Interview with MAX KNIGHT
Holocaust Oral History Project
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BY PEGGY COSTER:

Today is November 15, 1990. I am Peggy Coster, an interviewer with the Holocaust Oral History Project in San Francisco, California. Today we are talking with Max Knight. Assisting in the interview today is Jack Clarke.

Q. Good morning, Mr. Knight. Could you just begin by telling us where you were born and when.

A. I was born in 1909, in Austria. My hometown is Vienna. My family comes from the German-speaking part of what then was Bohemia, the Sudetenland. It was a middle-class family. My father was director of a branch bank in Pilsen, outside that German area, and later in Vienna was vice-president of a major bank, Bankverein-Creditanstalt. It still exists.

I grew up in a very sheltered atmosphere. My name was not Knight. It was a German, or a German-sounding name, Kuhnel, K-U-H-N-E-L, with an umlaut over the u. And to jump the gun, I changed it on the advice of friends just before I, well, at the moment of my immigration to the United States, because that was just briefly before the outbreak of the war at Pearl Harbor. War was expected and anticipated. And my friends told me that during the First World War German-sounding names were a problem. There was great antagonism against Germans. And as it turned out, this was not at all the case in the Second World War. In fact, the Germans were more the darlings than anything else. In later years I sometimes was thinking of changing the name back, because there was really no reason otherwise. I did not do so because it

just would have been too complicated, because of all the documents and accounts, and what not. Also, in the meantime, I got married. My wife is American-born; my children -- I have two sons -- both are born in this country. So they are the rightful bearer of this name, although I, myself, feel I am not.

So, as I was saying, it was just too much commotion to change the name back. And so I left it the way it was, although in the early years I felt uncomfortable with an English-sounding name, especially when I was with my own kind. And it was obvious that the name could not have been my real name. Meanwhile, I got quite used to it. And it may amuse whoever sees this thing here to learn why. I, in later life, wrote books. And when the first one was published under this name, Knight, and I saw fine reviews in the literary section of the newspapers, I was happy to identify with that name. So, ever since then I felt all right.

So, to get back, I went to grade school and to middle school in Vienna. Middle school was the Gymnasium, meaning the classic school, the one that feeds you six years of Greek and eight years of Latin, which later on turned out much more useful than I thought it ever could be. I'm referring to Latin, particularly. And it also got me interested in languages. I dabbled in several and am very fond of studying languages. I have in later years -- well, we come to that which I later studied. So I graduated from that classic high school in 1928. And I went on to the university in Vienna. For five years I studied law; I graduated in law; got my J.D. in 1933. And that

was also the year in which Hitler took over in Germany. Now, there were five more years to go, from '33 to '38, when he took over in Austria. So these were the five breathers, you might say. Unlike people who had to interrupt their studies, or lose or gave up their jobs or break up with their families, I was very fortunate that if I had to leave my home, it could not, ironically, have been at a better time, before I took roots, before I took a wife, before I had a permanent job.

So these five years, the years of gestation, you might say, of the political situation, was a time that worried me very much. I saw the build-up of armament in Germany. I saw the growing militancy of the Nazi party. And yet I felt isolated in seeing this. It must be remembered that Austria was the first country taken over by Hitler. There was no precedent. So my pessimism of what might come seem unjustified. Jewry in Europe was emancipated, I had learned in history. the Emperor Joseph, Joseph the Second of Austria, had emancipated the Jews in 1782. They had become citizens of equal right. There was supposed to be no more discrimination. There was religious discrimination in Austria -- I'm saying religious, rather than racial, discrimination in the earlier years. But that did not affect me at all. My family was totally acculturated. I did not know my Jewish descent until I was a teenager. It was never mentioned. It was never practiced. I mean, the religion was never practiced. There was no such thing as diets, holidays. I was a lost cause for Judaism. I felt simply as an Austrian, and

nothing else.

But I was very interested in the political situation, although I was not a political person. I was a literary person. I wrote stories, poetry. My first production was actually printed when I was seven years old. It was a contest during the First World War. A contest by a women's magazine, "How Do Our Children See the War." It was a well-known women's magazine, DIE FRAU UND MUTTER was the name. And I had once written, longhand with pencil, on lined paper, a poem about the war and how the soldiers suffered and how they were hungry and froze in the woods, the way I imagined that. And without my knowing it, my mother sent that in, in the original handwriting. I didn't know anything about this until many years later, when, lo and behold, I found the clipping in my father's desk which told about that, that I had won the first place in this contest. I had won the prize because the other submissions were always very patriotic, and hurrah, and flags flying, and soldiers on high horses. It was all very wonderful. So I was the pessimist even then. I remember how my father, shortly after my mother had sent it in without my knowing this, got up at lunchtime one time, rather formally, and read from a paper the fact that here this Max Kuhnel had won the prize for this and that. Well, I paid no attention to this at all. My father used to read things presumably from the newspaper. I couldn't read until just a year before I wrote the poem. I did this poem the second year of grade school. My father was in the habit of, quote, "reading

from the newspaper" what my mother told him I had done wrong during the day -- I had broken this dish, or this or that, and "Look what I read in the newspaper, you have broken that dish." So I was used to this trick and paid no attention to my father.

I became known in those years under a pen name, Peter Fabrizius. In the final years of this period, between '33 and '38, I collaborated with a friend who was a fellow student in law school, who also wrote. And we formed a great friendship. We wanted to write jointly. And although this seems a difficult thing to do, we found a way, and we jointly published in later years, published these stories under that name of Peter Fabrizius.

In 1937, the last year before Hitler took over, I avidly read a little magazine that was published in Germany, DAS NEUE TAGEBUCH. Originally, DAS TAGEBUCH, later, DAS NEUE TAGEBUCH. And this paper published articles well-researched, well-reasoned, and well-written, about things which I didn't read in the daily press, about Hitler's growing power, re-arming, working the armament factories. And I became more and more disturbed about this. It was, as it turned out later, very important that I read this. Although this magazine had a relatively small circulation, it was more intelligent, it was better reasoned. I would compare it, if you can compare anything of that sort, vaguely with the NEW REPUBLIC here or THE NATION. The editors didn't go in for advertising, but the facts. And this made me perhaps, you might say, well, I was going to say,

"prematurely" aware. It was not at all prematurely. It was very timely -- aware of what turned out to be the real political situation. I was worried, disturbed and lonesome. When I talked about it, people would say, uh-huh. I was tossing in bed during the night, what to do about this, how I saw this avalanche of barbarism. And I finally came to the conclusion that the only thing to do was -- and it took me a long time to come to this conclusion -- to go abroad; not for emigration, to go abroad, for a visit, and try to establish a place so that in case this avalanche should really come and roll over us, I would have a place of refuge. Israel did not exist in those days, the normal haven. Besides, I doubt that I would have chosen it. I was just a "plain Austrian." And so, in the fall of 1937, I went to England. That was a great decision for a young fellow who had no particular reason to do that, no apparent reason. But I said right away when they asked me, "Why do you do it?" I said, "Well, I just want to dig myself a mousehole to crawl into if this is necessary."

I tried to publish my stories in England. England, in those days, was very, very conservative. My stories didn't seem to fit there. I went from one to another. And then came a decisive interview with one editor there, fiction editor for a newspaper called the DAILY HERALD, a mass-circulation, five-million readers newspaper. And he, to get rid of me, said, "You know, even if everything were fine with your stories, and if they did meet the taste of our readers, they're much too short. We

have a page assigned for short stories, and we have to fill this. This is tradition, this is a custom, this is the policy we have here." And then I said, "Well, if my stories are too short, why don't you use two on one page?" That caught him unprepared, and he thought it was funny for me to say such a thing. You have to imagine the stereotypical Englishman: We have a paper, the page is that long, and we have to have a story, not two stories. But it amused him somehow that I had said that. And I said, "What can you lose? Try it one day. Our stories, which are translated into 13 different languages all over Europe, why should they not appeal to the Englishmen here?" So he did this, really. The day came when he printed two stories by Peter Fabrizius on that one page. I had said earlier, "If it doesn't take, you don't ever have to take another story from me. You cannot risk so very much. You do not risk very much doing that." And so he did. And it turned out to be a bang-out success. And he then ordered a whole dozen of those stories and announced a series of them in the paper, saying, "Next week we will print the whole week a series of these stories." You can imagine the triumph.

I returned after this to Vienna. And I thought, I do have an edge now. If something happens, I can go to England and publish my stories, and can live on that. I failed to mention that these stories were in English, of course. But I didn't know English. My stories had been written in German. And in view of what happened in later years, and to jump the gun again, I'm today a professional translator, and have more than a dozen books

which I, myself, have translated. In those days I had to hunt for a translator, and I couldn't pay the translator anything, except, perhaps, share the proceeds. It was on speculation. I had several translators because I wasn't satisfied with the first, or the second, or the third, or the fourth. I had tried so many, because I wanted idiomatic English that didn't sound translated. As a matter of fact, I had to ask the translator to forego even mention of his name. I said that, otherwise, I cannot succeed. And I turned over the entire proceeds to him. I said, "You can have all of this; I merely want to establish myself."

So, I came back to Vienna, and we are now talking about the first weeks of 1938. I cannot at this point here, and I don't expect it to be necessary, to give you a background of what went on, historical, political, background, except to say that Hitler was in the last stages of taking over Austria; and the demonstrations in the streets, the increasing brutalities of those SS men, the SA men, in the streets, accosting of people in the streets whom they suspected of not having the blue blood that they desired; the increasing terrorism, the setting off of bombs in movie theaters, all that. And to me it all seemed to merely confirm what I had read in this journal I was mentioning, the TAGEBUCH.

And then came the dramatic day on which the last chancellor of Austria, Schuschnigg, called on the Austrians to have a plebiscite on March the 13th, to decide whether they want

to have an independent Austria or whether they wanted to be taken over by Hitler. I felt that was such a crucial, historical parting of the ways. And I couldn't see how this small country could really resist the big, powerful neighbor of Germany. I packed my suitcase and had it ready. On the 11th of March, two days before the announced plebiscite, a Friday, I was with my parents sitting around the dinner table, the radio was on, we listened to the news, and I heard the last Austrian chancellor, this Schuschnigg, say that Austria was in the process of being taken over, that he had to resign. And his last words were, "God save Austria."

When I heard that, I said to my mother, "Please call the western railroad station and ask when the next train is leaving for England." Nowadays, we think in terms of "When does the next plane go?" There was no such thing then. There were -- planes existed, but the normal way of traveling was by train. And I heard my mother speak on the phone with the depot of the railroad station and I heard her say, "Nine o'clock? That is too soon. When does the next one go?" And I cut in and I called to her saying, "Never mind, never mind. I'll catch that one, the first one." But it was 8:00 o'clock, it was only an hour to go. Well, I went to my room, I closed the already packed suitcase in a hurry. In such a hurry that when I finally arrived in England, there was still -- there was a spoon lying on top of my clothes and my things, which I had held in my hand and dropped there. I reached that railroad station right in the middle of jubilant

Nazi formations that cut off our way in several places. But the taxi driver got through; I caught the train; I said good-bye to my father.

There were only three other people who caught that very, very first train immediately after the takeover. Were there three or four? I'll come to that --

Q. In your book you say four.

A. Beg your pardon.

Q. In your book you say four.

A. Four people, four people, yes, including me. And if you visualize the map of Central Europe, Austria is a, what you might call, a horizontal country -- long stretch, from the Hungarian border to the Swiss border. And Vienna is at the extreme right, the extreme eastern point. It is only an hour away from Hungary. And so we had to travel all night to the Swiss border, not knowing whether we would get through or not. The train, indeed, was stopped in many places. And I saw the Nazi guards on the platform of the various towns, and you never knew whether they would come in and do something, or whether they would leave you alone. There was a high-tension atmosphere in that compartment. We spent a long time in Salzburg, which is sort of half way, not quite, to the border. As it later turned out, we did pass Salzburg, going from east to west, we went like that (gesturing), and the Nazi troops came in from north to south like this. So I just missed them. You see, like that, within hours, perhaps less.

I cannot describe the terrible pressure and tensions that prevailed during those hours, between Vienna and the border. Shortly before the border, one of the other three was taken from the train by two Nazis who came in at the last station before the border, and took him away. We didn't know why. In fact, they took all three away. They left me alone. What happened, why I was passed over, I will never know. Perhaps I looked least conspicuous, a young fellow. I had claimed I was going to see my fiance in England. They had asked me, "Why are you going there?" I didn't have much baggage, I didn't have any money. They left me alone. But they took out the other three. And the train started going again. After a few minutes, however, one of the fellows came back. And shortly after, the other one, but never the third one, and I don't know what happened to him. Those two were not saying a word. One was furiously smoking. They both didn't want to say what happened to them. And then we reached the Swiss border, and passed the border, and I saw Swiss uniforms on the station there. One of the great moments in my life. I knew that I had escaped. This was the first of several escapes.

One of the two men who had come back -- and now he opened up and just gushed out everything he had to say. He was just ecstatic with joy, jubilant, saying, "They took all my money away, everything I'd saved in my life. I had it in my shoe, you know, in cash, planning to build up a new life in another country. But they took it all away." He seemed to be happy about this. It didn't make any sense; until we found out that

the Nazis didn't take it away, he threw it away on the way to the interrogation room, which had been at that station. He knew that if they had found this money with him, that would have been the end of him. But he pretended to fix his shoe laces. There were columns holding up that building, and at the base of that column, he put his shoe, took out the money, stuck it quickly underneath, and went in clean from the Nazi point of view. And so they let him go. And he was speculating of the cleaning woman who would find that money the next day; a fortune. And he was the happiest guy in the world.

Well, so we arrived in Switzerland, and, to shorten it just a bit, the train went through all of Switzerland, all of France. We got to the French channel (Calais), and on the channel boat, a rough crossing, but we arrived at Folkstone, at the British port of entry. At the British port of entry, there were the immigration people, the British officers, interrogating everyone, "Why did you come? Who are you?" At that day, at that time -- mind you, that was the first day, the very first day, after the Hitler takeover, because the Nazi troops had arrived in the night, from the 11th to the 12th. I am now talking about Saturday, the 12th of March. Things hadn't worked out yet quite. The Nazis on the train, there had been only relatively few of them. They were looking for the highly visible, political figures on the train. As a matter of fact, I had a brother who took another route, the short route, namely to Czechoslovakia. There were two short routes, to Czechoslovakia and to Hungary.

He took the short route. And on that, the Nazis expected everybody trying to get out, and they did not let that train go through. And they nabbed everybody there, including my brother, who eventually perished. But that's another story.

My route, however, was less watched. The Nazis less expected that people would try to flee the long way out and take many hours, rather than the short one. So, the British officer, also, was not quite prepared; he did not have any instructions. All this had happened the night before. Government doesn't work that fast. But the officer only applied the standing instructions; the ones, you might say, in peace time, in normal times. And in normal times, visitors were allowed to come to England without visa for three months, not longer than that, without special permission. And they were not allowed to work, "You are a visitor; you can spend your money, but you cannot work here." So, this officer asked me routinely, looked at my passport, how long I intended to say. I said I intended to stay three months.

"Three months?"

"Yeah."

"Do you have money to support you for three months?"

No, I didn't. I had nothing, because I knew that Austrians were not allowed to take any money out of even pre-Hitler Austria. You could see, from that fellow who was with me in the same compartment who got rid of all the money, because he knew that this was illegal.

I said, "I have pocket money only." I think the Nazis allowed ten marks, equivalent of -- I don't know what it was -- a few dollars, ten dollars, eight dollars.

So he said, "What will you live on?"

I said, "Well, I'll work here."

He said, "You're not allowed to work. You cannot come in without money."

I said, "I am a free-lance writer, and I can sell my stories here in England."

"So, you are," he says.

I said, "Yes. I was here three months ago and stayed here and sold my stories, went back home, now I'm here again." I gave the impression that I was a big-time writer who just manages to go back and forth between countries. But he didn't play ball.

He says, "No, you're not going to sell your stories to newspapers here."

And I said, "Why not?"

"Because you're taking away space from British writers. They would sell their stories if you hadn't been here."

Well, that seemed like the end of the story. That was the second time a crucial point in life. I had to think up something, quick, immediately, and convincing. And while he was looking at my passport, a matter of a few seconds, I had this idea. I said to him -- Let me at this critical point go back a few moments. He had also said he was going to send me back to France. That's what he had said. So I had to give some answer.

And I said, "You can send me back to France, but then I will just mail my stories to your papers, and will spend the money that the papers pay me in France instead of in your own country, where it circulates about your own economy. This is what a free-lance writer can do. You cannot prevent a letter to go through."

He looked at me and he bought it. He just said, "Uh-huh." He waved me through, and here I was, saved again. The truth is that I had bluffed. I could not go back to France and sell my stories from there, because the French would not have let me in. I had no permission to go to France. You had to have it in those days. They would have sent me right back again to where I had come from, where I had just gotten out of.

And so I was now in England, penniless. I will say, when I was there the first time in the fall of 1937, digging my mousehole, I had left the proceeds of my stories at that time in England. I did have a little money. Just enough to tide me over the first two weeks, something like that. Just that much, so that I could afford a place to sleep and to eat. In the weeks and months that followed, I gradually could expand the foothold that I had been able to find earlier in my first visit, and I published many more stories in England. Yet, all this was a hand-to-mouth situation. I could just eat once a day. And I got my meal on the basis of a meal ticket that was issued by the local Jewish community. When I first -- on the first day after my arrival -- appeared there, I was received by a very

distinguished-looking gentleman. He was a senior member of the Montefiore family, very well-known name in England and perhaps throughout Judaism. And he listened to my story, to my escape, to this horrible night of the escape. He said, "Do you know that you are the first swallow?" -- meaning I was the first Austrian who had reached England after the Hitler takeover, Number One, because, although there had been four on the first train originally, one man we knew nothing about. (He disappeared. He was taken out by the Nazis, and he never came back.) Two had come back, of whom one left in Paris. And the other one, I forgot to say earlier, did travel with me all the way to Folkstone, and he was turned back. They let me through, but they did not let him through. So, I was the first swallow.

In the weeks that followed, I met the publisher of a very distinguished magazine called CORNHILL MAGAZINE, old established magazine. The first editor was William Thackeray. The publisher had heard about this first swallow. And he asked me if I would write the story of that night of escape. And so I wrote the story under that name, THE FIRST SWALLOW, and it was published. It was a great break for me. As a matter of fact, some papers picked up the fact that there had been such a story. Among others, it was picked up by the LONDON JEWISH CHRONICLE. We, here in Northern Californa, might compare it to the NORTHERN CALIFORNIA JEWISH BULLETIN. But it had a much longer tradition, and today it carries -- it still exists -- the subheading, The World's Most... something or other...Distinguished, or Famous

Jewish Newspaper, which it is, the leading newspaper.

I struggled through with writing stories. This Mr. Montefiore, the Jewish community, had given me a meal ticket. Once a day, the German refugees, the ones that had come before me -- you see, this committee existed, had existed, during the past five years for the German refugees. I was the first Austrian refugee. The German refugees were sitting in the same office building in which I had been received, and had their meal. It happened to be just mealtime when I was interviewed by Mr. Montefiore, and he gave me this ticket. And so I went downstairs. There was a big hall, long tables, and there were these other mostly young people. And to my surprise -- it wasn't that I went in a line and got some soup ladled out -- we were served, ladies came. Not waitresses, but they acted as waitresses. They were all volunteers, community ladies, well-dressed, wearing their jewelry, not pretending that they were servants. And they served us. These ladies served us, the nobodies. I was very moved by that. That they should look after us, that they should be interested enough. There we were, dropped into a country where we didn't even know the language, let alone knew how to behave. All our movements were awkward. We didn't fit in. There are many mannerisms for every country. British mannerisms are very different from continental manners, from French, Italian. And at every corner I noticed I was a foreigner. I didn't fit. But it didn't matter. They came; they served us; they were friendly.

And then they would sit down next to us and ask in a very restrained way; they didn't want to dig into us, but they asked to find out, they tried to find out, what would we be doing, where did we stay, what resources did we have, what did we want to accomplish here, how will we try to make a living as refugees having no permits from the Home Office. The Home Office was the government agency that was our government, because we had no government. The Austrian government had disappeared, and the German government, of course, did not accept us. So we were stateless, which is one of the most frightful conditions that you can be in. I will explain later why this is such a terrible thing. So they were sitting with us and trying to make connections for us, getting each other introduced. They started get-together places. They would invite us, always, always treating us as equals. That was the moving thing, especially in a class-conscious country like England. We were equals, we were their kind, we were fellow Jewish citizens. I remember one lady who was opening her house for regular Wednesday afternoon get-togethers. An open house. Everybody could come. This was very important to us, because we were lonesome; we didn't know anybody at all. And so we at least got to know each other and we could share experiences.

So time went on. In the meantime -- I didn't mention my parents whom I had left behind. I was foot-loose and fancy-free. I could go any place. But, of course, it's not the same thing with old people. My father still had a position, he had a

pension to lose, he had a home, a house; he had savings. Here again, as in the case of my brother -- whose story I cannot tell when I tell my story, which in itself is a tremendous story, which led all the way to Czechoslovakia, France, Algeria, Martinique, New Caledonia -- I cannot tell his story now. But I have to tell part of my parents' story because it ties in directly with my stay in England. My father was taken away by the Nazis, and put in jail. And they said he had illegally sent money to me in England. I can only say I wish he had; I wouldn't have had such a struggle. So, my father was in jail. He was in ill health, poorly fed, damp prison. My mother wrote that I should try somehow to get them to England. I was still living from hand-to-mouth. I did not get or take any money from the Jewish committee. I shouldn't say "take"; they were not giving you money. They gave you a meal ticket, and they, in some cases, helped with the rent directly; but we did not get any money.

But I had, and I was, searching all the time of something I could do in England. Something that would not break the ban on labor for refugees. You didn't have permission to work, and yet, you had to live. There were very rare exceptions. The Home Office, on special occasions, if one of the refugees had some talents that were hard to find in England, would make exceptions. So I was hoping that I could think of some exception for myself. And, just as in the case of the British immigration officer, I did have an idea, eventually, of what I might do. And I went to the JEWISH CHRONICLE, and I asked them who was

monitoring the Nazi newspapers. Well, they didn't have anybody who could read German. I said, wouldn't that be a job for me, to read Nazi papers imported via Switzerland. Of course, you couldn't really send them to England, so some coverup in Switzerland would import Nazi papers to Switzerland and forward them to us. I would read them, and I would make a very unskilled rough translation. I said I didn't know English, but I knew enough to buy groceries. Not enough to ride on the bus, by the way. I must insert here this episode, which I will never forget. I got on a bus and asked for a ticket. And the bus conductor asked me where I wanted to go. And I said, "To Trafalgar Square." And he said, "Huh?" And I said, "To Trafalgar Square." The fellow next to me said to the conductor, "This bloke wants to go to Trafalgar Square." "Oh, to Trafalgar Square. Why didn't he say so?" This was my pronunciation in English.

Well, that was accepted, that I would make a rough translation, just keep the general idea of what these articles in the SCHWARZE KORPS, the VOELKISCHE BEOBACHTER, and the STUERMER, all these rotten newspapers, what they were saying. That was very important, of course, for the JEWISH CHRONICLE in London. And then there was another editor who put this into readable English. Here I had an existence. And that was something the Home Office would buy. The director of this JEWISH CHRONICLE applied for permission for that job. He said to the Home Office that my skill was unusual. And he decorated this application by saying I had special knowledge about the Jewish situation on the

continent. I had no idea, but he could claim that. I didn't know more than the next fellow.

So, lo and behold, I had a job in England! Now, I had a job, but there were my parents, and there was especially my father. My mother wrote that there had been an interrogation. He had signed away everything he owned; stocks, bonds, cash. And they would let him go if he cleared out within -- I don't know what it was -- six weeks or two months, or something. If he was still around after that, they would take him to a concentration camp. This was in 1938; it was long before the so-called Final Solution was used. There were no extermination camps at that time. These were the early days when concentration camps were labor camps; there were also ordinary jails, "ordinary" in quotation marks, jails in the cities themselves, in Vienna. Father was held in an ordinary prison. The Nazis not only would let him go, but they expedited, pushed him to go. Of course, they couldn't provide any permits to go to another country. The countries all were closing themselves out. They didn't let anybody come in. But such people as Eichmann, he was in charge of particularly expelling Jews. That was the time before the extermination phase. That was the earlier phase. First, get them out, ("Juden raus") "Out with the Jews." So my father was given an ultimatum: Within six weeks you go out. It's your worry how you find a permit, how you find a country to let you in. As far as we (the Nazis) are concerned, you can walk illegally over the border, if you can do it.

So, I was in England. I was told by the Home Office, "If you can find a British citizen who will guarantee that your father and mother will never become a public charge, will never take a job, then you can bring them in."

I said, "Never? Their whole lifetime?"

"Somebody has to guarantee for the lifetime to support them."

Here I was, the last flotsam in this country, not knowing anybody, let alone anybody who would have the means to do that. Not to speak of compassion or interest. I had to provide such a guarantee. Well, last year I published a book in which I told my story. And it takes many pages to describe what happens in the next six weeks. In an oral report like this, I can only give you the bottom line, namely, I started with my landlady. I lived in a little attic way up in the roof, slanted ceiling. The landlady hardly knew me. I was just a tenant there. There were many tenants in that place. And I said, "Look, I have to find somebody who will guarantee for lifetime to support my parents. I don't ask you to do that, but I don't know anybody in London. I want two names from you of people whom I could ask what I need. I will not ask them for the guarantee either, but I will tell them the story and ask them to give me two names each."

She was very puzzled and slightly embarrassed about the thing, but I was just so firm, I wouldn't leave that room without getting those two names. And I did get them. And I got the two names, and I went and told my story to those two people, that I

have to get this guarantee, and would they give me again two names each. And I continued this buck-passing system persistently. London is an enormous city. It's a country, almost. It is so big, and there were long bus fares -- bus rides, and I did hardly have the money for the fare. It was a great expense for me, to have even the bus fare. And it took hours to get from one person to another. And I neglected my job, I didn't eat, I didn't sleep. I did nothing. Those first four people, I told each of them, "If you would sign such a commitment, it is an official document. It has to be signed for the Home Office, for the British Government. It is not a guarantee to me, saying, 'Yes, yes, we will guarantee.' But if you will sign the guarantee, you will not be called upon (by my parents to implement it). It will be a pro forma guarantee."

So they listened to me, these four people. And the four snowballed again into each four times two, and those eight again, and it went on and on, day after day. And these people, all strangers, all people whom I had never seen, and they said, "Well, you say the parents will never call on implementing such a commitment. What will they live on?" And I said, "I will keep them." They said, "You will support them? Do you have means? Do you have a major bank account or something?" I said, "No, I don't have that." "You have a good job?"

Well, at that time -- I am telling the story a little ahead of time. At that time, when this happened, I did not yet even have that small job at the JEWISH CHRONICLE, which allowed

me to refrain from going to the one-meal-a-day thing at the committee. I just had barely enough for me to hold myself for a while. No, I didn't have the money, and I didn't have the job, and yet I said, "They wouldn't call on you." And when they asked me how I would do it, I said, "I don't know, but I will keep to this."

Now, this is no proposition for anybody, to have trust in a stranger who speaks a peculiar type of English, who's somebody they've never seen in their life, who says, "Sign an official British document," which obligates me to the government to support two people whom I've never seen, who are not related to me, or anything. Well, as I say, I started to say, that I will give you only the bottom line; I didn't keep my promise, and started to tell you the real story. But I will now really cut it short and say that eventually, eventually, eventually, there really was somebody who bought my story. There was an officer of the British army who heard it, who felt not only sympathy, but had the trust just from my telling the story, from my face, from the way I put it. This ordinary, middle-class man, signed this paper, and restored my faith in mankind. Not Jewish, in no way did I have any connection with him; he did it. He said afterwards, "If you don't keep your word, I'm ruined."

I didn't know how I would keep my word, but I knew I would. So, since we're talking about bottom lines, my father was released from prison, and the parents left on the 10th of November 1938. You remember, a few days ago we celebrated

Kristallnacht. They left at the day of the Kristallnacht, just as I left on the very day of the takeover, which made me the first swallow from Austria. They left again on a key date; at the Kristallnacht itself. As we found out later, while they were on their way to the airport -- they came by air -- while they were on their way, they were still in town, Nazis came -- mind you, although my father had just been released, that didn't matter to them. They grabbed anybody in the Kristallnacht. Despite their promise that they would let him go, that meant nothing. They came to the house, they asked the caretaker, "Where is this Mr. Kuhnel?" And the caretaker, bless him, said, "Oh, they have long left for England." He said that. I will say that my mother was always particularly nice to this man. Caretakers were, in class-ridden Vienna, just about the lowest class that existed. A caretaker was not like a receptionist in a hotel in this country. He lived in a hovel down there, the basement of the house. My mother was always very good to him and gave him food, and so forth. That paid off now. He did not betray the fact that the parents were still in town, they could still be caught at the airport.

They got through. And while they were in the air, they saw the burning synagogues down there. They arrived in London, and we were reunited. Of course, they were not allowed to bring anything, no money, no jewelry, nothing, although they had bought with their last money -- since they could not take it out -- outfits, clothes, and all that. When they came to the little

place where I lived -- I had taken another room in the same, very, very, modest place where I stayed -- and they came there. My mother showed me a pin. It was a gift from my father on the occasion of my birth. A beautiful piece of jewelry. It had two emeralds, and two sapphires, and two rubies in the shape of a butterfly.

I said, "How come? You're not supposed to take out anything."

"Oh," she said, "know what I did? On the train going to the airport I put that pin on my hat. I did not hide it. I put the hat on the rack. The pin was like a piece of costume jewelry. The hat was tossed up there and nobody paid any attention to it." When I said "jewelry" earlier, I meant, of course, gold, silver, diamonds, and that. So she salvaged that beautiful piece. And to jump ahead now, seven years ago, when my grandchild was born, I gave her mother, my daughter-in-law, that pin. So, it continues the tradition.

I was now in England. I had my parents. And now, what do you do? I had to have groceries for the next day. Perhaps not for the next day, but certainly for the next week. I could not approach the person who sponsored them, of course. Except that I called the sponsor and I said, "I do want you to at least meet my parents." And so, we went there, and even at the door I said, "Don't be afraid. You'll just say hello to them, and you'll never see them again in your life. Don't worry. So it happened, he was very gracious, also his wife. They gave us some

coffee, we had a nice chat, and that was the end.

But for me it was the beginning. I had to have some support for my parents. This is another long story, and here I will really tell you the bottom line. I decided to go to the richest man in London, and ask for the support of my parents. The richest man in London is Lord Rothschild. I went to the Rothschild Bank -- you can imagine somebody off the street, coming in to ask for the Baron Rothschild. It was bizarre to get by the receptionist. But, you know, if you're really in a corner, somehow the way you present things must make some impression. I did get past the receptionist; I did get past the watchdog No. 3, and past watchdog No. 2, and watchdog No. 1, and finally faced Mr. Rothschild. And he was in the room, he saw my parents -- I took them along. We were in the room three minutes. He had an aide who had come in with him, and he said to the aide, "Handler Fund." Didn't know what that was. What he meant was, he had, with one word, given my parents a pension -- what he called a pension -- to live for one year. It was understood, although not said, that it might be renewable. It was like going to see Mr. Bush in Washington.

I had my job at the JEWISH CHRONICLE, my parents had this so-called pension, and we could exist. I am approaching September 1939, the day Hitler invaded Poland. I wonder whether this is a good moment --

Q. Take a break?