and visit us. And he would tell me, "The children are well, your wife is well, and this wife is well." And then he would go to the farmers and he would bring down a gift to all the families that needed it. You know, the Belgians had nothing, because we had nothing. This one here, a cousin in the mountain, this one had a cousin in the city; but we...

JF: You had no extended family.

BM: That's it. So we had nothing, and there he helped us. And we went again. Our job mainly was disturbing, for inasmuch it was possible in all activities the German life. Like I said to you, blowing the electric stations, disturbing traffic, robbing. For instance the cigarette industry is a monopoly, so the Germans grabbed the *Fabrique Cigarette*, the cigarette *fabrique* [factory] in Riom. It was only about two and a half hours going down the mountain. They give to the French just enough tobacco to go by and they took everything for them to Germany for the soldiers. So we made a raid on the cigarette factory, and we stole two truckloads of tobacco. That was part of us; we attacked a couple of banks; we needed money. *Les Chantiers de la Jeunesse* [youth work organization], that was Général Pétain had made that all the young people between the age of sixteen and twenty one, in view not to be taken by the Germans, to be sent away to work in Germany, he kept them, *Chantiers de la Jeunesse*; they would do reforestation work, keeping the roads clean, and they were dressed in uniforms with sticks.

JF: They were dressed in French...

BM: French uniforms, you know, green felt pants, black leather jacket, and the beret. In fact, that's the uniform. We robbed one of the--we didn't rob, we took, we attacked one of their stock centers, and we took the six watchmen and we tied them. We didn't harm them, because they were youngsters. We tied them, and we took out everything we needed, shoes without nails, and underwear, everything we needed, and we loaded ourselves because we had no transportation. We were a nice group, maybe thirty people, and we all

carried a bundle up the mountain. Of course, later on, was the repercussion. The town was punished for this and that, and they didn't get allocation of the milk or the butter or--there was always a punishment.

JF: This group that the town set by, were they under the auspices of the army, or they were just...

BM: They were--there was no army.

JF: There was no army.

BM: It was under the government, the French wasn't allowed an army from the Germans. The Germans did not allow the French to have any army.

JF: This was a government sponsored...

BM: Sponsored movement *de Jeunesse*, a youth movement.

JF: And was this okay with the Nazis?

BM: Yes, this they allowed, to repair the roads and the reforestation, and cleaning of the culverts, and things like that. This was allowed. But we had to have clothing, because the winters were getting rough, and we had nothing to wear. So here was a storehouse, a warehouse full of stuff, so we decided with the authority of our commandant that we should take what we need. We took more than what we needed, because it was inflicting damage to the collaborators. And we came up and we dressed, and that was my uniform--leather jacket, green pants, boots. My shoes were--oh, my heavens, I take six pounds a pair of shoes, so heavy it was, but when you are young, you don't pay attention to anything, you just, you carry everything. And after this, we had missions to punish collaborators: we went down into the country, or up to the mountains, and we knew that--I was dealing with the Nazis. You would say to the Nazis, whatever he had, instead of giving away to the Resistance or destroying, because greed is a big thing. For money, many people would sell their soul away.

JF: So these collaborators you're talking about would give...

BM: Wouldn't give nothing--they would exchange to the Nazis.

JF: They would exchange with the Nazis.

BM: For whatever privilege they would get from them. They would get a barrel of nails, or everything, something to gain out of it. If you give under duress and terror, is one thing, but at least you resisted it. But if you are free, willingly dealing with them, just to make a fortune, this we made them pay.

JF: What did you do?

BM: We took women who did it. We shaved their heads, and we rubbed it with mercurochrome. After the war, we paraded them stark-naked in the streets as traitors. Have you read the book, *The Sorrow and the Pity*? That was in our *Maquis*. Volvic is mentioned there. Madame Martinon and lots of children, and they were all taken to the concentration camps; only a few came back. The Hotel Martinon was burned by the Nazis, by the Gestapo there, threw thermal bombs to burn it up, and...

JF: What did you do to the men who were collaborators?

BM: I'd rather you don't ask.

JF: Okay.

BM: Please!

JF: But this was part of...

BM: Yes, that was part. We could not resist revenge, because we had paid too dear of a price. We had lost the best of mankind in that war against *barbarie* [barbarism], and like I said, I repeat again, it is not possible to describe the amount of myself who went out on those missions, because I am a Jew and I hate blood. And I can feel for the guys in Israel. We are not a murderous people; we don't want to fight. If we can talk, we will talk. But once we are pushed and we have to fight, then we are reluctantly doing what we have to, but we do it.

JF: What was the attitude in the town or in the towns towards the collaborators when they were identified as collaborators?

BM: When Hitler was in his glory everybody would keep quiet. The collaborator would be riding and riding in a car with gasoline, and he was certain that Pétain and Hitler are going to win the war. But those who in their heart had kept that spirit of freedom, unless he would jeopardize his life, he would be quiet. Once in a while, a group of citizens would beat up some collaborators, without being recognized. That was just to vent their disgust and their hatred for them. You couldn't take revenge because you would have to take revenge on a tremendous amount of population, and not everybody has the fiber of patriotism, and not everybody is Jewish. A Jew had to fight; he had no alternative. Those who could fight, fought. The Jew had a stereotype; we are not fighters, that's wrong. We don't like fighting, we are against spilling blood.

JF: Was there a spy network among the French as there was in Germany in terms of turning people in?

BM: Yes, definitely, there was. However, we knew of it, but I was remote from it, and again, like I said to you, previously, I regret now that I did not know that I would survive. Had I known I would survive, I would have kept track of many things that today I cannot remember. But I know that we knew, that it was a *réseau*, a network of spies, of people bringing information, and many have survived who have written many things about it. However, like I said, I had to try to survive on my own, because I had to save my family, and when I was with anybody, my mind was never with nobody but my family, because I never knew what's happening there. And like I said, my wife's French was like my English now...