[? Thanks, ?] [INAUDIBLE]. I'll let you know. OK.

This is the Holocaust Oral History Project interview with Maurice Blane taking place in San Francisco, California, on April 1, 1993. My name is Sylvia Prozan, and the second interviewer is Richard Kirshman. Maurice, when and where were you born?

I was born in July 16, 1922, in a town called Hayange, H-A-Y-A-N-G-E, in France. It's in Lorraine, really, but it's in France. I was born in the time was Lorraine was French, 1922. Prior to 1914, the Germans were there.

Your father's name?

My father's name is Joseph Blankenberg. Now it sounds strange, but when I came to this country, my name was Blankenberg. I became a citizen of the United States in July 1950, three years after I got here.

Coming from France, being a pastry chef, I worked in the hotels where French chefs were the real people that ran kitchens. When I told them my name was Blankenberg, they said, you're not French, you're German. That's all I needed to hear.

So I got married in 1950. My wife was an American citizen. Through her being a citizen, marrying an American citizen, I was able to ask for my citizenship three years after I came here.

And in front of the judge, I knew ahead of time that I could change my name. So we discussed what I would change the name to. I had no relatives, really, to report or ask, can I do this? I was the sole survivor.

So I decided Blane, B-L-A-N-E, which had no real reason. I can't give you a reason why. We tried different things. I tried even Blanchard, which was something like French because my French heritage is still there. Rather, my parents weren't from there, but I was more inclined to keep this.

And so I became Blane. My citizen paper, which I had with me, shows that I was born Maurice Blankenberg in France, and I became Maurice Blane. Another reason I have to explain is when you're working in these pastry places with French or Italian or whatever and not knowing that I was Jewish, I heard a lot of the same thing. People, antisemite, that talk badly.

So I had to earn a living. I was very fortunate I had a job coming from the other side. So that prompted me to change my name. And I'm, for 43 years, Blane. And it took me just a few minutes by the judge to change it.

Now to the French government, I'm still Blankenberg. 1989, I was in France. I went to see a lawyer to have the name legally changed to Blane also. To this day, it's not done yet because they are very, how would I say, with red tape. You have to write letters to different place where you were born, and you have to make all kinds of things. And I'm most likely have to stop on this because that comes in as we talk, you'll get to the crux of why it took so long in France. It's not finished yet. OK.

And where was Joseph Blankenberg from?

Born in Poland. And the way I was told as a child, my father was in the Russian army, and I have pictures of him in the uniform. And he was-- in 1916, the Germans got imprisoned in World War I. And he came to Lorraine not on his free will, as a prisoner. And they put him to work in the factory, which is iron ore mill in Lorraine. And it was a large company and he worked there.

And after the war was ended, rather than go back, he stayed there, had his wife, my mother, brought from Poland there, and I was born there in 1922. And my parents had a son born in 1911 in Poland. And so he was nine years old when we got there, when they got there. And I had a sister born in 1925 and another brother born in 1933. So it's a big space between the first and last. He was born in 1933. OK?

Did you know your Polish grandparents?

No.

Did you ever meet them?

No. Never even-- I would say, deep down trying to remember-- no, I don't remember anything.

Did you know their names?

No, nothing.

Do you know what they did for a living?

No.

What about your mother? What was her name?

Zissla, which translated in French for the French people, was Suzanne. Zissla became Suzanne. Hajdenberg was her maiden name. H-A-J-D-E-N-B-E-R-G.

Her brother was in the service with my father, and the two of them came to Lorraine as prisoners. Both stayed there. So that's my uncle, which was in France and which I saw a few times even after the war. He was fortunate. He escaped the Holocaust.

Do you know what city your parents' families were from? What city in Poland?

Warsaw is the only thing I heard. My mother, and I guess her family, had a butcher shop. She had a butcher shop in Poland, in Warsaw. There was no other town that I can recall that was ever brought up to my mind that I could say, OK, that's what happened, and that's what I heard.

Did your father have any brothers or sisters?

Yes. The only sister that I do know came to the United States pre-World War I.

And her name?

Her maiden name I know was Blankenberg, but I don't know. I have no recollection because I didn't get close to them. When I came to this country, I met her and her children because principally, a sister of my mother made papers for me to come to this country. And the sister of my mother came to this country prior to World War I.

And what was her name? Her first name?

I say, give me a second. I'll try to remember. I haven't spoken or heard of her in 40 years, so it's kind of difficult to remember. It'll come to me. I have to just-- because, you know, when you have an aunt that brought you over, the husband really was the one who made papers for me and tante-- tante something. I forgot now because there were tantes all over the place from my first wife, so Tante Toiba, Tante this so just for a second it's kind of--

That's OK.

OK.

What about your names of your siblings and your brothers and your sister?

Right. My oldest brother was Bernard, Bernard Blankenberg. My sister was Regine, which is Rivka Leah in Jewish. But Regine is how I knew her. And smallest born in '33-- they say the smallest, the youngest, really, his name was Victor. And because he was the youngest, in France, we call them Coco. Coco, which was-- it is really a nice name to call somebody that you like. Coco.

What did your father do for a living?

As I was very young, he worked for the same factory that he was brought over. And my mother being really a business lady, she had a butcher shop. We had three or four different businesses before I was 14.

I'll explain because we had, at one time, a restaurant where she did the cooking that I can recall, and she was a very good cook. And we also had a pushcart, you know. We used to go-- and I remember there was no transportation like now. We just walked 10, 12 miles from one place to another to sell, you know, the jeans you're talking about now, we had this type of blue clothing, a denim, that was sold in France at that time.

And in the weekend, there was fairs where they sold candy out of a stand in the street. That was basically what they were doing. And I'm talking about this the year '32 to '36 that I can say that. After this, I went to work, finished school at the age of 14. I went to work in a bakery as an apprentice.

Tell me about your mother's restaurant.

Well, the thing I do recall it was in a small town, and it wasn't anything like a restaurant here. It was more like a coffee shop, so to speak, with tables that were not like-- let's say that you're going to a restaurant. You have table for four, a table for two. This was long tables and community food.

It was not kosher, had nothing to do with that. It was strictly for working people that lived in the neighborhood. It wasn't a fancy restaurant. Now remember, I tried to recall when I was under 14, and that's what I can recall.

And the town was called Knutange, K-N-U-T-A-N-G-E. It was just about 10 miles from where I was born in Hayange. My schooling was in a town called Thionville, T-H-I-O-N-V-I-L-L-E. Thionville.

You lived in Hayange, and your mother had a restaurant in this other place?

No, that's where I was born.

That's where you were born.

But we moved where we had the restaurant. There was always an apartment in the back of wherever we had a business, so we lived in the same place where we had a business.

During this time, your father was still working at the factory?

No, he had stopped, and we ran it. My folks ran the restaurant together. He had stopped working in the factory.

What kind of meals would they serve?

Very difficult to explain because I live here over 40 years. I know French food. I know American food. But I couldn't tell you what was really served, you know?

Food. You know, it could have been potatoes and-- not steaks because they didn't have that much food. She was preparing-- sometimes she had gefilte fish or something like that, that I can recall.

It was not just Jewish people that were in that town. There was very few. Some friends of my folks that I know, even

Polish friends that were non-Jews, that would come in the place and eat.

But that's basically something that's way out of my mind to remember because remember, what I'm saying now was before 1936. So we're talking about almost 60 years. And so I can't remember.

Can you remember what your living arrangements were like and these apartments that you had in the back?

No.

Anything about the butcher shop?

No. I could-- The butcher shop in Poland? No. I've never been there.

Did your mother have a butcher shop in France?

No.

How many Jews were there? Could you count the number of families or was it a few thousand? How large was the village where you lived?

It is very difficult to answer that question. I wouldn't know. But I made my Bar Mitzvah there.

And there was a situation prior to the Nazis because at that time in France, there was no Nazis. But there was Jewish families and my parents-- Now again, I don't want you to feel funny what I'm going to say. I just tell you what I thought at the time.

My impression as a kid was that we were more or less considered like second-class citizens by the Jewish community. Now if I explain this, most of the Jewish wanted the people that live in these towns were either Alsatian, born maybe three or four generations there already. And they were the upper class. My folks were working people. They weren't very rich. I would say we were even poor.

And when I went for my Bar Mitzvah, I remember the rabbi and whoever it was, I remember, you know, we talked about holidays, which is coming next week. There was the holiday that's usually just Purim, which is before Christmas and New Year's. And so I used to go at the temple, and we had these shacks, like, with fruit and vegetables in the back. And I remember that.

But I felt kind of funny because I was in a Catholic school because that's the only school there was. And I heard the Catholic prayers every day. It was automatic. And then I went to-- became my bar mitzvah. It clashed.

You know when you're a young kid, you don't know which way you're going. And it had nothing to do with the Holocaust at that time.

This is my background, how I had to face life. Which way am I? Who am I? My parents never really gave you an upbringing of being religious or not. It was pretty loose.

So there I am, 1936, finishing-- I had a certificat d'etudes, it was called in French, which is the equivalent in here high school. But at 14, that's what you get. After this, you should go to a lycee, which is to go further, like a college, afterwards.

And I was told it's best to learn a trade. It's always helpful. So I went in the bakery business in the town of Metz, M-E-T-Z. And in that town, the owner of the bakery had a contract that we signed that I was going to work for him for three years for room and board, no remuneration, which was norm at the time.

So I went to work for him. He never knew I was Jewish. And naturally, you go through hard times, but it didn't affect

me that he knew or didn't know. He didn't ask me, I didn't tell him. That's it. And I worked there for three years.

In 1939, I was going to leave and go to work on the steamship as a pastry chef. Now the war broke out, changed everything. And August '45, not '45, '40. No, '39. August '39, the war broke out.

And my father naturally was too old to be drafted. He wasn't even French. He was still Polish.

I became a French citizen by naturalization in 1934, '35, which I didn't know. I got papers that when I had to-- Now in the past years, to find out if I was I was born there, you still are not a citizen even though you're born there. So I found out I was naturalized in the '30s either because my oldest brother became a French citizen or whatever. That was all a surprise to me.

Now in 1939, when the war broke out, my oldest brother was married, and which she was not Jewish. Her folks came from Dijon in Burgundy. So the whole family, we had to more or less leave. We were evacuated. We were very close to the German border and the Maginot Line.

So before anything happened-- the real war was started in May 1940 when France was invaded by the Germans. But prior to this, we all went to Dijon, Burgundy. And in September 1940, we were in Dijon.

And I called Dijon my adoptive town because at that time, I was already 18. I made friends. I was paid for what I was doing. So I thought this was more or less my youth. I had nothing to look back.

Lorraine was never a place that I would go back to say my place of birth. I've gone back. Nothing changed. It's always been half German, half French. It's very simple.

The people are either very French or they're German. It's a very funny situation, Lorraine. In Alsace, they speak a patois, which is German. So they have a tendency to be more German.

The Lorraine people fought in World War II, saved Jews, made a lot of patriotic gestures for France. But again, I had two strikes against me at all time. Because I was born there, I was not a real French. I was a Jew. That's another strike.

Now the reason I say this is as we went on in the war, and the Germans were there, our situation became kind of not here nor there because we were in Dijon more or less like refugees. But I worked. My father didn't work anymore. My brother worked, and my younger sister was to go to school. She was born in 1925, so she was 14 in 1939, 14, 15. You know, she was still going to school.

Now I get to that situation where the Germans come in. All the Jews had to-- see in Europe, in France also, you have identity cards. Here we have a driver's license or social security, and that's all they ask you. In Europe, you have identity card that gives your name and even gives your religion.

So when the Germans came, they said, OK, all the Jews have to get ration cards for food, have to register. My folks registered, I did not. And I tell you why I didn't.

I never thought I would have a problem with food for myself. Working in a bakery or working in the food business, I'll always have food. I never got rationed food to go in a bakery, buy bread, or go to the grocery to buy butter or sugar, whatever.

And so the three years I had been gone as an apprentice, I wasn't really close to my family. The fact is that they lived a certain life. I had three years of an owner that put in a discipline in me for the work. She has a kid. The Jewish kids are always very spoiled. I was spoiled. I could do whatever I want at home, you know.

My sister was the oldest girl of the three, so my father that's her favorite. I was the favorite of my mother. My oldest brother was already gone. Then the young one when he came, everybody liked him. He's the youngest, you see.

Now so I became more or less at the age of 17, 18-- when I got to Dijon, I made some friends my age. I remember going out with a hat on my head. I was a-- now when you say 17, you're a kid. At that time, I thought I was grown up. I was a man, you know, although you learn that's not true.

So what happened is I worked in a place that basically I was making cookies, and the product that was made in this place I worked was called pain d'epice. Pain d'epice is like a honey cake, Jewish honey cake, but it's a specialty of Dijon, with the mustard. And that pain d'epice is strictly a Dijon specialty. So I worked there, and I had to be there at 6:00.

In February of 1942, the Germans were already there since '40, you see. They come to the house around 7 o'clock and take my father. He was registered. But they knew of me and asked where I was. They said that I wasn't living there, which wasn't true. I was gone working.

So he was taken. The neighbors came to the place where I worked and told me to not to go home because they were looking for me. So I don't recall exactly how it happened, but some people in the underground put me that evening on a train that was empty rail train that came from Germany and went to Lyon, which was nonoccupied, see that portion of France was not occupied.

And so they had sealed-off wagons empty, and they put me in there. That's it. The way I was. That's it.

I went in there to the nonoccupied where the Germans weren't. And this is February 1942. In July '42, I was going to be 20, so I wasn't exactly 20 yet.

And inside, there was four or five guys. Some were in French military uniform, some were in civilian clothes. And there was just like a material laying on the floor. So we laid down.

And as we get to the border, I could hear the boots of the Germans outside. But we went through, no problem. We get to the other side where the line-- the French flag was flying at the railway station, so I knew there's no Germans. Where the Germans were, there was no French flag flying.

And so when I got there, the logical thing was to go to the town of Lyon, which is a large town for work. As I got to the station-- you need water. OK-- as I got to the town, I'm looking around. I see military, French military guys, and these posters posted that the Vichy government is drafting anybody born between 1920, 1922, in the youth camp in green uniform. I figured that's just got to be the Germans.

But the military guys talked to me, and they said, where are you from. I said, born in Lorraine, but I come from Dijon. And they said, look, if you want to escape the Germans, you enlist in the army. After you go through your training, you have a choice where you want to go.

So I said, well, I want to go to Africa. Why do I want to go to Africa? I figure from Africa to get to Gibraltar and join the French forces in England. And remember, I'm talking like a 20-year-old at the time. My destiny wasn't to go there because I never made it. But I enlisted in the army for three years, the French army.

Now. (video logistics) OK.

All right. In 1942, my father was taken by the Germans. I really had no idea because the situation at that time wasn't as fluid as now with communication. You knew who in Germany was the bad guys, but you didn't-- I wasn't aware there was concentration camps. I had no idea. They took my father strictly because he was a Jew regardless of what he did in life, but they just took the people.

Now when I got to the army in Lyon, and I enlisted for three years, I realized that I have some time in October to be shipped to a town called Blida in Algeria. And from there, I was going to try to do something. I had no idea what.

Now my sister stayed in Dijon, and she met a pastry chef that was a friend of mine, non-Jew. My mother always

complained to me, why don't you take your sister? You go out with your buddies although there was the war, and your sister is always at home. She never goes out. So I took her one time with me. She met this fellow, Marcel, which-- and she was 16 and 1/2, she got married to him. OK?

Now when they took my father, my mother lived with the little boy. Remember he was born in '33. That's '42, so he was nine years old.

I go in the army, and the only communication we had between the two zones was open postcards. For the censure, you couldn't write letters. You could have a postcard, and the censure could read what you wrote.

So I got this in July in the army from my sister that they took my mother, and she took the little brother with her. So that was another shocker. See, the father, I figured he was in the army. If they took him to work to Germany, he might survive.

Unbeknownst to me, he never lived 24 hours because when you reach a certain age, they were automatically eliminated. So when they took my mother, it was a greater shock because it's a woman, you know? You don't realize the way the mind of the Germans work, those particular Nazis that do this work.

So here I am ready to go to Africa. One day in September of 1942, the American troops land in Africa, which is in, not Algeria, but in Morocco. As soon as that happened, the Germans crushed the nonoccupied zone, go all the way down to the Mediterranean, and the French flee in Toulon scuttled.

I, in the army at that time in Lyon, had to go. They send us to guard against the Underground, the basic post office, gas factory, and everything, that there is no terrorist act. But when we went, that was before even the Germans came down.

And here were a group of 12 guys in this gas factory like PG&E, let's say, and people come to us and say, listen, the Germans are in your depot. You better not go back. You're going to be taken as prisoners.

And they give us this jean-type long thing, like mechanics, you know? We wore this. The sergeant and the corporal had families in town. They left us flat. We were some guys. And that was September, October of 1942.

So what happened at that time-- I forgot to mention one more thing. When I got to the army, maybe three weeks later, one of my buddies in Dijon, which was non-Jewish, came and wanted to enlist with me because we were so close friends.

He went to the Air Force. He had flat feet, so he went to the Air Force. But we stayed buddies.

Naturally, he had his family in Dijon. He went back. Where was I going to go? I went back to Dijon to get my sister to tell me what happened.

So what happened, I get back, and I recall that at that time, the Laval government-- now we get back just before Christmas, and we got a thousand francs for a premium of enlistment. And a thousand francs at that time was pretty good money. So we had a good party and right after the first year, '43, we get a notice from the government-- you didn't finish your enlistment. You have to go work in Germany. To finish off your enlistment, you go as a laborer in Germany.

Now I wasn't that stupid. I realized, where was I born? Automatically, they put me in the German army if I'm not Jewish. Being Jewish, I go to the camp.

So I had met a fellow in 1940 when we got there, 1939, when we got to Dijon. I was already telling you the type of person who wanted to go to Gibraltar to join de Gaulle, and I was already taking prÃ©paration militaire, which means preparing me because I wasn't stupid. If I knew something ahead of time, I might become a sergeant or an officer rather than a regular soldier. So I learned the Morse code, the gun that they had at the time. It was just like the preparation in case I was going to get drafted. I was 17 in '39. So I wasn't drafted till 18. But the Germans came, I wasn't drafted.

So I called this guy, and he was working-- while the Germans were there, he was working at a place called the prefecture. Prefecture is not a city hall. It's above. It's not the capitol, but it's each section had a perfecture.

In the perfecture Dijon, he was working there, I went to see him. I simply told him, this is the case. I'm born in Lorraine. They don't know I'm Jewish. They took me to the German army. But being Jewish, they're going to put me in a camp.

So he said, you can be very useful to me. We have a way for you to work. We're going to-- instead of taken into Germany, we're going to put a requisition for you to work in a restaurant strictly for the German soldiers, which was near the railway station.

And it was a town-- coming from Germany going to the African corps, the Germans had to stop there. They didn't have to stop, but they stopped there. And the only place, because they had no French money, they had to eat in that particular place. By the way, I worked there.

And what we used to do, I used to-- and the cooks, we ate better than the Germans because we could fix what we wanted. And for them, it used to be one dish. For each dish, they had a ticket. They gave me the tickets, I put them in the office, but I counted them, and I reported to this guy how many dishes we served that day. That's all I have to do.

Somehow, I don't know, there was somebody that worked there that was a girlfriend of mine. She had nothing to do with it. But I mentioned I had a girlfriend. But you know when you're that age, you're a little cocky. I must have said something. Somebody heard.

And one morning, my brother-- the oldest brother was hidden. He didn't register either, so he was with his wife, which was Catholic. And they had two children by that time. One born in '40, one born in '41. There was about, like, 12 months, 11, 12 months difference between the two.

So I went-- before going to work, I have to explain. In those days, in this particular kitchen, I worked from 7:00 in the morning till 1:00. Then I came back at 4 o'clock and work a few hours for the evening.

And so before going to work, I went to see him. And from his window where he lived on the third or fourth floor, you could see train filled with French guys my age going to Germany as working people. They were either drafted or on their free will, they had no other way to work. And he says, watch out where you are. It's kind of dangerous. You know you shouldn't do that. That was the last message I heard from my brother.

I went to work maybe 50 minutes later. Some German field gendarmerie with these big dog tags-- I had a big thing said gendarmerie-- they picked me up. And I'm taken to the Gestapo. Naturally, I didn't know where it was, the Gestapo, but I found it was the Gestapo. And I heard some guys scream. They were being beaten.

And here I am. I get into an office, and there's a guy behind the desk, an officer. And he looks at me and he says, [GERMAN].

What was I going to say, no? He asked me. He knows. Otherwise, he does not ask me. I said yes.

Nothing happened to me. They took me to the jail in this town, took-- in that jail for the purpose of shipping me to Drancy, which was the departure port for people gone to Germany, the Jews.

I was in a prison that was loaded full, and we were in the workshop. They put up beds three high, and I was in that workshop. And I guess it was about a couple of weeks and then some civilian French guys, police, picked us up to take a train, like, at midnight, that was going to Paris and from Paris, to go to the suburb of Paris, was the place where they put all the Jews together to be sent to Germany.

The French didn't know where they're going. They knew they had to bring me to that particular place with another fellow that they picked up in the Underground. He was in the woods, they picked him up, and he was put in prison, and the two of us went to Paris.

What I did because even then, I was already thinking, before I leave, whoever I knew should know what happened to me. So I asked the French police guy, could you have my girlfriend, she lives just in this place, tell her that I'm leaving for Paris. And she came with her mother. She wasn't Jewish, naturally.

The reason I bring her up because it's very important to realize when I got to Germany-- and I got first to Drancy, and there was hundreds of people-- the first thing the Germans did, they said-- they gave us a paper, and they said, you give us your money. We're going to convert it into zlotys because you're going to work in the factories in Poland.

My mind was working already. I'm going to be underneath in the mines. I'll be warm. The winter cold wasn't for me. I'll be fine.

You know, I always took this lighter than it really-- I never looked at the danger because when you're a young guy, the family is gone, what do we have to lose more than one life? That's it. So I never worry too much.

Before we left, the Germans said, to every-- it was these wagons that said-- it was 12 horses and 40 people. That was World War I. They used these for transporting troops, so that opened doors like this, and they put people in there.

Before leaving, they assembled in front of every wagon. There was a German and an interpreter that said, whoever escapes from this, we want-- this man, his wife, and his children will be shot if somebody tries to escape. Naturally, the biggest worrier was that guy with his family. He didn't let anybody escape. He screamed if somebody was trying to escape. Anyway, we had nobody that escaped.

I went from Paris to go to Germany to the hometown where I was born. I could see it. I realized where I was.

We were on the train for three days and three nights. All we got was some bread from the Red Cross. We had nothing to drink. There was all the people. They got sick.

When we reached the place that was called Hindenburg, there was the border between Germany and Poland. And we left December the 7th, and we reached there December the 10th, 1943. And, really, some time in October, I was taken by the Germans. So between October and December the 10th, I was in custody left and right.

My sister at that time was pregnant. And I didn't know when I left if I ever would know if she had a boy or a girl.

OK. So I get to this camp and then the reality hits you. There's German green uniform opening the door and starting with a whip to whip the people off the train. And you get to-- there's snow on the ground.

And naturally, as I said before, languages was part of my life because even where I was born, we took two hours of German every week in school, so I could understand German. They were saying, women and children on one side, and the men on the other side. So we had a line. There was a guy on a little hill, not high, maybe 10 feet above that he could see down in front of the cattle that was coming to him. And all they wanted us to say, the age and profession.

So I got to the place. I said, cook, 20. This way.

There was 1,100 people on this train. The whole train had 1,100 people. By that evening, there were 300 that went to work. And at that time, they took us on trucks and drove us to which became Buna-Monowitz, and there, the reality of the atrocity really hit me because we got there in the back of a barrack and we had no baggage, no nothing. We just had our clothes, and it's winter.

There's a young guy. He couldn't have been-- more a soldier, military, with a whip. And he starts to holler and whip around, take all your clothes off, take your shoes and your belt.

Naked in the snow. You know it takes a little thinking. We did this, and we went into the barrack, and they clipped every bit of hair we had on our body, and put-- it smelled like petroleum because the biggest thing, the fear of the

Germans was the typhus, which had to do with lice.

And as you got in there-- and I had been in the army, so I looked at some of these guys, the Polish guy, the people that have been hardened already, and they start laughing at seeing these new recruits coming in and say, where you from, where you from? And when they clipped and they did this, we had to go under a shower, hot water and out in the snow completely wet.

Now I can't see. I have no mirror. When I saw the guys around me with no hair and some of them had wife and children, I have been expressing my feelings on the face of these guys.

Like, did you ever look in the eyes of a cow? A human being has emotions. When you're sad, you'll see in the eyes. If you're smiling, you're happy, you'll see. The cow, there is no expression.

That's how these guys became expressionless. The eyes were dead because they realized if to him, they do this, what if they did the same thing to the children and the women? What we know since, that they put them, instead of in the shower, with gas. They were finished, into the oven.

Where I was, was no ovens. We were like a distance of Millbrae to San Francisco, between, let's say San Francisco is Auschwitz, Buna-Monowitz was like Millbrae. So we could see the smokestacks and naturally with the people that were there, you get to know a lot of things that you don't realize that you have. Everybody, like a mix from all over the world, that are there. There was even an American that was in the streets of Nice.

And there was a raffle. A raffle is where they pick up young guys. And this particular guy, they put him in the hallway, had his trousers down, he was circumcised.

He wasn't even Jewish. Was circumcised, woop, they sent him to Auschwitz. And I met him there. Now this is just an aside, just a commentary of how you get to see different situation.

The particular camp that I was in, Buna-Monowitz, there must have been at least 80 barracks that held 120 people. It was three lines of beds three high. So there was 40 here, 40 here, and 40 here. Now the figure, approximate. I was in the middle.

Now every week, once a week, they clipped your hair, clipped you under the arm. And whoever did this got a soup, extra soup, extra food. And also the ones that went to the kitchen, there was thermos, high thermos with soup in there. That's all we've got, some soup and some dark bread. So I used to go and pick up the soup, clean the kettles just to have a little more to eat.

Because I was strong enough and I have a bone structure that was big, so I didn't show skinny situation right away. But every month or two, a German officer would come and you had to parade in front of him from one aisle, naked, from an aisle and show your back to him and go out. Whoever you could see the bones of your behind sticking out, they were taken away to the ovens. Now that never occurred to me because, as I said, I always had thick bones, and it did help me.

I happened to get an abscess from the guy that clipped me, and it wasn't very clean. So I couldn't work. I couldn't lift my arm.

We had to make the beds in the barracks. And there was-- the head of the barrack was called kapo, K-A-P-O. And the kapo usually-- I say usually-- was either a criminal or conscientious objector that didn't want to go in the army. Anyway, it was a guy that used to be in jail. He was in charge there, so some were pretty mean.

And so when I had this, and I was in the middle, I had some friends that helped me make the bed, but they said they can't. They're also very tired. So finally I decided I have to go to-- and my job was to work outside in the snow in the winter. We had to dig holes. They were making a hole to put synthetic gas. They were making synthetic gasoline without a coal, and they wanted to make some containers into the ground.

We couldn't really work. You had no way with a pick and shovel to make holes in the snow, and so you did this to keep warm. By noon and when it thawed out, the hole closed up again. So we were not very useful at work.

Anyway, I get to this situation where this is bothering me. I can't lift my arm. And I go to the infirmary. And I was always told, you go to the infirmary, we're never going to see you again. They don't want to take care of you. They're going to give you a needle, and you're dead.

I had no choice. So I went, and to this day, I hate hospitals. I can't see sick situation. But I went in, and there's a German prisoner that talked to me. And he gave me some black stuff to put on and the next day instead of go to work, I went back.

He was one of the greatest surgeons of Berlin. Jewish. He told me so. And so, he put me on a table, and he said to me, [GERMAN] to grit my teeth. And look, he cut it.

There's no bandage. He gave me what we have as toilet paper here. You know that band. He put this around, that paper.

And I didn't stay in the infirmary. I didn't want to. I went back to the barracks. And I could see people of authority have to show meanness for one reason or another for discipline.

When I got back there and all the people were gone, it was just me and him, that guy that was a criminal was very nice to me. He talked to me, and he said to me, don't worry. When you get better, you're not going to go work outside. I put you to work in inside the factory. You'll be away from the coal. Fine.

I worked with a German civilian that had a long, white face, pale. His name was Schultz. You're going to say, how do you know he's Schultz?

Well, because Schultz, you got the former guy in the government here was Schultz. Eisenhower, General Eisenhower, before he was president, I made ice cream for him in New York. And his aide-de-camp, his captain, was Schultz. So the name Schultz stayed with me.

You know what this Schultz did for me? His kit with the tools, he brought me boiled potatoes that he, during the night, got in the field and boiled them for me and brought them to me. But he never let me eat in front of him. He had to go hide on top. You know the job we did was insulate pipes so that insulation was glass wall, and that pretty much was rough.

So I hid up there and one day came up, and we got to talk. He says to me, do you know why I gave you the potatoes? I don't know you. But you know, when I was in occupation in France, I had some French farmers that invited me to their house to have a good dinner and some wine. That's how I want to repay them.

That's how I got potatoes from him. So you see, in the worst of situation, there are some people that you cannot say everybody is 100% bad or 100% good.

Now I came to that situation because my setup in the camp was such that every day was a day you survived. People disappeared because they were skinny, and they couldn't work anymore. The hunger was something. You dream about food.

You couldn't-- there was nothing else. What are you going to think of? Survival? You're just like a-- you know what they call-- the Germans called people that were very skinny? Muselmann. In French, muselmann means a Muslim. But in German, muselmann means a person that is near death or so skinny, they call him a muselmann.

I had this situation where I was in the middle of three beds. Above me was a Russian soldier, prisoner that was there. And the bottom was a professor, Jewish professor from Salonica, Greece.

I don't speak Russian. I don't speak Greek. But like I talk now, I think of talking of recipes, of bakery goods I was

making. So I start to talk, and I find out this professor from Greece speaks French, and he speaks Spanish. The soldier that was above, in 1936 was in Spain during the revolution with the Russian army in the brigade that went to Spain, so he understood Spanish.

Now I made rum baba in my mind and talked to the guy. He talked to the Russian. The Russian said to the guy, tell him after the war, I come to work for him in Paris. You know, this is anecdotes of how you try to survive by saying or doing.

And sometimes, you have people that used to smoke. They would give up the piece of bread to get a cigarette. I had no problem with this, but we had-- you know I didn't see a piece of soap for 22 months? How we got up in the morning, we washed, we picked up sand. We had no hair, so we-- the skin.

My worst situation was on a New Year's Eve, must have been '43, Christmas or New Year's Eve. We're supposed to go to work. And the guys, the guards were all drunk.

And here there were some French guys, there were Jewish guys that were with me. And we got-- we got to sing because what are we going to do? They were gone, so we sang to keep our morale up. In the snow, we're walking back from the work, back we're walking to camp. So this is the low point where you're so sad.

I had many a days where I saw people laying dead. I looked up in the sky, and I said, if there's a God, why, why, why, why is this? Now, again, I'm out of context, really, if you want to look at it. I just speak as things come to my mind. All these things I kept. I never really talked about it.

I was lucky. When I got back in 1945-- first of all, before I got back, I have to explain. We were so close to the Russians that we could hear the artillery in Breslau. They were bombarding the town.

And so I always say, union makes force. I never work alone. I always buddies around me. So we were, some French guys together.

I have it with me maybe a dozen names of people that while we're in camp hoping we come back. If somebody comes back, you have the name to inform the family that they were there and if they didn't come back, we're the last one that saw them. But I have these names. I wrote them out.

The worst part of the camp came towards '45. End of January, February '45, the Russians were approaching, and we had to evacuate. Now you see a bunch of guys were saying, well, we're going to play sick. We're going to stay here, and then the Russians going to free us.

But then we said, wait a minute. Maybe the Germans don't want to see any survivors, and they're going to shoot everybody. So we went with the horde like cattle. We left. We walked.

At that time, the able men, Germans, were already gone. They had the old guard, people in their 60s, guarding us. They put a sack with food to carry and we're walking, pitch black, you know. The planes, Russian plane, would come and bombard around there, so there was no light. And we were walking.

And some of the old guys couldn't carry it. So they said, you carry it for me. So let's assume I got it. The guy next to me took it away. We took all the food out.

The guy didn't know who he gave it to. We all looked the same. He never knew who he gave the sack. So but I said, they were old guys.

We arrived to a place. It's like a station where there's a railroad, and there's a station. So it's so cold in January '45. Remember, I had no underwear, no socks, wooden shoes with material, and we're going.

We try to go to a door. It's locked. It's full of people from the camps. We go to a window. I try to open. A fist comes out and hits you so that you don't get in there.

So we were three guys. In the dark we saw like a little hill to protect us from the wind. We lay down in the snow. When we woke up in daytime, we realized we are laying on the top a pile of coal that was for the engines. We slept on the coal, and we survived this.

Now in January of '45, they're evacuating us, and we're leaving. Here's where we were, Buna-Monowitz. We go to Czechoslovakia, Austria, back into Germany.

It took us one week before we could get off the train because most of the camps wouldn't accept us. There was no room, no food. And here we are, nothing to eat.

Now the union is the strength. We were on the side. Let's say this is the wagon, and the height was about 6 and 1/2 feet, open.

Now against the wall, the three of us were protected. The weak guys fall asleep. Three, four guys fall on top. Every morning, we peeled the dead, threw them overboard all over Germany, all over the place.

Now before we left that camp, we got-- from a warehouse, we found some cans of Argentine beef. It's called bully beef. It's like corned beef in cans. So we ate that before we left, and we kept the cans.

I had no more belt. I had a string. I took the string with a hole we made in the can, and whenever the train slowed down, I went on the shoulder of a guy, and I was there like this. I went fishing for snow.

Food, after three days, your stomach closes. There's no way you're going to be feeling hunger. The stomach is closed. But your body requires water. So what we did, we ate this, and I remember saying to the guy, that's better than whipped cream. Because it's snow, looks like whipped cream.

And we ate this until maybe three to four days after we passed Austria, I am going fishing, and I didn't throw it very far. Now in my mind, I'm looking here and I said, well, I don't want to be greedy. I'm going back.

And I looked back. There's this gunner 3 feet from me. The guy is like this with a gun at my head. I grabbed the thing on the top myself, he shot, and missed me.

Now if I was greedy, and I was go, go, I would have never known what hit me. I shook for a good 10 minutes. I had no more can, and we continued.

Now this is the-- at that time, there was a story about the people that were off a ship, and they were on a raft. And they got so bad, they had nothing to eat, nothing. So I'm thinking about this. That's what happened to us.

We reached a place. I don't remember where it was, some place in Germany. And there's a railway station. And there's four lines of trains. We're in the extreme outside.

Here's the German Red Cross. They see us. They don't give a damn because they are feeding soldiers on this side.

On the other side, there's a field and like a ravine. So they go around and they say, we want to take all the dead bodies off the train. We need volunteers to carry these dead bodies into the ravine.

My legs were so bad. I decide, well, maybe I should go down. And you see, it's about 6 and 1/2 feet. I can't lift myself. I can't get out. So I stayed.

The ones that went out, they put one guy here, one guy here, and the other guy left, had the legs. They threw this thing in. When they were all in, they shot everybody that went out, threw them all in. So you see, on that train, I escaped death twice.

Now, OK. We go on. Two weeks in that train, we finally reached a place called Dora, D-O-R-A. And that had non-Jews, 90%. It had a lot of French and Russians.

And they were making the V1 rocket in that place, the shell. And they were in the pine trees. Inside all the barracks were the guys were inside the pine trees. And the factory was a horseshoe shape inside the ground, and it was covered with fake trees, rubber trees.

And when a train came to pick up the shells, they lifted this. The train would go in and go out some place else. So now with this U2 plane, they would have gotten it right away. But at that time, they never knew where the factory was, the Allied forces.

So I'm going in there. The three guys, we're together. And we're so weak, we hardly can move. But I shake it off. I went, and I eat snow from the ground.

And as we're walking up a hill into the pine trees, I hear-- I said, I thought I was hallucinating. I hear French. French? What's going on? Where am I?

I went to the barrack. The head of the barrack was a French from the Underground from France. And we tell them who we are. We are Jews from Auschwitz, and we're here. He says to us, don't follow. Where you're going now, they're going to exterminate you.

Somehow, he incorporated us three into that barrack, and we stayed in that barrack. And we had to go to work, and we stayed there. And we never went to no-- they said we were going up to a shower place. Turns out everybody that went up there was liquidated. They had no food for them. Because I heard-- that's why I stay with French because my life was saved there.

So what happened is, we went to work in a factory, and it was machine tool. They were making pieces to get that rocket. I'm not a mechanic. I don't know anything.

So the guys told me, look, you take a rag, and you just go around and clean. To keep busy, I was looking what kind of machine-- you know, like you look at a car. It's called a Renault. This is called a Chevy.

All the machine have the place where they're from. There was a machine from America, from England, from Italy. And that was my way of not getting bored. I'm cleaning.

We are going into January, February, March early April. All of a sudden, we see maybe hundreds of planes coming by. American. And they come in to bomb into Germany.

The next day, we're at work. There's a whole bunch of Germans that come. So the aisles in that horseshoe were this way, and that rail truck were here. They put a platform.

All kinds of big-shot German military were there, and they picked up maybe 40 Russians. And they read a list, blah blah blah. Sabotage. There was some sabotage.

And what they do, there is crane with a wood this thick. They put four guys with a noose and lift the crane. And then, the 40 guys got, not really hanged, strangled.

And as we're standing here, the entrance was over there, and they were here. They say we have to parade in front. And as we go back, they were hitting us, saying, this is for sabotage, this is for sabotage.

We go on the other side, maybe a couple of hundred. Then they say, everybody back to work, except the first 50. Stay there.

I was among the first 50. I figured maybe it's our turn now. Turns out we had to take the bodies off this noose and carry

them to the trucks out.

I was-- you know, there is in France, a superstition-- hangman's noose brings good luck. I'm holding a body that's still warm. What I'm thinking is, the noose is going to bring me luck. It just shows you you're dehumanized to a point that you do things you don't realize or think about things that are not human, even.

So what happened, sure enough, we had three guys getting this, and we went back to work. They didn't bother us. You have to realize, this is April 1945.

All of a sudden, the Allied forces approaching. I don't know if they're Russian or they're American. I don't recall except we have to evacuate.

So there's a hill on this side, and there's another side this way. We had no choice. We're told to go up the hill.

And remember, at that time, all the able army guys were not there anymore. It was all home guard, all the guys that couldn't care less. They were German, but they really-- they knew the end was there.

The ones that went into the valley were liberated within 24 hours by parachutist, American. We went on the hill, and we walked. And we are the three guys together, and we were walking.

And all of a sudden, there's no more guards around. They disappeared. So we figured, well, what are we going to do?

So we get to a couple of houses, farmhouses, and among the German countryside with pine trees, and we asked for food. So they had, like, a silo, not a silo, a barn, and there was potatoes, and there was a smoked ham hanging. So, you know, the three of us, we built a fire with wood, and here we are, we put in the potatoes. We fixed some potatoes, and we eat that stuff that was very salty.

And I happened to have a scar that I collected in another place from the Germans, and so it was never properly taken care. All of a sudden, I get enema, which is my forehead starts to swell up. My eyes were almost closed. For three days, I was like delirious. And this is end of April of 1945, and it was unusually warm in Germany at that time.

And sure enough, where do we land? RavensbrÃ¼ck. You see German, I mean, women-- well, I thought I saw muselmann men, skinny, but the women, legs are almost like this, almost like this.

And you know, if you didn't-- nobody told you, you never realize it's a woman. You know there's nothing that shows it's a woman. There's nothing feminine in the body that's walking.

And we get the Red Cross, International Red Cross, to give us packages. Well, we know the end was near. Most of the buddies I had passed away. They disappeared in the last three months. From the time we left Auschwitz, I would say 50%, 60% of the people that survived everything were finished in that period of time either because of the hunger or because of something happened to them.

Now in my story, there are some parts that I missed because I looked like going through where I was at a particular time. In that period of time we got the Red Cross packages, and I had that enema, we were in a place called Adolf Hitler Kaserne. There were no more Germans around. That was the depot called Adolf Hitler, but there was no Germans. It was all prisoners. And we did see a guy.

We rested there, and all of a sudden, I hear somebody in the hallway, everybody from the western zone, out. The rest stays here. The other buddies are sleeping, so I said to them, look, we're supposed to go out. We go to France. We are western.

Sure enough, big, black GIs on trucks pick us up, and we are brought to a particular place near the Holland border. And that's where we get Red Cross packages. The first thing I looked at the packages. It has margarine, it has cigarettes, it has sugar, milk powder. Being a baker-- there was rice-- I was going to make a rice pudding.

Rice, sugar, milk powder, and here I am fixing. While I'm doing this, somebody is stealing my package, and I started crying like a baby. My package was stolen by those guys that were in the camp.

You know what? Maybe a dozen guys of that group died from diarrhea. Within 48 hours, they were dead. The intestines are not lined anymore.

I couldn't even-- I never got anything in the package. In other words to say, I was saved again. I would have maybe gorged myself with that food, and who knows what would have happened to me? But I was very unhappy that it happened to me.

Sure enough, they got us to the border of Holland, and before we went on the train, we stayed one night in this particular camp. And at that time, they would be afraid of lice, too. They put DDT under the arms. Red Cross-- I'll have to explain, that was after May the 8th where the war had already stopped.

And sure enough, the last guys in 1945, from that Dora camp, guys that went off to fight, was a brigade, Charlemagne, speaking French that enlisted with the Nazis. So we heard the French go up fighting the Russians.

Now when we got to the border, Holland, everybody that was not German that enlisted, they put a swastika tattooed here. So when the Red Cross had us put up the arm, there wasn't a swastika. They started to hit because the nurse would give a signal. They started to hit this guy. They're trying to sneak in back into France or to Europe with the non-Nazis, so they had him in the barrack. They were like prisoners.

Now whatever happened is, the next morning, they all disappeared. The guys around me were saying, well, the Americans let them go. It made no difference to me. I would have never known that they put swastikas under there, the ones that enlisted in the German army. But they were from Spain and from France. There's always mercenaries that go fight for one cause or another.

Anyway, here I am. The war is over. I get back to France. And at the border, the French had a strict control of everybody. So I got a paper where I was, and they gave us like a khaki clothing and 200 francs. And I was in the town of Lille, the north of France. My first purchase was, there was a pushcart with cherries in the street, about a kilo of cherries, my first purchase.

Where do I go? Back to Dijon. I found out that my youngest brother was taken in 44, and my sister had a girl. And they picked her up while she was nursing the baby, and the husband was Catholic. He went to the Germans and said, at least let us stay here till she feeds my child.

So when they let her go, they took my little brother in '44, which is 11. And her, the baby, and the husband escaped into the farmland, and they never were taken. She was never taken. Neither was her daughter.

When I come back and I hear this, that they took my little brother, the buddy that enlisted in the French army with me and was in the Air Force-- we were like brothers to this day. To this day, we're still friends. His mother, when I got to his place, his mother saw me. They said, we never expected you back anymore.

Anyway, through him, I found out there was an office-- I think it was the HIAS-- that took care of these things. And we found out a guy that was taken, the 40-year-old that was taken with him, was at the hospital. Came back.

So I went to see him. I said, where were you? The same camp where I was. If I was barrack number 20, he must have been barrack number 48. He was that close to me, and I never knew. He never came back. Never came back.

And so, I found out my sister had a daughter. And the French government got me the-- now we're looking at after the war where, you know, what is the future? You have to become steel, not to be emotional. You're all alone. The sister that escaped with her husband was in the French army in the post office in Germany, in the center in Germany with her daughter. And the husband was in the army, too.

And so I was in Dijon. This friend of mine, Paul, was all I had. And my brother, the older one-- actually, that's all-- when I saw him and I got taken a few hours after, he decided to leave the city and he went to a village.

In small villages, everybody is nosy, wants to know who he was and what he was. And he was denounced by the farmers, and the Germans came in to where he lived in an apartment, shot him in front of the two kids that were 3 and 4. Two daughters alive in France. The wife passed away at the age of 80-something two years ago.

Now this is a chapter that I had even skipped over because I was talking of what happened to me. But in between, this brother was all that-- except my sister. 1947. But everything happens by accident to me. My destiny is written, why I'm here.

When the French government, after the war, realized I needed to get rehabilitated physically and everything else, they put me in a town called [Place name] which is the center-- not far from Vichy. It's a place where you drink certain waters, and it helps you. I get to this place, and it has maybe 50 to 80 people-- I can't recall exactly-- from Hungary, from Poland, from Spain, not from Spain, from Greece, all refugees that eventually not going to stay in France. They go either to Israel or to the United States.

I met this guy go to the United States, and we got friendly. What happens to me is, I have no way to find work. What am I going to do?

So I recalled in the '30s, when we were in Hayange, my mother's sister sent us passage on a boat, a ship, to go to United States. My parents didn't go. But being a kid that at that time, I was a Boy Scout. I watched stamps. I took the stamp for the United States and collect it. The envelope stayed stuck in my mind.

The name of the husband of my aunt was Packard. Williams Avenue, Brooklyn. Williams was a connection, William Powell. Not the actor. William Powell-Baden, the head that made the Boy Scouts, the former-- the guy that initiated the Boy Scouts.

So I send a letter in French, which my aunt didn't speak French, and I said that I was-- I forgot what I said except it took a month, I got an answer, half English half Italian, couple of words in French. Neighbors, Italian neighbors, helped to understand what the letter was. She knew I was alive, and she worked out some papers for me.

Naturally, in my life in France, my life in Brooklyn, was another episode of where it's kind of odd. I remember getting a suit that looked like when you look at the old movies, all these gangsters wore the striped suits. For $45, they bought me a suit, and there I was.

The first person I meet in the street walking is a Black man coming towards me, and he is drunk. And he starts cursing me. I don't understand a word. I cursed him back in French. We cursed. I went my way, he went his way. That was my first impression of Brooklyn.

But I was in the section where Danny Kaye used to-- was born. You know, I forgot the name of that section. Anyway, New Lots was the station. New Lots, the "I" or "T" line in the-- but I stayed there three months with them because three days after I was there, I went to the city, and there's a French club, culinary, that was formed in World War I because a lot of these French guys that came to work in the cooks or restaurant, they had split shift. And in the afternoon, a lot of people tried to sell them the Brooklyn Bridge or something, so they formed this club so the guys had a place where they could read their paper or a magazine from France.

So I went to see them. Somebody in France told me to go see them. I could have worked two days later. I could have worked in the big hotels, which I did, but a little later.

And little by little, this fellow that I met in that place in France recuperating, I got in touch with him in New York. And he had a funny situation with him where he was a tailor by trade, but he was with an orchestra on the ships, cruises, South America from Poland. And he comes back in '39 on a cruise when the Germans have-- and he's there. So he

survived. Guess he lost his whole family, but he had family in New York.

And he meets this lady that went to school with him in Poland that was a widow. So he invited me to his wedding, and that's where I met my wife in '47, on June the 7th, 1947. That I'll never forget. And we got married July the 3rd, 1948.

Now she had no folks anymore, but the grandmother and some uncles and aunts and so forth. And we were suited. I didn't speak English, she didn't speak much French, a little bit. And when we met, I took her to a movie, and I knew that my life-- all my life, I was by myself.

But you got to remember that I'm talking about 1947. I was 25. And when you are 17, you think you're grown up. Naturally, five years later, you think even more. You have to look for a future. Some roots, you need roots. You need to build something. And that's how I started.

But again, the period of all the things I tell you had to be erased from my mind, and it wasn't easy. I had-- in the beginning of my marriage, my wife would tell me I would dream and wake up screaming about the camp. But when I thought of-- it was funny. The only thing I remember dreaming is the Germans with these helmets with the point from World War I and bayonets in the trenches, which was World War I. That was in my dreams. But I'm talking about the first years I was back.

But then, as I explained, my wife was a Giant's fan in New York. I became a Giant's fan. Leo Durocher was the manager. What more could I ask?

So in 1950, '51, when the Giants won the pennant with Bobby Thomson hitting the home run, my son learned papa and mama and then Bobby Thomson. That's the three words he knew when he was a year old in '51. And I'm a Giants fan ever since. I'm in California more or less because of the Giants.

But you see, you need something to take all the bitterness out of life, so you go with building a future. I was never afraid to work because I was put into this discipline of work where it becomes not a drudgery. It becomes a pleasure if you do something with a heart that you like.

Baking was something I liked to do. I worked crazy hours. My wife worked in the store. Now as you see, and I'm talking about what happened to me, I never figured I would lose her. We worked for 35 years together, and the last place I had was in South San Francisco.

I had Mrs. Allison's cookies. It used to be an old firm by that name, and I was making granola. I perfected a granola for Oroweat. The granola brand that they sell, I perfected for them.

And the guy that got touch with me, we were buddies. He would want a contract. I had a $200,000 contract every three months with him. And we sold truckloads of granola. One ounce goes in a loaf of bread, but they buy truckloads to go to all the Oroweats.

OK, so what happened, we decided in 1983 we'd try to sell it because we had worked enough. And so I had a buyer, a French guy. And in a period just maybe six months before, she happened to have a problem.

In her family, she lost family members from heart attacks, high blood pressure, and stuff like this. But we worked-- for 20 years I think we went twice to the doctor for checkups. That's it. Because if you have a headache, you go to sleep, the next morning it's gone.

The mind is the biggest healer. If you say to yourself, I can't be sick, I can't be sick, I can't afford it, I got to work. What do you think happens? You heal.

Don't ask me why. How come? It's the strong belief that you have to be strong, that you have an obligation. The people working, customers, so forth. And my wife was the same.

So on Friday of the last week of November, just after Thanksgiving, these people are supposed to come to the house. And I had put champagne in the refrigerator. The people were going to buy my place, French people.

The night of Thursday or Friday, she wakes up in the middle of the night telling me, I have to go to the bathroom, I can't open my eyes. That's what she says, and she has her eyes closed. So my son called an ambulance.

And sure enough, they come, take her to the hospital, and they told me at 2:00 in the morning, no way, can't survive. It went into the brain. She had a hemorrhage, cerebral hemorrhage.

The only thing was about a year earlier, she had something happen to her. We took her to the doctor, and he said high blood pressure and gave her pills. And over the years, I think she didn't take them the way she should have taken them, and that's how it happened. But you know, what I went through, I thought we are supposed to be invincible. Who's going to do the worst that I went through? Couldn't happen to me anymore.

I simplify my explanation now, but I couldn't realize that something could have happened to her, and it happened so fast that while he was telling me this Thursday, the Friday I had to go back to work. And orders to go out, truckloads of merchandise had to go out. My son was with me, helped me out, and I sold it. End of December, I sold the business.

And I was really in a frame of mind that I want to drop everything. I closed my life insurance. I had a house in San Mateo. I didn't sell it, but I went to France in January.

My friend Paul from France came. Overnight, he flew from France to meet with me. He knew her because we had gone to see him in '58. I took my wife to Dijon to meet my friends and everything.

Anyway, so what happened, I go to France and what do I do? I go to the South of France, and I stayed in a place where I had been with her. I couldn't stay one day and I left. And here I am on a bus on the Riviera, Nice, Monaco, and I'm in a bus crying by myself because of the situation, how this happened to her. And it was not the day before or the day after it happened her. That was about a month later.

So I said, it won't help me to stay in France. I have nothing there. So I came back here.

And I had a good friend that had a restaurant called French Guy, [Place name] restaurant by the Hilton Hotel. And he decided to open a bread place-- baguettes, French bread, and called Delice de France. And he had it open just about a year when I met him. And he says, I could use your expertise. You want to go with me, form a corporation?

I said, look, I don't think I am interested. But as it goes on, I said, I had to do something. I wasn't able to do just hang around and not do anything. So I went with his son and three bakers, French people, and we opened this business in 1985.

And what happened is that over the years that I worked in the camp, when I left, I never realized, except before I left in '47, there was rumors people were telling me that there's going to be some reparation from the German people towards the people that were in the camp. IG Farben Industry is where I worked in this place. So they were going to give me some kind of a compensation.

But, you know, I went to work. I had a bakery in 1952. My wife and I, we opened the first bakery in New Jersey. And I always worked hard. We saved up money. I bought some mutual funds in 1952. So I am in the business of saving and building a nest egg over these years.

Fortunately, when we went to France one time in December, I felt-- because I went in July for summer vacation, offices are closed. Nobody can give me any information. I go for Christmas, and I met this fellow that had come here, visit his daughter. So he says, when you come to France, come to see me.

And so I tell him, look, I got to go. That was in Dijon. I got to go to Paris to find out what happened to possibility of compensation. So he sent me to the veterans' organization in Paris and within 24 hours, they take an X-ray of me, and I

get 100% disability from the French government.

That is 1979, 30 years later. When it first got into effect was in 1949. This is 1979.

And OK, they said to me, where were you all these years? I said, in the United States. I was working. Wasn't going to wait for a hundred dollars a month that you're going to give me compensation. Turns out it was a thousand a month.

So for 30 years, I couldn't get back pay. So I figured it's $150,000 Heck, I'm OK. I don't need the money. I got my own, anyway.

But the doctors there check everything else. French have a way-- if you could do a favor to someone, they pay you back some way or another. So this guy takes me to this doctor, Dr. [Personal name] and he says to me, look you got this. And I go, I don't have this. I'm not having heart trouble.

You're going to have someday. You're plastic. You're not going to have it now but later. He marked all these. I had 15 disabilities, which didn't exist. Some, yes. Chronic bronchitis, that I have since the time I went to work in a bakery and after the camp.

So here I am in '79. I go to France. Since '79, I must have gone a dozen times to France.

And in France, I would live like a king because my pension, if I travel on the train, I need a guide. When you're 100% disabled, the guide can help two years or 80 years. He's your guide. Two people, 25% each pay on the train.

Go to Paris, to Nice, pay 25% for each. You take a plane from Paris to any French possession, you pay 50% for two. Here, it doesn't count from here. Here is the United States.

Anyway, so I kept in touch. I'm in the French consulate here. And coming to the situation, '85, I was getting my pension, like my social security here, in a bank in France, in Paris. The bank that France has, Bank of the West, was bought by the French Banque Nationale de Paris. That's the bank that has Bank of the West.

And this lady that handles international transactions, she would bring me my money here. She knew my wife. And I went there one time. I took her out for lunch. And I said, that's the woman I'm going to have for myself. And sure enough, we got married in '86.

And she has-- I have a family. She has her father, her mother in their 80s. They're Sephardic Jews from Morocco, from Tangier. And she has two sisters here.

One of their husband was in Tampa. His name is Werner. Fischstein. No. Werner and Esther. And he was in the camp. He's German. He's got a thick German accent. And she has another sister that lives in Nevada. Her husband is also a German Jew.

Jewish people, you know, they are very religious, more than I ever will be. Not because I've got against-- I have nothing against it, but I don't know. There's something holding me back. And I think if I really analyze it, it's because the rabbi that I went for my Bar Mitzvah looked at me like I was a second-class citizen, and it was a scar on me.

Unfortunately, I'm quite sure none of these people that were there in 1940 when the Germans came survived. The man must have been in his 60s at the time. If the Germans came, none of them survived. But the reason I'm saying this is because there are some scars that you don't really believe that's the reason.

But somehow, my wife was also people that were cantors in New York. Her maiden name was Rabinowitz, which is son of Rabbi. Rabinowitz. And she had an uncle that was a cantor, and he passed away.

So when I got married with her in 1948, I more or less was looked upon like, you know, it's not like nowadays. The women are more free to decide and give the orders, which I don't care. I got a woman that gives the orders, but I do

what i want, anyway.

Anyway, coming back to the situation of my first wife, I had a bakery. See, I couldn't say for Passover, I'm going to close and not make any bread. There was no Jews around me. So I didn't really follow anything.

But time goes on. You get to a situation where you realize someone has to think what is life all about? Who are you?

And I realize when I talked about my situation and I say I was in the bakery back in '36, I said, well, I came with the dinosaurs because 1936, talk to someone about 1936, I was making croissant in France in 1936. And all these years, my idea of a book of my story would have the title of A Cat has Nine Lives, A Human Being has More. Why? Because you don't realize. You try to cross the street, you can get hit by a car. That happens very often.

This morning, Herb Cain had an article. This woman didn't see the car. She crossed the street. She got hit, and she got a jaywalking ticket for $120. So you see, she didn't get killed. But it can happen any place, any time.

But when I hit 70, things changed in me. Basically, the philosophy at this moment I have is, if I see the year 2000, I'll be the happiest guy in the world. Anything after that is already-- since '45 is bonus, anyway.

But the year 2000 to me is a-- because I know, between now and the year 2000, there'll be so many new things in medicine. Look at the communications we have right now. What happened in Bosnia last night, you see it at home the same night because it's the nine-hour difference.

There's so many things that are different from the time of '36. That's why I said a dinosaur of '36. There was no television. Look what happened with the telephone. I have a cordless telephone. I go from room to room. I go to bathroom, I take the telephone with me.

You know, that shows you how things are different, how much you have to realize that you have-- that there's people that were over there never got to enjoy, not to realize all these people. Not me, a little baker that was making eclairs or croissant, but the guys that were well educated.

I'm thinking about that doctor that opened-- he was one of the greatest surgeons of Berlin, I was told. I don't even know what his name was, but he was was in the camp, and he was performing what he knew best. And the German at least didn't finish him off. They knew they needed people to work. So if he saved them to go to work, they let them live.

What happened to these people, I never know. But it just shows you everybody went through a period of life where, for good or for bad, what occurs now is the nine lives. I must have two left, I guess. Seven have gone through. But they can take-- each one can take another 20 years, I guess. I'll let you ask me another question.

Let's go back to your Bar Mitzvah.

OK.

[INAUDIBLE]. Can you remember anything specific about that night?

No. The only thing I can remember being on a like a podium, and they opened the Torah. And I had like a pointy thing, and I read this in Hebrew, which I took maybe six months of training. And there was a time I could remember the first few sentences, but I don't remember. Nothing besides this except that happened between the age of 13 and 14, so it had to be 1935.

I went to work in August of '36. June, the school closed and in August, I went to work in Metz, and Gaston [INAUDIBLE] was my boss. He never knew anything about my situation except at one time, he beat me, and I said, I'm not going to stay there because we had to heat the bakery oven with coke. That was in the basement. And I brought up the coke, and at 6 o'clock at night, we heat the oven, put the dampers at 8:00. The next morning, we could bake.

One Monday morning, I had been-- I was working seven days a week, and the seventh day, a half a day, I was going by bus home. My mother cleaned my clothes. I missed the last that night, the last bus, and I had to take the next morning that instead of being at work at 6:00, I got there at 7:00.

He was pretty mad. He sent me down the basement to pick up some debris of-- you see the eggs at this time were in a big wooden crate, a thousand eggs at a time. And it was hay in between. So when you picked up egg, they was hay that would fall around, so he had me pick it up. There was a broken glass. I had to pick this up for the garbage.

He found a couple of pieces of coke, and then he slapped me. So when I had to make a delivery to a [? cold ?] spot that we had, I didn't go back to the place, and I got somebody to a phone, and I called my parents that had no phone, but somebody in the store had a phone. My father came over. And my father-- the guy said to my father very sorry.

So I realized my father was agreeing with him, so I figured, well, what am I going to do? So I stayed, and things got better because I learned a long time ago, too, in the period I was in this country, if you find a bully that's trying to do you something, you show that you're not afraid. The bully gets smaller. He is not as bad. For a good reason as he realizes he has somebody that's not afraid of him.

Because the reason I learned this, too, in 1949, when I was working in New York City, I worked in a pastry shop, was called Madame Eva. And Madame Eva was dead for a long time, but her husband ran that place. And the head baker was a German that was never married. He was like living in a room and board, and he never would say good morning. Nothing.

One morning, I come in, and he's giving me a hard time. And he was, oh, [GRUNTS] like this. So I took the rolling pin, I knocked it on the table, and I said, look, where I come from, even the pigs go, [SNORTS]. You don't even say good morning, but the pigs in our place, they say, [SNORTS]. That's good morning.

So the guy started laughing. He never was mad with me. He became a very good friend. But he wanted to influence the people because he was a big-shot German. Ho, ho, ho. So I just knocked the rolling pin on the table and said, look, enough is enough.

And he changed. And he realized that you're not going to get-- that I'm talking about 30 years ago or more. Nowadays, a guy takes a knife out if you give them the lip, you know. It's not the same life.

But when I was younger, I wasn't afraid. If I survived where I was, why would I be afraid? Nothing can happen to me except if it happens, it happens. I'm ready. Whatever happens, I'm ready. Now after the Bar Mitzvah, what is the next question?

Where was it held?

In Thionville, the town where I went to school.

What facility?

At a synagogue.

Did you have any family attending that?

Father and mother, that's it.

And your brothers?

Nobody else. I have to explain. My uncle, which is my mother's brother that was a prisoner of war with my father, lived about 30 miles away, but families sometimes have feuds, and they didn't get along fine. So they didn't talk to each other. But I met him after the war, and he was very proud. He passed away when he was in his 70s. He lost a son that was

taken, my age.

I have a picture here where I am in a mock car. It was like in a fair. You have the front of a wooden cardboard, and it looks like a car. I'm driving. My sister's next to me, and my two cousins, boy and girl, in the back. I must have been about 10.

So that's the remembrance of the closest relation, but there wasn't a big ceremony. You got to remember, we're talking about 1935. We didn't have that much to say, OK, we're going to make a big deal about it, not like what you see now here where you invite a couple of hundred people, and everybody brings presents. There was no such thing at that time.

Where did you get the feeling that you were being treated as a second-class citizen by the other Jews? Were there people in school or--

No. No. It's very difficult to pinpoint it, but it's something that is in the back of my mind. I might be wrong. Maybe it's just an imagination I had.

But you see, you get this feeling when my folks, first of all, were in France, and they didn't speak the language too close. I was born there. I went to school. And my father and mother spoke Yiddish between them and sometimes Polish because they're from there. Now if I had some friends that came over, Jewish people that were from there--

Now remember, one thing what I'm saying right now, don't hold it against me. I can't remember 100% what now I say I felt like a second-class citizen. It's because if you read history of people, should it be Black or the Irish that came here after the famine in Ireland, I came from a family that came from Poland. I was born there, but they weren't looked upon like people. They were looked at like second-class citizen in the sense because they were from Poland.

There is such a snobbery that exists among Jews as well as among other people where, if you're not from there, you're considered not the elite. There's guys that I'm talking about, like the rabbi or the people in the wine business, in that town were usually people that had wealth. And they more or less not like now--

I get-- my wife gets the Jewish bulletin at home. And I looked at this, and I see there are loans for no-interest for people that come from Russia now and all that stuff. That didn't exist in those days. They had themselves prejudices. Again, I cannot say exactly why, how come.

That's what stuck in my mind. That's what I felt then, and I still feel now although I don't have any grudge. That's the way they were. You can't change that.

Now among all this talking is strictly what I feel. I could be very well wrong and that they didn't feel it that way. But that's what they gave me the feeling, that maybe it was my own feeling of second class because we had no money. We were not wealthy.

I could never have had people say, well-- although if you look at some of the pictures, I wasn't bad looking when I was young. I could have got married with anybody there. But I could not see that closeness between classes in the years of '30s, in the '30s, see? And that's why I've mentioned that.

That doesn't mean that I hate it or something. It's more or less not a shyness but a feeling of exclusion, that I was not included in the group. That's how I felt because, first of all, I went to work at 14. Well, maybe the kids that these rich people had, he was helping in the store, he would go play games, or he was [INAUDIBLE].

I went to work. I worked seven days a week. And, as I said, I didn't know better. But I was lucky that I persevered the three years. Then in the army, so when I came to Germany, it wasn't so hard. I got through hardships before, so I could take it. First of all, I had no wife, no children to worry about when I got there.

So, as I said, you got to be lucky to survive. But you also have to be like steel, forged to mentally endure all of these things, which I've done, and I never-- I'm not regretting a minute of what happened to me prior to World War II because

I realize, thanks to this hard work, it helped me in the future. It helped me build up something and an ethic of work where I see some people nowadays, especially young people--

I have a son who's 43, OK? He works. He has graduated from Santa Barbara University. And he was going to be a teacher and actually, with Vietnam and all this, he never got this. But he's very intelligent in the sense that he learned the health food business.

So he's been working in this for the last 10 years. And his boss had to close his door. He hasn't worked since October. He's not worried about it. I would go crazy. At 43, not to work?

He's married with this lady for about 20 years. They have no children. And I saw him last week, and I talked to him on the phone yesterday that I was coming here. And his birthday is April 27, 1950, he was born, so he's going to be 43. So I said, for his birthday, we're going to go out, so he says, OK, I think after my birthday, I'll go back to work.

That again is a mentality that's different. I have nothing against it. If he saved enough money, then that's his life. More power to him.

But I'll give you an example of what happened in '35, '36. The Depression that you had here, we had the reverberation. We had it there, too. So you cannot realize some of the feelings I had at that time.

And what is now is completely different. You have to have opinions fit to the occasion. In other words, if nowadays things like myself, it doesn't bother me. I realize we lived a different life. Things are completely different.

Therefore, maybe I would have to be born in 1950, my life would have been so much different, maybe weaker of character. I don't know. Again, this is my thoughts and my belief.

There you were about the time of your Bar Mitzvah wondering who you were. What conclusions at that time did you come to?

The conclusion is very simple. Once you go to work and you get involved with something, it's just like a kid that is invited into a studio. There's a guy painting. And the guy says, OK, take some paint and create something.

My creation was putting egg wash on croissant. That was, to me, a creation. I felt like this is something that I never would have thought I'd be able to do.

As I went along, I made liqueur candies. I made pralines. I made so many things that I created. Unfortunately, you eat it. There's nothing lasting.

But I tell you, I'll explain this situation. When after the war, the government sent me to this hotel to recuperate. The first thing I did, I went in the kitchen, and I asked the guys, do you have some eggs and some sugar and some flour? Yes.

There was 80 people. I made eclairs for everybody. So I was a buddy. Everybody liked me.

That was in 1945. Nobody had eclairs. But you know, that was my way of creating something, and I felt like everybody was friendly with me.

In 1946, I went to Paris, and I got to work in a bakery. The fellow was Jewish, and he was working during the day, making French baguettes. It was behind the opera in Paris. And I used to go at 8 o'clock at night till 8 o'clock in the morning by myself, and I made a thousand eclairs during the night all by myself.

He used to buy in the black market some sugar. But for bread, baguettes, you need flour, yeast, and water, a little salt. That's it. So he made fresh bread at 10 o'clock and at 2 o'clock.

And at 8 o'clock at night, I come from-- some Jewish organization sent me to a villa between Paris and Versailles. They

had orphans. The parents got killed during the war. We had to ration books even after the war.

I used to go to Versailles. I had a bicycle with a little cart in the back. I used to buy bread in the bakery, maybe 20 loaves of bread, and bring it there. I would work from 7:00 in the morning till about 2:00, then I would take a nap, and then I go into Paris, work at night, three nights a week.

I remember getting one franc for each eclair I made. He sold them for 11 francs. But you've got to remember, it's not the same thing. This represents-- 400 francs was $1. So I got a thousand eclairs, I got a thousand francs. So if $1 was 400, that was $2.50 equivalent. But you have to remember, that's 1946. It was 1946.

So you see, my feeling was although it was tough, I created something. I learned something. It gave me a philosophy of being creative, to enjoy what you do.

That's why I worked at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York in 1949. And General Eisenhower was in Paris, and they sent a plane over to get from the Waldorf sides of beef. And I was in charge of the ice cream production.

So I made ice cream for General Eisenhower before he was president. And I had to write on each box, care of Captain Schultz, aide-de-camp, General Eisenhower. And that would be packed in dry ice and shipped before there was jets. That was 1949, 1950. Yeah, 1950.

So you see, I created. It was something that, first of all, I worked in the bakery. There was around-the-clock people.

And as I worked there with the French guy, and the chef was French. He's the guy that told me, you're not French, you're German. So, you know, he was very bright. That was the only thing to tell me that I was German. I hated it because I wasn't German.

And so what happened, he comes to me one day. He says, look, the hotel was sold to the Hilton chain, and they want to manufacture their own ice cream. Do you know how to make ice cream? I said, sure. I learned in France.

Three quarts by hand, that's what I learned. This they put it machinery. I made 500 gallons of ice cream every day, six days a week. We had banquet room for 5,000 people.

And I realized I made $100,000 of profit in one year for the hotel. The first year I did it, I kept book and everything. $100,000 in 1951. So I said, I've got to go in business for myself. I was making $80 a week, but I had two meals, and I had two bottles of beer that were given to me, which I didn't drink at the time. So I gave it to the other guys.

But, anyway, to give you a story that as soon as I came to this country, there is such a thing as you-- there's a metaphor for Moses. You change. The little guy that felt second-class citizen, that was shy, that couldn't see anything happen to him because he had no means to become somebody.

So I was going to enlist in the army, like I said, during the war. But when I came to this country, I said, there's nothing that-- who's going to stop me? If you're willing to work--

My wife at that time, we get married in '48, she worked for a fur company on 7th Avenue in New York. Big guy. He liked my work so much. I needed money. He advanced us $5,000. He vouched for me whatever loan the bank was going to give me.

So I got a $3,000 from the bank, and I opened my first business in 1952, '52, New Jersey. Was called Maurice's Pastry Shop. And, you know, once I got a business, I started to learn what business is all about.

You've got to make pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving. I never had seen this in my life. And I finished off in San Jose having the bakery where I made 1,500 pumpkin pies for Thanksgiving.

Life has levels. If you have any kind of ambition, you go from one level to another one gradually. My first bakery, I had

$8,000 to set up. I stayed there till I had no more debts.

Then I realized, what else? I have no more debts, but I didn't have a house. Back East, there wasn't such a thing that you could put down $10,000 or $2,000 and buy a house. So I lived in an apartment, which is OK. And when the Giants left, and I had no more debts, my wife and I went to France in '58.

When I came back, I said, if somebody came and said to me, I want to buy your place, how much do you want? I know already. $20,000, $10,000 down. Would you believe somebody came in January of 1959 and did exactly ask me how much I wanted for the bakery? And I sold it.

In February '59, we took a brand-new station wagon, Plymouth, went cross country. My wife had some cousin in Phoenix, no, an aunt in Phoenix, some cousins in Los Angeles. So we went cross country, and in Los Angeles, I could have worked for Romanoff in Los Angeles as a pastry chef. But when I got to Los Angeles, the smog was so bad.

So sure enough, the magnet was pulling me to San Francisco. So we went up and somehow, we went to Patterson, which is way in the boondocks, into San Jose. We took the 99 to go up. Tracy, we turned around, which is not like now. It used to be minor roads. Now you got 5 that goes up and everything.

And we lined up in San Jose. Went from San Jose to San Francisco, and there was a bakery called Blooms, which doesn't exist anymore. But in '59, the guy that was working there, he says, OK, can you decorate? I said, sure. OK, decorate this cake. Well, let's do this. And I did it.

I used to live in San Jose. To go to San Francisco, I wasn't interested. So I didn't take the job.

But in San Jose, I found a place that had bakery goods that looked like a Frenchman was with that profession. So I asked the people, is there some French guy in here? Yeah. He's off today. Why don't you come back tomorrow? He'll be here.

So I see him. And he says to me, you know, I'm busy right now. Why don't you drop by at 6 o'clock. Here's my address where I live.

OK, we were brand new. We found some realty guy. He had converted his garage where he lived, and he was renting for $125 a month. Good rent district. All furnished. So we rented this.

I went to see him at 6 o'clock. He's barbecuing steak. He never saw me in my life. He's barbecuing steak. So I said, gee, California is God's country, and we became friends.

And like I said, one thing leads to another. You do one nice favor to someone, you get repaid. One way or another, somewhere along the line, you get repaid.

And this is another philosophy I have. If you can help, even if some strangers come from Israel to see my wife, I take the car, I take Lombard Street, I take the bridge, Golden Gate, go underneath, show them underneath the bridge. Go on the other side, go up on the hill. I take every possible ways to show them a good time.

Some people from France, I did this. He had a son marry here. A guy, he lives in Paris in the suburbs. When we went to France the last time, he quit two days' work to take me around.

That just shows you, if you do something for someone nice, you're going to get repaid. There are few and far in between, there are some guys that are louse. They don't want to know from anything, but they're not that bad. In general, you're always going to find, if you act nice--

I have cases even now people I don't know, they look at me, they smile at me and say hello. He doesn't know me. He looks at my face, he says hello. I think that's nice rather than have a stick and try and hit you on the head with it.