

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

JOSEPH LEVY

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Inge Karo
Date: January 22, 1997

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Melrose Park, PA 19027

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JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-1]

JL - Joseph Levy [interviewee]

IK - Inge Karo [interviewer]

Date: January 22, 1997

Tape one, side one:

IK: This is January 22, the interview with Mr. Joseph Levy. Okay, now just to start with, why don't I get your name and where you were born, and a little bit about your family?

JL: My name is Joseph Levy, born in Eschweiler, Germany, 1911¹.

IK: All right. And tell me a little bit about your family.

JL: We have a butcher store, in a small city, 80,000 people living there.

IK: Were there many Jews in that city?

JL: I beg your pardon?

IK: Were there a lot of Jews in that city?

JL: Yeah, a lot of Jews. And on the day when Hitler took over Germany, in the morning, 10:00, a bunch of Nazis with the black hats, Storm Trooper, came in, want to kill my father.

IK: That was in 1933 already?

JL: '33. The 31 of January. Want to kill. Then, we had two girls working in our store. I myself, my mother, and my father. But naturally good thing happened he just went out of the store in the kitchen for a cup of coffee. That was the first.

IK: As they were coming in?

JL: Big excitement. We closed the store. The counter was broken. And that's all. And in the night about 7:00, somebody called me on the telephone. "Joe, put your father and your older brother away!" I say, "How can I put them away? I'm afraid to go out." He said, "I'll help you. Between 11:00 and 12:00, you look upstairs out of the window. When I show you the cigarette between my two fingers; that means it's clear."

IK: Now, when they said, "Put him away," you meant hide him? Is that what you meant?

JL: What?

IK: Did you mean hide him? *Verstecken*?

JL: So, my fa-, we packed a suitcase for my brother and my father. They went to the next city with a taxi, to Cologne. Now it's a big city.

IK: Now how old were you then, when this happened?

JL: This was '33. I was born '11, so I was about 20 years.

IK: And did you know who called, who it was that called?

JL: Huh?

IK: That called. Did you know who called you?

JL: That comes with the rest of the story.

¹Mr. Levy's personal history form indicates his birthday as August 22, 1911.

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-2]

IK: Oh, okay.

JL: Shall I go on?

IK: Yes, sure.

JL: So, my father went gone. We knew where he was going. He went to the, the real part of Germany where French. And we had relation there. So he went there. My brother, we didn't know. After so many months, we finally got some letters. So, I and my uncle who was owner of the business, we went, took the business and we had a good business. Now still with the Nazis a good business. And my father came back about nine-, I figure, 1935 or 1936, because this piece of land from Germany, Hitler moved in, and took it away.

IK: Where your father was hiding?

JL: Was back in our city. And somebody told me, that was a woman who always came to my store and to my father's store. She helped with stair, she helped with cleaning. She did a lot of things for us. Sewing. So, finally I found out who was the man who whistled. Who was it.

IK: When your father was, and your brother, were escaping?

JL: No, that was already before.

IK: Well then what...

JL: ...who was it. We buy our livestock in Cologne. And he was the, he had the truck and bring this livestock to our city and slaughterhouse. And one of these days, he said to me, "Joe, do you know who whistled?" I said, "No." "I am." And he was the biggest leader in the city. His name was Pamler.

IK: Now how do you spell that?

JL: P-A-M-L-E-R.

IK: P-A-M-L-E-R. Now, when you say he was the biggest leader, you mean the biggest Nazi?

JL: Yeah.

IK: Okay. And when you say he whistled, was that when your father first left in the taxi for Cologne or are you talking about something [else]?

JL: Yeah.

IK: That first story you told.

JL: That's right.

IK: That, that's [unclear].

JL: That's over.

IK: Okay.

JL: So, we, I keep the business going to 1937. In 1937 I got the affidavit here for the United States to come here. My parents were still there. But they have to move in all Jews from that city, had to move in one house. So that they can make control of it. I was, let's see.

IK: Now, you were born in Eschweiler.

JL: That's right.

IK: But the store was actually in Siegburg.

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-3]

JL: Right.

IK: All right.

JL: Because we went, my father went with my uncle in a big business, wholesale.

IK: Okay. Now when your father and your brother escaped, that first night you told me about...

JL: Yeah.

IK: ...when the man whistled, did your father and your brother did not go together? They went separately.

JL: That's right.

IK: And where did your brother go? Did you ever find that out?

JL: Yeah, he went to Paris.

IK: Oh, your brother went to Paris. And he stayed there?

JL: That is a story for later. I'll tell that story, too.

IK: Oh, all right -- saying your father served in WWI.

JL: What?

IK: You said your father was in the German Army in WWI?

JL: World one. And he earned the Iron Cross. Now what you, how we start now? They're back in [unclear] here. My father is back. My brother never came back. He was in France. I visit him a couple of times. So, in 19-, approximately in 1939, my parents, or '37 to '39, they tried to come to the United States. My relatives here made affidavit. Our, every time when they had a passbook, then they didn't have the ship. When they had a ship, they didn't have the passbook. So, what? One of these day I get to the Red Cross a letter. They landed in Barcelona.

IK: Your parents?

JL: Parents. Only when you have money. That was already in 1939.

IK: Do you know what month?

JL: Huh? No.

IK: No.

JL: We, illegal.

IK: But they went from Germany to Barcelona.

JL: Yeah. And ...

IK: And were they, did they have a permit to stay in Barcelona?

JL: ...they had the permit, and 400 German and French Jews were laying there, in camp.

IK: Now was it a Displaced Persons Camp or was it more like a prison camp?

JL: It was from the Jewish organization.

IK: Well that's important. Do you know which Jewish organization?

JL: No.

IK: No.

JL: Nothing.

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-4]

IK: But in other words, some Jewish organization put these refugees into a camp in Barcelona.

JL: Yeah. And...

IK: In 1939.

JL: ...took care of them. Yeah, and even something to eat. One of these days I get a letter from my parents. That was the last letter. "The only one who can do something is your brother." My younger brother was here, the first boy in the United States Army, was drafted and shipped to Pearl Harbor.

IK: That was not the brother who was in Paris. That was another brother.

JL: No, the younger brother was here. He was here.

IK: In the United States.

JL: In the United States Army, shipped to Pearl Harbor. And I wrote him he is the only one who can do something with parents in Barcelona, that they get the America visa. What happened? On 7 December, here's the book that shows.

IK: Mr. Levy is showing me a passport.

JL: Yeah. This is the passport from my, this is from the concentra-- my father was in concentration camp. Shall I put that in?

IK: Oh that's very important. And...

JL: Yeah.

IK: ...your father was in Dachau. Now where, when was he sent to Dachau? Was that before he went to Bar-...

JL: ...1939, before he came to Barcelona.

IK: Before he went to Barcelona.

JL: Yeah, that was there.

IK: And how did he get out of Dachau?

JL: That's another story. I want to show you.

IK: Now why don't we, let's finish how your parents got out of Barcelona, and then I'd like to go back to you, how your father...

JL: I'd like to, okay.

IK: ...got out of Dachau.

JL: They came out Barcelona. On 7 December, Pearl Harbor day, it's here in the book, the America Consul gave every Jew in the camp the America visa, with them sinking, they can't go nowhere. It was 1940 already. No planes. No ships. Nothing goes.

IK: So all the people in that camp in Barcelona got a visa.

JL: Right. What they did, they took the gold here, here, here, all together.

IK: All right, I...

JL: ...right in the...

IK: See, the tape recorder won't show what you're showing me.

JL: No.

IK: So you're telling me they took the jewelry and the gold teeth.

JL: That's right. Everything what make to money.

IK: Now who took it?

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-5]

JL: They went to the wharf where the fishing boats were laying, on the...
IK: ... the Jews?
JL: Yeah. On the border. A captain, with a boat, were 400 people laying on the floor. Pregnant women, doctor, lawyer, shoemaker.
IK: On the floor of the ship.
JL: On the floor on the ship.
IK: Do you happen to know the name of the ship or anything?
JL: No.
IK: No.
JL: And they went off on 17.
IK: Now, what kind of a, was it an ocean liner or was it just a fishing boat?
JL: Just a plain fishing boat.
IK: Fishing boat. Okay, and where did they go?
JL: Yeah. See, everything here is when they went off.
IK: Yes, but where did the ship go?
JL: Where did the ship go? The shortest stretch from Barcelona is Cuba. So, they went off on the 8, or was it the 9? I think the 11 of December.
IK: 11 of December.
JL: Yeah. They went off. They were 10 days over the high ocean. They lived only from fish, bread, and water. And when 10 days were over, there came a German U-boat. The captain got cold feet, want to go back. Over there people, their 400 people, they didn't let them. So, they said, "We die here or we die in concentration camp." So, they went off. [pause, Mr. Levy is emotional] A couple of days later, I don't know how many days later, another U-boat came. They came up.
IK: What do you mean, the U-boat came up?
JL: Up. Want to see what that's for a boat.
IK: So, up to the surface.
JL: So that, there was a English U-boat. The English captain got connected with England, or where, I don't know. They had the order to protect them, to [crying] Cuba..
IK: Would you like to stop a minute and --?
JL: Actually, he didn't never want to talk.
IK: Yeah. Mr. Levy tells me that he found out all these details from his father, much later.
JL: Yeah.
IK: Because his father never wanted to talk.
JL: Right.
IK: Now, when did he finally decide he wanted to talk to you about this?
JL: Once in a while, when in good humor, he talked. And they landed on the 26 of December in Cuba. And the Red Cross in Cuba telephoned me, send money. Sixty dollars at that time. "We bring your parents to the United States."

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-6]

IK: And as far as you know they were allowed to land in Cuba, even though they didn't have visas for Cuba?

JL: They had the visas. They had...

IK: ... they had visas for Cuba?

JL: The American Consul gave everybody the visa.

IK: Oh, but that was for the United States.

JL: Yeah.

IK: But how did, did Cuba permit them? Do you know why Cuba permitted them?

JL: Well, that I don't know. They let them...

IK: ... and did they, or did you...

JL: ... this time...

IK: Yeah, okay, just...

JL: This time they let them in.

IK: Okay. Did the English, the British U-, submarine, did they escort this boat to Cuba?

JL: Yeah.

IK: They actually...

JL: ...escorted them to Cuba. Right.

IK: ...escorted them to Cuba. And then Cuba let them in because they knew they, the Red Cross would ship them to the United States.

JL: Right, yeah.

IK: Is that correct?

JL: That's right.

IK: Okay, you know, I don't want to put words in your mouth.

JL: No, so they came over here to the United States and we had everything prepared for them.

IK: Both your parents.

JL: And they lived now a couple of good years here. This was my father. [shows photo]

IK: A very nice looking man.

JL: Now, this is that woman what I talked about. Do you know that she had my father's money?

IK: When you say she had your father's money, what do you mean by that? She saved it for him or he, she stole it...

JL: My father gave her a lot of money, in case that she has any connection with do. That's how it comes now.

IK: He has any connection with what?

JL: Anything to do, to save them.

IK: Oh.

JL: In their life.

IK: Okay.

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-7]

JL: Now.
IK: So this woman, Maria Schneider, whose picture you're showing me...
JL: Yes.
IK: ...she's the one?
JL: Yeah.
IK: She was the one who was your father's employee?
JL: Yeah.
IK: And she arranged the...
JL: ...she was like a, in a small town, a politician. [pause] Now, when my father was in concentration camp...
IK: ...do you know, let me just go back a minute. Was he just arrested by himself or was this a time when they arrested a lot of Jews?
JL: A lot of people. I'll show you the pictures, yeah.
IK: So he was arrested together with a lot of people.
JL: With a lot of men.
IK: Do you know when that was?
JL: A lot of men.
IK: Yeah, men.
JL: Only men.
IK: All men. Do you know what year that was that your father was arrested?
JL: Yeah, here, you can read it.
IK: Yeah, well, I have to say it into the tape recorder.
JL: See, he wrote in German.
IK: Yes.
JL: And it's censored, so he can't write much. "I'm all right. How's everybody else?"
IK: But what, what year was that?
JL: What?
IK: What year was that?
JL: It says it. I have to put my glasses on. Here's my father's name.
IK: Oh. Was this 1938? Is that when he was...
JL: No.
IK: ...December 4, 19--...
JL: The 5--, 4 of December, 1938.
IK: 1938. That's when he was arrested and sent to Dachau.
JL: Yeah.
IK: And how long did he have to stay there?
JL: I don't know how long he was there, because the letters don't come. We didn't, it was no more connection.
IK: Yes.
JL: Now, this woman.
IK: Maria Schneider.

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-8]

JL: I knew, I had her address and everything. See --.

IK: Now, at that time when your father was in Dachau, were you still in Germany or were you already in the United States?

JL: I was here in 1937.

IK: So when he was arrested and sent to Dachau you were no longer in Germany.

JL: No, nobody was there.

IK: Okay.

JL: My sister and my brother was all gone. Now, this, I wrote to this woman.

IK: Maria Schneider.

JL: Go to this, I gave you that first name, Pamler, when I say the Nazi, Pamler?

IK: Pamler. P-A-M-L-E-R.

JL: Yeah. I told her, "cross make no difference [may refer to Iron Cross awarded in World War I]. See if you can persuade him to do something."

IK: Now, that's to ransom your father?

JL: And she did.

IK: She was an honest woman.

JL: She, my father came home. See the hair is cut?

IK: Yes. So when your father got out of Dachau...

JL: Yeah?

IK: He went this, this, he went back home until he went to Barcelona, is that correct?

JL: Now this was on the [unclear] of '38. And I think '39 they had the opportunity to go to Barcelona. See, the people running around, and they heard something. So money was no object. Then they took advantage of-- somebody took some money...

IK: Right.

JL: ... and got them the tickets, you know? And he, they got, they tried to-- many times to get out. See what that means?

IK: Yeah, sure. Not let's try and get this a little chronological. Now, your parents did not stay in Cuba long. Were they in Cuba a long time or did they, within a day or two did they go from Cuba to the United States?

JL: Just overnight. One or two days. The Red Cross took care of them.

IK: Red Cross.

JL: They put them on a, I think on a boat and they came up that time.

IK: Now, could we just go back a little bit and get some more information about your family? Now, there was, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

JL: I had, actually three brothers and my sister, still living here.

IK: So, except for the brother who went to Paris, all your brothers and sisters also came to the United States?

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-9]

JL: Yeah. I, one accidentally died very young here. I had an uncle and, if you're interested, an uncle, he was a million, million millionaire. And he came, the wife from my uncle, it was the sister from my mother, he came every year to Germany with three kids and went to the Black Woods, in the best hotels.

IK: The Black Forest, yes.

JL: So, one of these days, maybe 1923, he said, "My kids are all married." They had three kids. "There, I'll take some of the boys alone." And it was my brother, who was two years younger than me, he went over to United States. When he was five or six years here, I have it on the papers, when he was five, six years here, he tried to make money. He bought prescriptions from the drug store to people at night, in the afternoon, not night.

IK: He delivered them?

JL: Huh? Delivered, yeah.

IK: He was a delivery boy.

JL: See, that time, no cars.

IK: Yeah.

JL: Nothing else. I don't know if he was on a bicycle. And then, on Thanksgiving night, somebody hit him with the car and never woke up.

IK: Sad.

JL: Yeah. Oh, that's here.

IK: Well, let's be, well.

JL: You see this? You see? There's my father. They're all Jewish men from our city. They had to go on the turnpike. They were building the *Autobahn Schlasse*. They had to shovel there.

IK: So that was like, they were like forced laborers? Is that what you're saying the Na-?

JL: No, that was before.

IK: Oh, that was before the Nazis.

JL: In '37. It was to '39, yeah.

IK: Yes, but they were forced by the Nazis to work on the *Autobahn*? Or did they just?

JL: Yeah, yeah, sure, forced by the Nazis. Sure, naturally.

IK: Okay.

JL: They are all Jewish men.

IK: Well, before we look at the pictures, I, you know, I want to go over the pictures with you and mark down what each one is, but I want to just get a, you know, get a few of the facts. Now, tell me the date that you were born. What day were you...

JL: When I was born?

IK: Yes, when you were born.

JL: 1911.

IK: And what date? What was your birthday?

JL: August, 1911.

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-10]

IK: August, 1911.
JL: Yeah.
IK: And what, tell us your parents' names too.
JL: What?
IK: Your parents' names. Your father's name and your mother's name.
JL: My father was Hermann Levy. And my -
IK: And your mother was Julie.
JL: My mother actually was Julia Alwert. She died very young. She died. That was my mother.
IK: And what was her name?
JL: The other mother is here.
IK: Oh, a step-mother.
JL: Yeah, Henrietta. The sister of -
IK: Well let me get them. What was your mother's name?
JL: Julia.
IK: Julia?
JL: Yeah.
IK: And what was her maiden name? Jacobs?
JL: Jacobs.
IK: Jacobs. Okay. And what was your step-mother's name?
JL: I beg your pardon?
IK: What was your second mother's name?
JL: Henrietta.
IK: And what, do you know her maiden name?
JL: Yeah, Hermann Levy. That's, yeah, Henrietta Giborna Jacob. That was the sister from my first mother.
IK: Sister. Oh. Okay. And your father's name was Hermann.
JL: Hermann.
IK: Hermann, Okay. With two N's? I guess so.
JL: Now, this, those are, that's when she died. Julia Giborna Jacob. That's the only stone in that little town what stays there, because it's marble. The other stones are all gone.
IK: In the Jewish cemetery?
JL: I came there in 1975. The grass was that high. So I gave a farmer a lot of money and said, "Cut it." These were the two girls, behind our store. They saved my father.
IK: What two girls?
JL: Oh, they are *goyischer* girls who ...
IK: ... yeah, I know, but these, what did, you were talking to me about this Mr. Pamler, and Maya [she misspoke, it is Maria] Schneider. Now who were these two girls?
JL: Mrs. Schneider is this here.

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-11]

IK: Yeah, I know, but who were, so, what did these two girls do?
JL: This is Machda and Inge.
IK: Yeah, but what did they do?
JL: Behind the store!
IK: I know, but what did they do to save your father?
JL: Oh no, everybody helped, to push, to hold the door closed.
IK: Oh well, you didn't tell me that. Why did they...
JL: Well...
IK: Oh you mean when they first tried to break into the store?
JL: Yeah, and he...
IK: And after this very...
JL: Like there is the store door...
IK: ...yeah, I know.
JL: ...you know? And we were here at the counter.
IK: But they didn't get in?
JL: No, no.
IK: But you told me they destroyed the store.
JL: Yeah, oh, completely.
IK: Yeah, so which door did these girls hold closed, a door to your apartment or the door to the store?
JL: The door to the, our apartment.
IK: Oh. Until, until your family could get out of the apartment, or what?
JL: No! Until that guy, I told you, the guy who whistled...
IK: Yeah.
JL: ... when we took them all out.
IK: So in other words, they never-- because these two girls held the door shut the Nazis never got into your apartment.
JL: Yeah, that's right.
IK: That was very brave of them.
JL: They were working in, we had a, like a family. They stay and eat and drink, sleep, right in this small town.
IK: Yes, right.
JL: Like a family.
IK: Same thing in, like my father's, yes. So, just so we get the story straight, this very first story that you told me, the, because these two young women who worked for your parents...
JL: Yeah.
IK: Held the door shut, helped to keep the door shut...
JL: Yeah, they helped, they, everybody.
IK: So they never could break into your parents' apartment.
JL: That's right.

JOSEPH LEVY [1-1-12]

IK: And the only place they could get into was the store. And then later in the night you got this phone call from this Pamler, and your father and your brother escaped.

JL: Yes.

IK: Now, your mother and the rest of the family stayed behind.

JL: Yeah, yeah.

IK: Did anything happen to them?

JL: No, no. Nothing happened.

IK: They left them alone.

JL: Nothing happened. Right.

IK: Now, okay, you told me when you were born and a little bit about your family. Now, before the Nazis came, can you tell us anything what life was like in Siegburg for a Jewish family then?

JL: For a Jewish family, they're all making a nice living.

IK: Did they have, did you have a synagogue, a Jewish synagogue or Jewish school?

JL: Our one, our city, no, our city had a jail.

IK: A jail?

JL: Yeah. Not far where we, five minutes' ride. And once in a while, the Nazi come with a Jew in the arm tied, and bring him to the jail. And he, from a very small country, or from a town, a little town, he did something, I don't know what. Had some trouble with a *shicksa* [non-Jewish woman] or had some trouble with a farmer, who knows. They came out. Our [unclear]. Those what, ah --

IK: Okay, wait [tape off then on]

Tape one, side two:

IK: This is tape one, side two, of the interview with Mr. Joseph Levy. All right, now you can go on.

JL: Those, that jail, there were, they had about, I don't know how many. They lived, the security guard lived right around that jail. Families. And we had a lot of customers. And they tell us stories from what happened in the jail.

IK: Non-Jewish customers?

JL: Yeah. They tell us the stories, and they brought some Jew in there.

IK: Now, that was the butcher store. Was that a kosher butcher or a regular?

JL: No, not kosher butcher store.

IK: Now, did you have, the Jews in your town, did you have any Jewish organizations or Jewish education what you...

JL: Yeah, I had Jewish-- I have a lot of pictures from Jewish-- we had a, called the *Jugendbund*.

IK: That's a youth group.

JL: Yeah.

IK: Yeah, well...

JL: That was a...

IK: ...unfortunately the, you know, the pictures don't come out on the tape.

JL: That was a small group. Oh, here is a whole, the...

IK: So, you had a youth group. Did you have a building for them?

JL: They are all from our city.

IK: Yeah, but did you have a building for this *Jugendbund*?

JL: Yeah, we had a Jewish school.

IK: And you had a Jewish school.

JL: Yeah. And we meet each other there. And they had a big garden, a big playground.

IK: Was it a religiously-oriented Jewish school or --?

JL: Not really. I don't want to say it's a religious.

IK: Just, you...

JL: I was...

IK: ...you taught regular subjects but also Hebrew and the Bib--, and Torah.

JL: Yeah, if you're a, we had a synagogue. I have pictures from the synagogue even.

IK: And what was there, just the one synagogue?

JL: One synagogue.

IK: And was it Orthodox or was it...

JL: No, I wouldn't say Orthodox. I would say sort of half and half.

IK: The men and women, did the men and women sit together or separated?

JL: Yeah, yeah. No, no, the women were sitting upstairs.

IK: The women were in the balcony. And did you have a rabbi?

JL: Yeah.

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IK: And a cantor?

JL: The rabbi was the teacher, he was a rabbi, and he was everything, all on one place.

IK: About how many students do you think were in that school?

JL: Were, they were from small to the high up. They were from the first class to the seventh class.

IK: But about how many, 100, or...?

JL: No, maybe 50.

IK: 50.

JL: Yeah.

IK: And did you have, did you go to any public school also? Or just to a...?

JL: I belonged to the public school.

IK: You belonged to the public school. Yeah, the way they did it in Germany. And before the Nazis came, well, did you experience any antisemitism or did the Jews and the Gentiles get along?

JL: Was a lot of antisemitism. Don't forget.

IK: And so how did, how did they show, what did people do?

JL: When we went to school, we had to pass a...

IK: This was before Hitler?

JL: Before Hitler. When we went to school, there was a school there, pass by, and we had to pass them. There was...

IK: ...there was a school...

JL: Jews.

IK: On the other side of the street and you had to walk past.

JL: Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. The Jew, always fighting. We went sometimes --.

IK: Did they physically, or did they throw things, stones at you? Or physically or--?

JL: No, we were...

IK: Just called you names?

JL: ...grown boys. My brother and I.

IK: Just called you names.

JL: We could take that, yeah.

IK: So they just called you, "Jew."

JL: Yeah.

IK: Now, when Hitler first came to power...

JL: That was the 3 of January, 1933.

IK: Yes. Did your family, your parents, your family immediately think that this was going to be very bad, or did they think like some German Jews that it wouldn't be that bad?

JL: No, my father was a big military man. And he always said, "Before I go, Hitler goes." That was his mistake.

IK: When you say he was a big military man, what do you mean? He was an officer or...

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JL: Yeah, he had the Iron Cross. And he was in, three years in the military, in the First World War.

IK: Yes.

JL: Yeah.

IK: But he wasn't, when you said he was...

JL: He was a strong man. And when somebody said to him, "Jew," he hit him over the head.

IK: ...but he was no longer in the army.

JL: No, that was in the First World War.

IK: Now, did you have any contact with the *Reichsvertretung*?

JL: What?

IK: *Reichsvertretung*? Was that in your little town? The Council of German Jews. No.

JL: No.

IK: And was your parents' store boycotted when they had the, passed this boycott that people shouldn't stop?

JL: Right. That was the trouble with my father. Next door was a cigar store. And we had a driveway, three houses around, from one end to the other.

IK: It was a circular driveway?

JL: It was a driveway. And behind the drive, on a side from the driveway, we had a big, big garden. And one of these days, the door went open, the chicken came up to his car onto the next door neighbor.

IK: One of your chickens went into the next door neighbor's car.

JL: Yeah. And he, see, that was before maybe 1930. He said to him, that guy, "You goddamn Jew! Keep the chicken out of my car!" And he said, "You goddamn Nazi!"

IK: Your father?

JL: Yeah!

IK: Now, when they passed the Nuremberg Laws, were you much affected by that?

JL: No, not really. I have it here, I have his book here, Dr.-- do you hear from Dr. Kempner?

IK: Yes. He was my attorney. But I don't, well, we know.

JL: Are you of Germany?

IK: But I'm, I don't, well, we know. I know. Yes.

JL: Where you come from?

IK: Essen.

JL: Essen! Twenty miles, 30 miles today.

IK: See we-- but, the thing is, we, you know, we know about the Nuremberg Laws. We're just interested in what, how they affected you personally.

JL: Nothing specially. Only Dr. Kempner, already, before Nuremberg there, he had my parents' paper. And he looked at he get everything over. Well, I have another big story. You want to take that?

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IK: Yeah, sure.

JL: My brother went to France, 1933. And he had, he worked for butcher stores, until 1939, Hitler marched into Paris. And they had all the German Jews on the paper. Those German Jews.

IK: You mean they had a list with the names of all the German Jews.

JL: Yeah. And that, German Jews, they couldn't run fast enough to hide. They ran, my brother ran all the way up to the Pyrénées in France.

IK: The mountains.

JL: Yeah. And where he found some friends, where he was hiding in the chicken coop. Then with the years, a lot of French that became in the concentration camp in Paris, in France, not far from my brother, ten kilometer, maybe you hear of it. Gurs [Gurs].

IK: Yes, of course.

JL: Ah ha!

IK: G-U-R-Z.

JL: That's right. My brother and 100 other boys was living, they made a place on the highest hill in the Pirenia [Pyrénées].

IK: Were these 100 boys all Jewish boys?

JL: That I don't know. However they in there. Not boys. Women, pregnant women, everything! And they guarded this...

IK: ...and how did they...

JL: ...with machine guns...

IK: How did they get food?

JL: Huh?

IK: How did they get food?

JL: I'll hit that too. So they had that place there *mit* [with] protection. They had machine guns.

IK: This was not the concentration camp. This was the, where they were hiding?

JL: Where they're hiding, in the Pyrénées.

IK: Yes.

JL: And there was a place, I especially brought that, what I can show it. That's the place that's called, Pau [sounds like "Pu"] And my fa-- brother was in that house, in the mountains.

IK: Mr. Levy is showing me a picture of the house in the mountains.

JL: Yeah. And there my brother-- I was there in 1975-- and he showed me the passway, how they got up in the mountains. All that I can show. This is the, this is the mountains, the Pyrénées they're called. They took a lot of Jews who had opportunity in Madrid, in Spain, to get over, with a boat, to Madrid, where they can take a freighter or a boat to China what was open for money.

IK: So from the...

JL: A lot of them.

IK: ...from the Pyrénées, they went to Madrid? Is that what you're saying?

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JL: Yeah, yeah. First on the top of the mountains.
IK: The mountains, yeah, they had to get the --
JL: When it was clear there.
IK: And who, who organized that?
JL: They, my brother, and a couple other boys. Besides the other boys, the whole town, the whole town was for them.
IK: The town of Pau?
JL: What?
IK: The town of Pau?
JL: No, the town was Orree [phonetic, possibly Orin]. It's 10 kilometers from Gurs.
IK: Wait a minute, how, do you know how that's spelled?
JL: No.
IK: Well did it start with an "O," do you know?
JL: Huh?
IK: Did it start with the letter "O?"
JL: Yeah. Orree. That's when I brought, when I was there, I want to say, this [unclear] the people there, the mountains there. And he was, many times he came down with other boys. And the farmer, it was four, four years they were there, over four years. And the farmer had to kill an animal in the black market. He helped them. And the baker, he helped them, too. And there was a big wood mill, who cuts the wood in plates.
IK: Oh, like a lumber --
JL: Yeah. And they were, all those people in that little town, they were very nice and very, they lived very primitive.
IK: Very simply.
JL: Oh, here is a, that's the family who saved him, in France.
IK: Do you know the name of that family?
JL: No.
IK: No.
JL: I never was a -- here, and there.
IK: Well, is your brother still alive?
JL: Eight years ago he died.
IK: Because, see, he should really, you know, this is really his story.
JL: Oh well, we are not finished. When the war was over, he went back to Paris and he looked up his boss, where he worked in that. His boss said to him, "Jules, we start a new business." They started in a hot dog factory.
IK: Hot dog?
JL: They called it wiener. And they started there with 10 pounds manufacture, and they became so big that they had 200 employees in 1956.
IK: I didn't think they would like hot dogs in France.
JL: Oh yes! Very big, very.
IK: So your brother's name was Jules? J-U-L-E-S?
JL: What?

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IK: What was your brother's name?
JL: Jules, yeah.
IK: Jules. Now how about, give me the names of your other brothers and sisters.
JL: Well here, one brother was here. He died a couple of years ago. Ernest.
IK: Ernest.
JL: And my sister still lives here. Maybe you know her. She was always working with Anita Wasserman.
IK: Anita Wasserman?
JL: The dress shop.
IK: Is her name? No.
JL: No, her name is Julia Cohen.
IK: Julia?
JL: Yeah. Cohen.
IK: Cohen.
JL: Yeah.
IK: Okay. So Jules was the brother who was in the Pyrénées.
JL: Yeah.
IK: And then there were Ernest and Julia. That's, you had two brothers and one sister, is that right?
JL: Right.
IK: Okay. So I just wanted to get your names. Well, now let me get back first to your own story. How was your family's relations with the non-Jewish people who lived in your town?
JL: In Siegburg?
IK: Yes. Did you have...
JL: Very good.
IK: ...very good relations.
JL: We had, until the last minute, we did enough business. People came by night.
IK: Well this was, but before, before the Nazis you had good relations and they kept having good relations even after the Nazis?
JL: Oh yeah, yeah, oh yeah, yeah.
IK: And you, so you were able, your father was able to support the family because he was able to keep his store open?
JL: Yeah.
IK: And he still had customers.
JL: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, he was not five years, you know, there. Not five years. About four years he was not there. You know, he went, 1933 the first night he went over to that French-occupied, you know, I told you when he went over.
IK: Yes, yes.
JL: When he came back...
IK: ...so then while, while your...

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JL: ... I, I sold 193-...

IK: So you took, you took the store over?

JL: Yeah, with my uncle. I had an uncle.

IK: All right, now, let, so, when your father first went, had to flee, in 1933...

JL: Yes.

IK: ...and went to the, what you, the part of Germany that was under French control?

JL: French, yeah.

IK: He stayed there for four years?

JL: Yeah.

IK: And then he, when the...

JL: ...He came back.

IK: ...when the Germans occupied that section he came back.

JL: That's right.

IK: And then he, well how long was he home before he was sent to Dachau?

JL: Well, that was about '36, and in '39. It says it here.

IK: Yeah but when -- do you know what year he came?

JL: See, here.

IK: Yeah, but what year did he come back?

JL: What?

IK: What year did your father come back? Was it 1937?

JL: Not, he was not long in there. I figure about a half a year.

IK: Okay.

JL: See, Block 29. Dachau PK.

IK: So you never had, your town never had a ghetto. Just all the Jewish people had to move into one house?

JL: Yeah.

IK: Is that what you were telling me?

JL: Yeah.

IK: All, all the Jews in your little town...

JL: Yeah, one or two houses.

IK: ... they moved in one or two houses.

JL: They had. I don't know exactly. They had to move.

IK: And were they able to come and go? Or were they more or less under arrest in that house?

JL: No, they had restriction.

IK: And what were the restrictions? What kind of restrictions did they have?

JL: I don't know. I didn't ask. I don't want to know.

IK: Okay. Did you ever know, apart from your brother's experience, did you personally ever know of any kind of resistance, organized resistance or, you know, groups who would try to sabotage the Nazis or underground resistance or anything like that?

JL: Well, they did. They did. And many times he was in town down there.

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IK: Who was? Who was in town.
JL: My brother. In town.
IK: Oh but that was in France. I'm talking about...
JL: Yeah.
IK: In Germany, in Siegburg.
JL: Oh, what?
IK: In Siegburg, where you were.
JL: In Sieg--
IK: Did you know of any?
JL: Well, my brother had an amount of trouble with a *shicksa*. You know, he was a young boy, and that's why.
IK: Your brother Ernest?
JL: And that's why.
IK: No, well which brother was that? The one who went?
JL: It was Jules.
IK: Jules.
JL: Yeah. Who went to France.
IK: Oh.
JL: See, that's what they say, "Get your brother away."
IK: Oh. Okay. But you didn't, you, you yourself didn't know about any organized resistance movements to the Nazis?
JL: No, no.
IK: And you, you yourself were -- now the only member of your family who was in a concentration camp was your father.
JL: That's right.
IK: You were never there.
JL: No. From my wife's family, a big family went in concentration camp. Yeah. All of them. They went to concentration camp.
IK: Now how did you get to the United States?
JL: Oh, you know, they're making papers out.
IK: You mean you got an...
JL: You never saw a paper? How you came here over?
IK: ... affi --, yes. Well, you got, well I know, but I want to get it, it's not for me.
JL: No.
IK: It's for the...
JL: ... Yeah, an affidavit.
IK: It's for your interview.
JL: Somebody make an affidavit.
IK: You got an aff-- but it was just for you, not for your-- and you came over by yourself.
JL: Right.
IK: And when?

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JL: My parents, my --.

IK: This was already after the war had started. So where did you, how did you leave? What, how did you get here? Because this was already...

JL: No, it's '37.

IK: When did you leave?

JL: I came in...

IK: ... Oh, you left in 1937.

JL: In American boat over.

IK: So from what port did you leave?

JL: Hamburg.

IK: You left from Hamburg.

JL: Yeah.

IK: To New York?

JL: Yeah.

IK: To New York. And do you remember the name of the ship?

JL: Yeah, [pause]. No, I can't get it.

IK: Oh, well, all right. It doesn't matter. But you went by yourself from Hamburg to New York.

JL: Yeah.

IK: And then when your parents came over...

JL: Yeah?

IK: Did you live together with them again?

JL: No. See, I-- that's another story. I married. I don't know if you're interested. It's not big, but it's beautiful. I came over in 1937. About four months before I left Germany, she had a brother there. And we had, we Jewish boys and men, we made a bowling alley. We go to a bowling alley.

IK: This was in Siegburg.

JL: In Siegburg. And, well...

IK: A Jewish bowling club.

JL: It was a Jewish bowling club, yeah. And I, then her brother went to England. Her sister went to Ecuador. So she didn't know exactly where she should go. She had no papers. She had nothing. So I said, promise her, after I fall in love, I say, "We'll see what I can do." I came here to the United States and I ask my relatives to give me the affidavit. They said, "No, because it's not blood relations. Your parents are not here yet, and other people. A lot of other people."

IK: So they felt that they first have to give affidavits to relatives.

JL: Right. So [blank to end of tape]

Tape two, side one:

IK: This is side one, tape two of an additional interview with Mr. Joseph Levy. You were going to tell me about your father's experiences.

JL: Yes, yes. So, there were, in our town, it was in the other family, it was Levy, they had two daughters. One daughter was working in Cologne on that office, a Jewish officer like here, for the ration. Then one of these days my parents had the visa to you go to United States. And they had even tickets with the boat. So they come to Hamburg and want to go on the boat and they wouldn't, don't let them in. Why? That Jewish woman, the same name, Levy, was with her husband in that boat. She changed to Herman. Her husband was not Herman.

IK: Oh. So what you're saying is that a Jewish woman from the organization changed your parents' passport?

JL: My parents.

IK: Yes.

JL: Now she changed her passport to get in the boat.

IK: Oh.

JL: Hannah Levy. [unclear] over there, and what council did you went for the papers, and made the papers?

IK: In Stuttgart.

JL: I too. What year?

IK: 19-, we left in 1939.

JL: '39.

IK: Yes, December.

JL: Did you hear of that crooked business from them?

IK: What business?

JL: Crooked business.

IK: No.

JL: No? I hear. I was twice there. They sent me back. I had a pimp-

IK: ... now what crook-...

JL: I had a pimple, ingrown hair, and that's why they sent me back.

IK: Well, when you say them, who are you talking about, the United States Consulate?

JL: Yeah. Later I found out through somebody, I didn't know, somebody told me, there was a name Fuchs, or Fox. He took money to get other people right away out.

IK: So you feel that you were denied a visa because you didn't pay this man money?

JL: I didn't know him. Yeah. A lot of things happened.

IK: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add that you've thought of?

JL: Here, you want a [unclear] book? No, that's enough.

IK: All right. Well, if, you know, as I've said, I, we very much appreciate your giving us this time. I know it was difficult for you to talk about some of it.

JL: Yeah.

IK: And if you think of anything else, you can let us know and we'll come back.