

Interview with Claude Kelman: (K)

Interviewer: (I)

K: [inaudible] -- it's becoming complicated. That's why I think that it's truly the eleventh hour.  
[break] ... and what exactly are the subjects you expect to broach?

I: Right. I have to admit that I don't belong to this organization. I do something else. I work with the Union for Soviet Jews, but since I know this lady Lani Silver, and I intended to take a trip to Paris, and she knew that I was able to speak French, she asked me to do this for the organization. She gave me a sort of guideline to go by and she told me to ask you simply what your story was, what happened to you during WWII, what the first signs of danger were for the Jews. And to let you do the talking; and to ask you questions on what you have seen and done etc. And to attempt to get the most accurate possible chronology. I do have all these questions with me, but it's up to you; you are the one who is going to do the talking. The first part will be: situation before WWII, experiences during WWII, the ghetto, the camps, life in hiding, false papers etc., the resistance, the partisan movement, etc. Post-WWII experience. But it all depends on what you remember and on what happened to you. The story of each individual is different, although there are some similarities.

K: But this is a very long story.

I: Yes, I know.

K: I was born in Warsaw. My family was large, and rather traditional. And militant Zionists to such an extent that my mother tongue was Hebrew.

I: Oh, that is quite something.

K: When I was 17, without giving any warning to my parents, I left home on foot. I left Warsaw on foot, and I crossed all Europe.

I: This was due to what?

K: Due to anti-semitism. I was born in the heart of the old city. The old square in Warsaw, which was a neighborhood with few Jews, and I was constantly exposed to beatings. But what was worse were the humiliations, which had an impact on me for the rest of my life. Once, I passed by a woman who was carrying a small child in her arms, and she said to the child: "Repeat after me: dirty yid." I was ten years old at the time, but that was the gravest injury because.... I remember going back to my house. My father was quite a Zionist and had a picture of Theodore Herzl in

his study. I remember I climbed up on the desk, and I kissed Herzl's hands. At that moment, my fate was decided.

I: When were you born?

K: In 1907. [Inaudible]. I was constantly beaten up in my neighborhood. Later, I decided to leave for Palestine, and I started to take English lessons.

I: They were speaking English at that time in Palestine, and not Hebrew?

K: Yes, it was under the British occupation.

I: Of course, I'm sorry.

K: The First World War Marshall Allenby had occupied Palestine and it was under mandate; it was not entirely [inaudible; possibly: sovereign] but the English... but afterwards, when I was 15, I wanted to leave for Palestine and I studied English. I arrived in Antwerp, where I was lucky to meet someone who hired me to work on a ship -- not for passengers, but a cargo ship. [inaudible].

I: It was a Jewish man?

K: [inaudible]. I stayed in Belgium and then I went to Paris. I abandoned the [inaudible]. When war broke out in 1939, like many foreign Jews, I volunteered in the army and stood in line for three days in front of the War Ministry.

I: Here, in Paris?

K: Yes. In order to enlist. France was already in a divided situation between the right that supported Hitler -- They preferred Hitler to the French Popular Front, many of the French. As fate or chance would have it, my comrades who were called up first, and whom I went to see at the training camps, told me "Do all that you can not to come here."

I: Not to...?

K: Not to come.

I: Come where?

K: When they would call me up.

I: You mean in the French Army?

K: In the French Army.

I: I see.

K: They called us "Dirty Jews." They would mistreat us. They would [inaudible] us. Finally, since I was still a Polish citizen, it was the Poles who drafted me.

I: I see.

K: They had formed a Polish Division in France.

I: I have a question. You said that you wanted to enroll as a volunteer to go to Israel.

K: No, war broke out, and I volunteered.

I: Oh, in the French army.

K: Yes.

I: Oh, I misunderstood.

K: In the foreign legion.

I: Oh, I see now.

K: Jews who were citizens of other countries were enrolled in the foreign legion. In any case it was with the Polish Army that I went off, and retreated. And when the [inaudible] attacked I went as far as the Pyrenees in an attempt to embark for England. I didn't succeed. I therefore stayed. And as my wife had stayed behind in Paris, I returned to Paris after the occupation.

I: I have missed something here. So you enrolled in the Polish army --

K: No, volunteered in the French army, but they didn't call me up. And in the meantime there had been an accord between the French government and the Polish government in exile, which was in London, to form Polish divisions in France. And I was therefore called up not as a voluntary recruit but as a Polish citizen in the Polish army, which was formed in Brittany.

I: And it was a kind of resistance movement, then, against the Germans.

K: Against the Germans, of course.

I: You'll forgive me if I --

K: And when the Germans occupied Paris -- and at the time they were practicing a sort of politics of smiles ["politique de sourire"]: they were having themselves photographed with

babies in their arms, helping old ladies cross the street; in short, they were trying to project a good image [ils ont fait la politique]. And they invited the people to return to Paris. [Inaudible]. And then there were the Decrees at the beginning of '41 -- Decrees stating that Jews had to have their identity cards stamped with a Jewish seal. I preferred to leave. I therefore crossed -- there was already a line of demarcation; there was an occupied zone and a free zone where control remained in French hands. It was Marshall Petain who was the leader of the new French state created at Vichy. It is interesting to note that, already at that time, there were many -- it was forbidden to cross the demarcation line between occupied France and free France, and it was necessary to have an ausreiss --

I: A what?

K: An ausreiss: a German authorization, which the Germans issued. And naturally, it was out of the question for Jews to ask for such an authorization. And so, there was born in France what was practically a profession of passeurs: people who helped those who wanted to pass the line of demarcation in a clandestine manner, [who helped] to cross the line because they knew the region. But among these passeurs, there were crooks [canailles] -- they profited from this, they made money --

I: What do you mean by canailles?

K: Canailles: bad people -- who took money from the poor souls, from the people who wanted to cross, but then took them straight to the German outposts in order to turn them in. And they earned a bounty from the Germans.

But I had heard talk of this. And I was even on my guard -- I left at night, a winter's night, across the fields --

I: Do you know what year this was?

K: March, 1941.

I: And you went from where to where?

K: Near Macon, in the region of Macon, toward Lyon -- Lyon was in the free zone. And so, in the field I was asking the passeur -- who was a real bastard -- some questions, and he said to me:

"Listen. If you expect that you are about to be arrested, don't hesitate to run into the fields. And run in zig-zags. They'll shoot, but there's a lot of space near by."

He already foresaw the scene. And so we continued crossing the fields --

I: You were alone?

K: No, with a friend. There were two of us. We continued on, although we had false papers: already somewhat --

I: Yes. How did you obtain these false papers? Was there another profession which did this, like the  passeurs? Were there people who -- yes --

K: It was already an embryo of the Resistance. In certain city halls, one knew of certain windows where one could speak, where one could say --

I: And this [information] was passed on between Jews?

K: Between Jews. One could say to them, "Madame, I am Jewish. I am in danger. Help me."

And so, having arrived, and seeing from a distance this kind of barrack, which was all lit up, I had the following idea: I said, "Friend, why don't we go on the side of -- in other words skirt around -- this outpost, and make our way toward Free France." And that is what we did --

I: In other words, you didn't follow the advice of the  passeur.

K: -- of the  passeur. [in agreement]. Instead of going directly up to the building, I said: "I would prefer to go by way of the field, and arrive at the building from the Free French side." But as we were on our way, we heard: "Halt! Halt!" And in the blackness we could only hear the voices, and we threw ourselves on the ground. And we threw away our real papers. But then I stood up and said, "Well, too bad. We're caught." But then: they turned out to be French.

I: Really? [French] who were speaking German?

K: No no. One says "halte" in French as well. And they were Frenchmen, who said to us: "We saw that you were making your way toward the building which is the German outpost, and we said to ourselves, 'They're going to get themselves caught like all the others.' And we made our way forward in order to warn you."

I: Oh, that's kind. They were good Frenchmen.

K: Yes. And they saved us.

And in the end, we made our way to Nice.

I: With your friend?

K: That's right. I started -- I had friends. And so, having arrived in Nice, I was walking along one day, and these people came up to me and said, "Do you know what is going on? Go into the synagogues and look. You'll see that there are an enormous number of refugees who come from the occupied zone."

I: The people who came up to you were Jewish?

K: Yes. They brought to my attention that there were a lot of Jewish refugees in the synagogues who'd come from the occupied zone. I went, and I observed the scene: Dozens and dozens of Jews, miserable, [?], and sad, waiting in line. And in the synagogue, there were three old Jews, seated behind a table, distributing one franc, two francs [to those] at the head of the line. But I was young, and I had different opinions and this revolted me.

I: What do you mean?

K: I had other ideas, other opinions about social welfare. For me, this was a handout, and it humiliated people that these [?] were giving handouts in front of hundreds of other people. I waited, and I observed, and after the meeting, I went and saw the president [of the congregation] in order to tell him that I didn't approve of this manner of treating refugees, and that it was necessary to organize this in a more humane manner. And so I offered my services --

I: How old were you at this time? What year was it?

K: It was the beginning of '41. I was 32 years old.

I: And so you offered --

K: I offered to help. And we formed a group. The synagogue was called the Synagogue du boulevard du bouchage.

I: You mean "du bouchage" as in when the cork comes out of the bottle?

K: "Debouchage." Yes.

I: Was that the real name?

K: [Yes.] -- of the boulevard where the synagogue was. As in all the towns of France at the time, there were many immigrant Jews: of Russian origin, Polish, Rumanian, etc. But the French Jews, born in France -- who were called the assimilators -- had their own synagogue. And the foreign Jews had built in all the places where they'd come, little synagogues with their own rites --

I: Oh, I see: sephardic and ashkinazi ....

K: No, the division was not along those lines ....

I: Oh, the countries, their native language ....

K: The country of origin. The Jews from the East had their [moussakh?]. The French Jews had their [moussakhalman?]: synagogues with organs, and music. Whereas the Eastern Jews had their fervor -- it was authentic like in the little shtetls.

And it was in this synagogue that we came to organize a movement devoted to helping the refugees. But the French police were rather severe with us. Because, as regions go, Nice was a very nationalist region. It is there that [Seviset?], the head of the militia, [Darnant?], who was shot after the war, who formed the volunteer legion which went to fight against the Russians on the Russian front. And the police didn't look too kindly upon us, especially [upon] the foreigners, as there were many Jewish refugees who came from Belgium, from Antwerp -- all the diamond [dealers] from Antwerp, who had sought refuge in Nice. And I remember one day, they started to conduct raids in the street --

I: Raids?

K: Arresting people, demanding their papers -- and all the foreign Jews who had entered France after 1936 had to be taken into custody, and turned over to the Germans.

I: Okay: All the foreign Jews who had entered France after 1936 had to be ....

K: .... imprisoned in camps, and the Germans came from time to time, to make a [trip?] to ship them off to the so-called "work camps." At the time, there were work camps. Nobody, as yet, had even a suspicion of the existence of -- but it's true that they were not -- they were already under construction, but they didn't deport them [there] yet, in '41. But in '42, they started to conduct raids in order to arrest foreign Jews. It is then that we literally transformed our entire system.

I: "We," meaning?

K: In the synagogue du bouchage, we formed a committee which we called the [medvay?; hebrew sp?]; there were 36 of us. Chance would have it that there were 36 of us in this committee. And we started to take up collections, as there were also many Jews who were quite rich who had become refugees in the free zone, and in particular on the French Riviera. It was a [peaceful?] region, especially since they

couldn't work, they could live very agreeably. But afterwards that all changed. It didn't [last?].

Afterwards, in '42, the situation became more serious, the arrests -- In the meantime, there had been a change. The Germans and the Italians had made an accord, and the Italians had occupied the entire region along the Italian border -- what was called "the five departments." The Var, the Alpes-Maritime, Hautes-Alpes, Vizere, and Savoy -- the two Savoys. They formed a line from Geneva up to the line of the Var. So then, we experienced a period which was a bit more calm. The Italians --

I: One second please, so that I might understand. You said that the Italians had occupied this border [region] between France and Italy?

K: That's correct. The band -- after the French-Italian border on the Cote d'Azur, there was, after [Menton?], what was called the [Pont St. Denis ?], just past Monte Carlo. They occupied [the area] up to Marseilles. And at Marseilles, [they occupied] the length of the [Rhône?]. The entire left bank of the [Rhône?] up to Isere was occupied by the Italians, who were much more humane. At the very least, there weren't any Germans; they didn't come around any more. Until the day when Mussolini decreed the application of the racial laws in Italy, and therefore in the [Italian] occupied zone as well.

And thus began a curious page in history. The man, the Italian high functionary who had been put in charge of the application of the racial laws in the French occupation zone -- the zone occupied by the Italians -- was named Lospinozo --

I: How do you spell that?

K: Just like it sounds.

I: Oh, it's an Italian word. Does it mean spy?

K: No, it's a name. He set himself up in a hotel which he had set up for his functions and his offices -- in a hotel in Nice -- and we succeeded in establishing contacts with him.

I: By "we" you mean the Jews of ....

K: .... the community, our community du bouchage. And we founded a personal relationship with him. We ended up making him believe that "Lospinozo" could only be an Italian deformation of "Spinoza," and that he was a Jew by birth.

I: [Laughs]. That is quite interesting.

K: Yes. And he believed that he was, therefore, of Jewish origin, and that his ancestors had been Spinozas.

I: Okay: it's one man whose name is Lospinozo, one man?

K: Yes. The one who directed the --

I: Mr. Lospinozo?

K: Yes, [head of] the office of the application of the Italian racial laws in the zone of Nice.

I: This is quite interesting.

K: And so, the Vichy police obeyed the orders of the French government. And as much as they were able -- they didn't want to let Jewish refugees arrive from the German occupied zone into the free zone.

I: They didn't want to let them enter?

K: To come to Nice.

I: They didn't want [to let them]?

K: No. You must understand the situation: There was a line of demarcation between the German occupied zone and the French free zone which it was forbidden [for Jews] to cross. But between the French free zone and the line of Italian occupation, there was no interdiction. One could travel freely [between the two zones]. But the police didn't let Jews travel in order to come and settle in the Italian occupied zone. And when they conducted raids and found Jews who had come from the German occupied zone, they arrested them, and handed them over to the Germans. And it is there that we found a formula.

We organized [our formula] after a long, long period of research and discussion, and thanks to JOINT. Because we were still in contact with the JOINTs which had their offices in Nice and Bordeaux. And they had correspondents in France -- Jews who had contacts. There was [Herrmann?], there was [Froymkin?]. We had contacts. And they said to us: "If you can save people who remain in the Italian zone, we'll take responsibility for them." Because they were people without means. And we had dealings with the occupying troops -- there was a Captain Salvi [sp?]; he was killed afterwards. We had dealings so that the Italian occupying troops would create internment centers on the outskirts of Nice. All the Jews in danger of being arrested -- we would give them a certificate [attestation]. There was even a Mogen

David on the certificate, since our committee was the du bouchage committee, but with the signature of the Italian Commandatura: "That Mr. Such and Such" -- and it was we who put the name directly on the paper, on the certificate -- "that Mr. X is interned by the Italian military authorities." And it was what we called an involuntary permanent appointee [assignee a residence forcee] of the Italian occupying authorities. But we went -- in recounting this yourself, you can give an abridged version -- we went throughout the entire region, and we requisitioned empty hotels, because tourism wasn't going on at the time.

I: Yes, of course.

K: And we placed people in these hotels. The Italians sent a squad of militiamen [squad carabine] -- a sort of military police -- and people had to present themselves every morning in order to have their [?] stamped, because they were incarcerated, but free.

I: Incarcerated but free? But they couldn't leave the ....

K: .... the village, or the little town. They had to present themselves every day to the Commandatura. But they were free.

I: I see.

K: And in each of these cities of internment, we had formed committees which distributed --

I: You formed what?

K: Committees of distribution of the vital necessities, because we had guaranteed the Italians that they [the Jews] wouldn't become the burden of the Italian government. And it was money which came from JOINT.

But how [did it come from JOINT]? We were not able to transfer [funds].

I: Then how?

K: We borrowed from rich Jews, and we wrote them a certificate in the name of Joint: "we have received the sum of," for which they would be reimbursed after the war in the United States.

I: But did you have the authority to say this?

K: Yes.

I: We have received the sum which will be reimbursed ...?

K: ... reimbursed after the war with this receipt -- it would be honored. I must say -- this is between parentheses -- that after the war, many people were able to start their economic lives again upon returning to Paris or to the cities where they lived with the money that the Joint had [?] to them by telegram --

I: From the United States?

K: No. But as soon as the occupying troops -- and when the Americans entered Paris, I remember a [Chaplin Reddich?] whom I met; he was the second. The first whom I met after the Liberation was an officer who had "war corespondent" [written] on his arm, and who asked me, "Do you know any Jews?" I said, "I am a Jew." And he said I would like to see the -- and he gave me his name which was Sulzberger.

I: Saltzberg?

K: Saltzberg. He was the boss of the New York Times.

I: Oh, Schultzberger. Oh, I see.

K: As chance would have it. But this, if you like, I will tell you about this afterwards, because its a rather interesting story. So, anyway, people loaned us money. And our line of reasoning was as follows -- [inaudible?] If one is caught, or shot or deported, it [the money] is no good anyway. One would have at least saved, or helped people. And if you survived you would have the means to begin [your life] again. And people accepted: we amassed millions and millions of dollars in this manner. But we had young people who had volunteered to cross the Pyrenees in secret, to reach Barcelona, where there was already an office of JOINT as well. But we had contacts with -- it was Dr. Joseph Schwartz --

I: Oh, excuse me. I think this is the end [of the tape].

[Third Cassette]

- I: Third Cassette of M. Claude Kelman.
- K: Yes, I was telling you how much the French -- the French jews -- were discouraged and disappointed that France had so poorly protected them. Which means that they no longer had the will to make an effort to live, the jews. And it was necessary -- and in this respect the jews of foreign origin were more resilient [resistant], more dynamic. And it was they who gave the impulsion to reconstitute an organized communal life. I was in this respect the secretary general of the Federation of the Jewish Society of France [Federation de societe juive de France] which was generally -- it was an organization originally of Jews from the East -- [?] which I made the proposal to create a "United Jewish Appeal" [in English] in 1946. And I remember an audience, an interview, with Doctor Joseph Schwartz who was director of JOINT for Europe, a remarkable man. Afterwards he was the president of Israel Bonds ...
- I: President of what?
- K: of Israel Bonds Organization. [in English]
- I: Oh, bonds.
- K: Yes. So I proposed to him, I made this proposal to him to attempt to create an organization like the one for the [Appel de fond ?] and for the [Aide Sociale], and he gave me his okay, and even immediately allocated a budget of fifteen million old francs....
- I: Fifteen million old francs....
- K: Old francs, that's to say one hundred fifty thousand in today's [francs] -- for the beginning of an organization, but that -- with the discussions, with the diverse groups -- wasn't until two years later, in March of 1949, that we definitively created the Fond Social Juif Unifie [United Jewish Social Fund]
- I: Le Fond Social ....
- k: ... Juif Unifie. That's it: FSJU, [an organization] which exists today....
- I: SF....?
- K: FSJU, which is the organization of the [collectives?] today. The same goes for the CRIF [Conseil Representatif des Israelites de France (Representative

Council of French Israelites)] which we were already discussing under the occupation. On the political map [which] we constituted, the CRIF united all the jewish organizations including the jewish communists, and began its activities from 1945 in order to create firstly -- in order to obtain from the government a vote on laws of indemnities...

I: On what?

K: Indemnity laws.

I: Oh, I see.

K: Restitution of apartments, and jewish stores which the Germans had requisitioned and [then] often sold to French people.

I: So this organization had the necessary funds in order to buy them back?

K: No. We asked that restitution be made by law.

I: I see. I see.

K: That the illegal occupants be evicted, and that jewish apartments and businesses [affairs] be returned to their owners.

I: I see.

K: It was a [considerable?] action which provoked a rather serious anti-semitic reaction, but all the same, in this respect the French government was absolutely upright [correcte], and the laws of restitution were scrupulously respected and executed. On this point... This calls to mind a fact which merits remembering: When Sulzberger -- when I met him, and he wanted to meet other jews -- I was able to gather together about ten people -- and he interrogated one after the other: "What would you say about such and such a subject..." He asked for answers, he asked: "What was the conduct of the French, in your opinion?" And so each gave his opinion, and I remember that I was the last to give my opinion, and I said that one third of the jewish community was able to save itself by emigration, one third survived, and one third was deported. Those that were saved, [were saved] thanks to the French. And those that were deported, [were deported] also thanks to the French, to other French, to the bad French. Because the Germans alone would never have been able ... to do that.

I: There were many ...

K: Collaborators. And so, those who were saved were done so thanks to the French, because they were not ....

I: Yes, not everyone was ...

K: Yes. Therefore our action, on the political map -- therefore the CRIFs became -- the Representative Councils of French Israelites -- became the mouthpiece of the jews viz a viz the government, and we did a lot of work [in the area] of reconstitution. And finally, the [financially] ruined jews very rapidly regained their positions, their work. It took less long than we'd feared. Except, obviously, the heavy burden of the children of the deported whom it was necessary to find, to gather from the convents, from non-jewish families, and widows of war.... In short, there was a lot of work to do. I must say, for having worked during all these years with American organizations, with private [firms], that without this aid from American jewry, we would not have today such a large and powerful French jewish community.

I: Without this aid of American jewry, we would not have had ...?

K: We would not have had the French jewish community as strong and organized as it is. We also had the moral cooperation of the American jewish organizations at that time.... You surely do not remember the Finally Affair, the kids, the two Finally brothers? It was the drama of a family of doctors, German jews, refugees in Grenoble, who had been deported, but who were nonetheless able to entrust their two children, two brothers, two boys --

I: The name was ...?

K: Finally. -- whom a French woman from Grenoble had taken into her home. And when we wanted to take back these children -- after all their aunt was already living in Israel .... She [the woman from Grenoble] hid these children, she left for Spain --

I: Oh, she didn't want to ...

K: ... give them back. She hid the children, and in Spain hid them in convents. And we had to fight a battle for nearly two years in order to get them back. It was the head rabbi Kaplan who was the great leader in [the fight to] recover these children.

I: This was when?

K: 1952.

I: Oh, rather late.

K: Yes, it took four years to get them back. And they left for Israel. I remember we accompanied them to Israel all the way to a kibbutz near Jerusalem. They live -- they got married, and live in Israel. But this "Finally" case became the symbol for the struggle for the recovery of lost, and often annexed, Jewish children. It was the same struggle in Poland, and even worse. In Poland there were tens and tens of thousands of Jewish children like that, which we were not able to recover. But history has had its revenge; today, among the leaders of the solidarity movement, the majority are jews.

I: Is that true?

K: Mischnik [sp?]. Yes.

I: I didn't know that.

K: Mischnik, and Huleva [sp?], Hurban [sp?]. The three - - the four principal advisors of Welesa are Jewish children, which some Poles had taken into hiding. But we have in France the case of Cardinal Mustiger [sp?]. We have here in Paris a cardinal --

I: Cardinal Mustiger.

K: Yes.

I: I've never heard of him.

K: No? He is a jew. A catholic jew. And he perhaps would not be. Mustiger's parents were deported from Paris. And he was hidden in a convent, and --

I: In what country? A Pole?

K: In Paris.

I: In Paris?

K: Yes, but ...

I: And the reason why these Poles did not give back these children, was it because, because they loved them, because they wanted to keep them as if they were their own children -- was that the reason?

K: It was generally people who didn't have any children, and one becomes attached to a child .... Well, we

therefore recovered our -- we recovered our morale at the creation of the state [of Israel]. When the state of Israel was created many jews returned, and until then we had traversed some terrible moments. There was so much to do, and we were only a handful of men. What is there to say about after the war? We tried at any rate [to create] a Social Fund [Fonds Social]. There were two tendencies: those who thought that social action was necessary to put jewish families on their feet, [?] a relatively young community; and those who thought that the most urgent thing was to resurrect a spirit, and a feeling of identity, of jewish identity. And I remember that, in Paris, I adopted the following tactics: That it was necessary, with respect to the Germans, it was necessary to have courage, not to be afraid, to show oneself assured. Since I was not able to work --

I: Why do you say, "Since I was not able to work ..."?

K: Well, because, of course, I could not work -- in my business -- under the occupation.

I: Oh.

K: I'm back to the occupation.

I: Oh, I see.

K: I had already had, on the Place des etats unis [United States Square], in front of an organization where there were German soldiers -- in the garden in front -- I was amusing myself with formulating the plans for the organization which we would create after the war, after the liberation. And we created, along with the [cojassorts?] --

I: With whom?

K: At the same time as the [cojassorts?], we created what was called the CIDE, the Israeli Treasury of Economic Rebirth [Caisse Israelite de Demarrage Economique] which still exists today, in order to loan sums of money to people who wished to reestablish themselves.

I: We have the same thing.

K: Yes. And these were loans without interest, loans for economic rebirth [demarrage economique]. In this manner, we were able to put more than twenty thousand families back in shape, thanks to the loans. There too, the large Jewish international organizations helped us: the Joint afforded us a part of the capital for loans and the means [of support] for three months;

and in the meantime, we borrowed from others, and each [organization] loaned [enough] for three months; therefore, with four lending organizations for three months [each], we were able make loans to people for one year, two years. It was a system which we established. And, at the same time, we created everything which exists today. I was of the opinion that we needed to create community youth centers.

I: At this time ...?

K: At this time. And it was the great debate which we had, above all, with the native [French] Jews, the [Consistoriots?], the Rothschild family: They said it was necessary to feed people first, to help widows, etc. And to deal with culture later.

I: In other words the others thought that it was necessary to aid those in great need, while you thought more of the future.

K: Because we had a youth who had not had Jewish studies, I began -- It's very simple: In September of '44, one month after the Liberation, I founded a publishing house, which I named Kiyum, a hebrew term which means "existence." And I began by editing the abstract of Duonov's history.

I: Of whom?

K: Duonov, a classic, a history manual.

I: You created ...

K: This publishing house in order to edit books on the history of jews and others. And the first work which I published in 1944 was an historical abstract of Professor Duonov's, who was the --

I: Who? Professor?

K: Professor Duonov was a -- Professor Duonov was massacred in the Riga ghetto. He was one of the greatest Jewish historians, like you have, what is his name, Barrow [sp?]? This is all by way of showing that we immediately had the intention to -- there were no more Jewish books, because either the Germans had made off with them in emptying all the Jewish apartments, or else those who'd had them before had thrown them out: Since they lived under false names, they weren't about to keep Jewish books. I thought that the first thing [to be dealt with] was these kids who, during four years of war, had had no jewish education -- that it was necessary to think of this, or else we would lose

an entire generation. And we therefore created this publishing house, and we --

I: Who is "we," when you say "we"?

K: It was this little group which I formed around the Social Fund. There was Dr. Modianot, Judge Maiss who was president of the tribunal, the only one among the native jews -- he was president of the court of appeals, a great jurist. Dr. Modianot was a jew of Salonikan origin, a great doctor, a great surgeon, very well known, a remarkable man. There was one of the brothers of the Levin family, you know, the Perriers, the Perrier waters.

I: Is the Perrier company still in a Jewish family ....?

K: Yes.

I: [inaudible].

K: Yes. Yes, the last, the most Jewish is deceased, it was he who -- two are dead, there were four brothers -- it is he who is still alive, less jewish. But there are already the sons of the others.

I: There are what?

K: The sons of the other Levins.

I: Oh, I see.

K: The Levin who is active today in the community is fifty-someodd years old. The Levin who founded Perrier must be about 80 -- more than 80 years old. He is still active.

Anyway, we founded all of that, as well as community centers. We founded 60 centers in all the towns of France. Today there is twice or three times that number. [Inaudible].

Anyway, I think that I've been caught a bit unprepared [by this interview] and that I should have -- If you had told me on the telephone exactly what you wished -- I didn't quite understand -- I would have drawn up an account with points of reference, in order to come up with something chronological, more logical.... This is gradual --

I: All the same I think that you have told your story quite chronologically, and it works well -- I'm very happy to have your story.

K: The current situation is quite -- you're familiar with the activities [on behalf of] Soviet Jews and all we --

I: Yes.

K: I think that we have very well [inaudible] this area.

I: You have lived an extraordinary life, and you have helped the jews of your country a great deal; it's unbelievable.

K: Yes, but there are perhaps a few more words to say about the memorial to the unknown Jewish martyrs, and the Center of Contemporary Jewish Documentation. But the greatest credit [for all this] goes to Isaac Schneerson [sp?]. It is he who had the idea, back in 1942 in Grenoble, to gather us all together in order to say how essential it was that we collect everything -- all the documents of that period -- so that in the future the world would know what happened to us. And he also had the idea -- we then founded the center of documentation, and at the Liberation we went to all the bureaus of the Commisariat of Jewish affairs of the Gestapo, and we carried off entire car-loads of documents. We have 600,000 items of diverse documents, and so we created the center, and then the idea of the memorial was also Schneerson's idea. I have been the treasurer since the beginning -- from Grenoble up until the end, and the death of Schneerson -- and I accepted the post of the presidency of the executive committee -- but not that of general president, until this day, in view of the fact that he was an irreplaceable man.

I: Schneerson?

K: Yes. Irreplaceable --

I: Okay: you were at first treasurer, right? And after that you were --

K: And after his death, president of the executive committee up until the present day.

I: And the exact name of the organization?

K: It's the Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyrs. Do you know the memorial?

I: Yes, behind Notre Dame?

K: The Seine, yes. We are in the process of enlarging it, of rebuilding it.

I must tell you that what you are doing is a very important thing, and that this is truly the final -- the eleventh hour. It must -- it is sacred work --

I: Yes, I think -- You mentioned that you had 65,000 [sic] various documents, but what we don't have enough of are personal stories of the people who survived the period.

K: Yes, I think --

I: And it's very important; I agree with you, and I thank you very much for your time. I know that you're a very busy man, and very --

K: But History is .... It is .... A country, a people, which does not respect its past has no future.

I: Yes, I agree with you. Well, thank you very much.

K: Well, I will leave you, then.

I: Thank you, and thank you for the cassettes as well.

END