

Q Your name?

A My name is Felice Zimmerstokes. My address is 241 L Avenue, Teaneck, New Jersey.

Q You were born?

A I was born in Walldurn, Germany, which is the Black Forest region.

Q And when were you born?

A October 8, 1939.

Q In Germany.

A In Germany.

Q You were German.

A I was born in a house, not in a hospital. Like it was already too late. I was born in the house.

Q Your name?

A I'm Paul Kassy. I live in Falls--- Virginia. I was born in Roumania in 1927.

Q What date?

A May 8th 1927.

Q And the town?

A Carei, Roumania.

Q Your name?

A My name is Jacques Fein. I was born on October 10th 1938 in Paris, France. I currently live in Columbia, Maryland, but I grew up in New Jersey, northern New Jersey.

Q Okay. And you are?

A My name is Sherman Stokes. I was born in New York, March 10th 1932. I currently live in Teaneck, New Jersey.

Q You are not a survivor?

A That's right, I'm married to a survivor.

Q Okay. Thank you. Now, why are we interviewing all three of you together?

A I think the main denominator is the organization OZ from France, which is the Oeuvre au Secour des Enfants, which means the agency which saved children, Jewish children. And the OZ had a lot of homes, orphanages, during the war or before the war, so this is the main denominator. We were all living together in different orphanages run by the OZ.

Q You were all living together in different orphanages?

A No, not together, at different times, but in a home run by the OZ.

Q So the OZ is the umbrella organization.

A Right.

Q But you were each in different homes.

A But we found out this morning that Felice and I happened to live in the same orphanage in Tagranie (?) from, well, I was there, I believe, from 1946 or so till October '48, and she came in '47--

A No, '48.

A ---early '48 to around '51. And by chance I had a letter when I came to the United States that their kid sent me and one of the names, I can remember, on the letter was Felice -- and we're pretty sure although we cannot be completely sure -- that she must be the one.

Q Not many Felicias.

A No, not too many.

Q Now, who's the kid? You said the kid sent.

A From the orphanage. When I left I was adopted by an American family---

Q Oh.

A ---and I left in October '48, you know, we had some communications and the kid sent me a letter hoping everything was okay and everybody said something. Leon, Henri and Felice and other names which I've forgot right now.

Q Okay. You don't still have that letter?

A I am going home today. I read it last night and I could kill myself, but I was going to take it but I said no, it's too personal, and what are the odds that, you know, I could use it or want it this morning.

Q The odds were very high that you would---

A Well, after forty years, roughly thirty-five years, it was possible, but I just didn't want to lose it also.

Q You're going to go home now and get it. And you were in what orphanage?

A Okay. Well, I was in Equit (?) for about two months.

Q Where is that?

A That is in Normandy, France. And then I was for about a year and a half at T--- in Paris, France.

Q And how did you get to the orphanage?

A Okay. Well, I was liberated in Buchenwald in April 11, 1945, and OZ brought out about four hundred kids aged from about 12 through 30 or 35 to France and they took us to a house they ran in Equit in Normandy.

Q Now, I'm leading up to becoming an orphan. You lost your parents?

A Well, we lived, I was born in Roumania which became Hungary in 1940 and the Germans took over in 1944. I ended up in a ghetto with my family.

Q What ghetto?

A In my hometown in Carei, and we were moved from that ghetto maybe two weeks later to another one in a nearby town called Satu Mare. We were there for maybe ten days and we left there, we were put on a transport, the third transport which arrived, to Auschwitz-Birkenau in end of May.

Q Now, who is we? Your whole family?

A My whole family. Basically my mother and father, an uncle, aunt, and some cousins.

Q You all went together to---

A To Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Q You went with your family to---

A To Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Q Um hm. And then what happened to your family?

A Well, my father was separated with the old people and I believe he was gassed, you know, that day whenever. I saw my mother from far away the next day in the women's camp. I was with my uncle for a while. We were there for about three days.

Q Now, how did you see your mother in the camp? You were behind one camp?

A Well, they were separate, the men and women were separated in different compound and she happened to be in a compound next to ours and I saw her from far away and then she got chased away from the fence.

Q It was a barbed wire---

A Barbed wire fence. Even the camp was subdivided by barbed wires into different compounds.

Q And so you saw her. Did you wave to her?

A Yeah.

Q And she waved to you?

A She waved back to me.

Q Do you remember what she had on?

A She had some nondescript clothing on. I guess her hair was shorn. So she had some kind of a gray kerchief on her head. That's the last time I saw her.

- Q Now, some of the people said when they were shaved and wore different clothes, even their families didn't recognize them. But you recognized---
- A Well, what happened there was that my uncle managed to talk to her at close range maybe five or ten minutes before and he came to get me. So I was walking over towards her and I recognized her from her stature and she waved to me and I waved to her. And then she got chased away and that was the end of it.
- Q That's the last of your mother.
- A Yeah.
- Q And there were gas chambers at the compound?
- A Well, okay. When we arrived it was late in the afternoon and we were waiting in front of a, whatever, a big barrack, and I saw about maybe two hundred yards away bodies being pulled out of a barrack and piled up like cords of wood. So I kind of expected to be killed when I got into the barracks. A friend had told me you had to do strip and I went through the showers, the real ones this time, and I ended up in Birkenau for two days and then we were shipped, I was shipped out. We walked about, oh, maybe ten miles to Auschwitz. We stayed there overnight. And then next day we were marched off to Auschwitz 3, which is Bunamonovitz (?). We had --- a synthetic rubber plant there and I stayed there till the Russians were close when they evacuated everybody.
- Q Did you work at the factory?
- A Yeah. My uncle who was with me died in July sometimes.
- Q Of what?
- A Basically he caught pneumonia during a bad rainstorm and they put him in a hospital where he died sometimes in July.
- Q Did they tell you that he died?
- A No, but I saw him in a hospital, somebody told me he was in a hospital, and you couldn't get into the hospital. Somehow I managed to get in and I saw him. I didn't recognize him. The man was skin and bones. He recognized me. I felt very bad about it. I talked to him for about a half hour and I tried to get him back to hospital and get him some food but he was gone by then.
- Q So that was the last---
- A That was the last of my uncle, yeah.
- Q By then you were all alone.
- A Yeah. I was with two friends, one of them is in Switzerland, he

survived; the other one is in Dallas, Texas. Three of us were pretty much together all through the camp.

Q Oh, you stayed together?

A We managed to stay together. One time we all took up the same name so alphabetically we would be in the same position.

Q Oh, that's very clever.

A Well, I don't know if it was clever but if somebody had figured out that we may have been twins, it would have been the wrong thing to do.

Q Oh, I see. So just by positioning yourself.

A Yeah.

Q Yeah, to stay together. And how did you -- how did you become an orphan?

A Okay. I was born in 1939. When I was about, I think about a year old, that's what I've been told, the Germans came into our town and rounded up all the Jewish families, which was five Jewish families, and we were taken to the camp --- which is in the Pyrenees -- and I have a sister who is two years older, so my sister and I were put in a different part of G--- and my parents were put in a separate part. And my sister still remembers that she had a bracelet that my mother had given her but I pulled it away from her. Anyway, this is the only thing she remembers from it. The French agency, I don't know whether this was OZ, I have an idea it was OZ, was still able to come into the camp and take the children out, literally snatch them from the Germans, and we were taken to Limoges, which is like a, there was like a nursery there. And from there the French underground took us and they just ran through the forests and tried to ask different people whether they would take children and hide us. And I was hidden in a place near Chateau Roux called LaCayodiere (?) and there this wonderful family, Gaston, and -- I forget her first name -- I forget her name -- it was Mr. and Mrs. Patoux. They took me in and I lived there from November '42 to November '45 and I lived as if I was their child. They told me my name would be Felice Patoux and they were always ready to run, they never quite undressed. I lived, I stayed in their bed -- not in their own bed but in a bed in their bedroom. They hid all their jewelry. And I was this little girl. I mean, I was like two at

that point or two and a half and they took me to, well, I went everywhere with him and he built me a little carriage and---

Q They were so afraid that they never got undressed fully so that they could run.

A. Right.

Q Because of you?

A Because of me, because I was Jewish. I never knew I was Jewish and I think I was the only -- there might have been another Jewish child that came later -- but it was a very small hamlet, it was not even a village, it was like a very tiny. There was a lot of forests around so I think that's one of the reasons why they took a chance. And last year when I went to visit again, I understand that there was a mayor from the other town who also knew about it. But in 1968 I went back and I visited her, she was still alive, and when I finally got in touch with her she -- and I wrote her a letter -- and she says I didn't know it was you, my Felice, my chere Felice, it was like I'm her child. And she had saved all the pictures. She gave me all her pictures she had of me, and letters I had written. So from there in 1945, when the war ended, the OZ brought my sister, because I never knew I had a sister. She was hidden with nuns. And the two of us stayed with the Patoux for three months and then we were taken away from them. And because they were not Jewish we couldn't have any contact with them anymore. So we were taken to a home OZ which was called Travail for two years and I just found out that one of the girls here, I think she lived with me.

Q Oh my.

A So it was from '46 to '48 I lived in Travail and from '48 to '51 I lived in, I found --- in T---, which is very near Paris. And then eventually I had an aunt and uncle who wanted us to live in the United States so they brought us over, but we got here and they really didn't want us here. I mean they wanted us in the States but not with them.

Q They felt obligated.

A So we had to live again with another orphanage. So I lived there for another year and then we were put in separate foster homes. My sister went to live separate and I went to live in a foster home.

Q Where was this, in what town?

A It was in Newark and then I was living with a foster home in Linden, New Jersey with the Gellers, Mr. and Mrs. Murray Geller, who have been wonderful to me, and their family. And eventually two years ago I met this lovely man.

Q You got married.

A Married him. Who was related to my foster -- not family, but cousins, and that's where it----

Q Okay. And your experience?

A Well again, I was born in---

Q Say your name again.

A Jack, Jacques.

Q Yes, um hm.

A I still call myself Jack and very very rarely Jacques. I was born in '38 and all I know is from papers that I had that my mother was in '41 and my father died in '43. And I really don't know how I got, the mechanics of how I was saved, except through talking to Felice and other people that more than likely the OZ people helped me find a family just like Felice. I forgot their names completely but I think the name Beaucoup, something like that, you know, sticks in my mind. I had a sister also, I'm virtually positive that she's my natural sister, because I'm never positive really, absolutely positive that, you know, of anything, you know. I don't have anybody to relate to.

Q Right.

A To prove it, to show it. And we lived with them from -- I don't know -- probably early forties to mid-forties, to the, till the Allies landed in June of '44. And my recollections are very very sketchy because my sister doesn't really remember anything. And I have no one to relate to as far as what happened except just living there in a farm and the two incidents I only remember was that one day my sister and I and some men, I think the farmer probably, we were hiding like in a ditch, you know, behind grass and everything---

Q And how old were you then?

A Four. Maybe five. '38, something like that. And all we could see, and I still remember, about a hundred, two hundred feet away were soldiers and more than likely they were obviously German soldiers and I just can recall that over and over again just hiding away

from them and realizing that, you know, within a matter of seconds or minutes by a few hundred feet I could've been completely, you know, I could've been obviously killed by them right there on the spot. And the other thing I remember is a more happy occasion was the actual, you know, when the Allies landed, the American troops, the Allied troops were coming in Jeeps and we were in the fields on the main roads and they were throwing chocolates and all kinds of candies and everybody was going like, you know---

Q Happy and--

A Very very happy. And after that I remember living in, you know, like segments, living in an orphanage run by Catholics orphanage in Paris for not too long.

Q Tell me how you got there.

A No idea. About three or four weeks and again it was, you know, I assume it was the OZ. And then living in another orphanage in Normandy by the beach and learning how to swim, but again no recollection. And then eventually in Tav--- I think for about two years, and again I just remember like fragments, you know, the place, what it looked like, and---

Q What did it look like?

A Like a castle, like a big castle in a ---

A It was a wonderful experience. I don't know if Jacques remembers this. It was such a warm loving -- I mean, you had to understand every single one of us had lost one or two or both or, you know, whatever the -- but we were in the same thing, and I remember this my counsellor Elaine, I mean she had been through the war, she had a number, and she told us this unbelievable march that she'd been through, it must've been like for you, walking in the snow and then you had to walk and walk and if you couldn't walk anymore, once she asked the gendarme please, help this -- just a few feet -- so they say okay, sure. So they put her in the truck and the moment she was in the truck they shot her. And all of us. I mean, we had been through unbelievable things. We were listening with our mouth open, we can't believe this. And we wanted more, we wanted anything, everything that you could tell us. And she kept telling us these wonderful stories and I went to visit her a few times, I've been in touch with her in Paris, and she says to me, you were unbelievable, you were so -- in French it's douce, sweet, so sweet, you always

wanted to come and cuddle up, so sweet. You always came up and you always, you know, you always sort of bent your knees and you always went like this and like this and you always came like this with your face and she says all of you children were unbelievable. It was like we were so happy, you know.

Q You had that experience?

A Not only that experience. I have a, well, I'm going to go home in about forty-five minutes to get the letter and other papers and so the phrase I remember was, you know, notre grande famille.

Q What is that, I don't know.

A Which means in English our large family. And the word happy showed up a number of times. It was, you know, everybody was in the same situation. I thought it was very normal to be, and it was. It was nice there really.

Q Your counsellors were the people who took care of you, who were they?

A Well, the head of the orphanage was Eric Grosman, who is now a, he's a religious man, it was a very religious home, but it was a very positive religion. We celebrated Shabbos every Friday night. We walked around, we sang songs, we walked around the table, we sang Sholem Aleichim every time and we ate together. I mean, the bare minimum, we had bare minimum food, but everything was in a very positive thing. We had cake on Saturday morning and when we had to have our tonsils out we all had to do it together, and it was a very exciting experience going to the hospital. And then it was, I mean, the whole experience at Tav--- was very positive, warm loving family. That's all they wanted to have us. And we had to learn all the prayers. But it was no big hassle. I mean, that was the thing. But I want to tell you -- I forgot to tell you -- my parents were taken to Auschwitz and they were killed and I never knew, and I think Jacques had the same thing, I never knew the date, the convoy, anything, and then Klausfeld came out with a book two years ago, three years ago, in French, and we had all these lists of people. And when I went to visit Elaine in Paris, she says you have to go home and you have to look through the list, I'm telling you if your parents were sent through France they're in that book. And I went home and I went and went and looked and sure enough, two years ago I found my parents' name, I found my

uncle's name, and I think Jacques found his family. Yes?

A Well, right now my mother's name and I haven't, I didn't know what dates it said my father was, but last night I did go home and, you know, verified, and I'm going to go later today also just to see it.

Q Yeah. And was your experience in the orphanage the way theirs was, happy?

A No. Well, okay, it's kind of a different situation. I was at that point about eighteen years old so I was kind of---

Q Yes.

A ---a teenager, half grown up, whatever. But we were about four hundred of us, we basically were very happy to be alive. There wasn't enough food but there was a lot of camaraderie around and this was when we were in Normandy, we were there for about two months. I left after about four weeks and I got a job in Paris. And I worked for the American army for about two three months. And then when that orphanage was closed and the people sent to different houses, some of them were sent to where Felice was in Tav--- or there was a house in Paris, and that's where I was. And there were about forty or fifty of us and we had just -- some of us went to school, some of us had jobs, we usually came home to eat at noon and evening.

Q Yeah.

A There were about twenty Hungarian Roumanians, about another twenty Polish guys, and most of us were going to come out to the States. I left about two years, after about two years. Some of them went to Canada, some of them stayed there. We still keep in touch.

Q Could you just say your name again?

A Paul Kassy.

Q Okay. Now, we didn't get to how you left the orphanage.

A Oh yes. An American family came and---

Q And how old were you?

A When I was nine this American family came to France and my mother, well, they adopted me eventually.

Q Yes.

A She couldn't have any children and obviously there were a lot of kids to be adopted during the war, and they saw my sister first and my mother and father said she looks so cute and everything that that was the one. But obviously I came with the package because we were together.

Q Um hm.

A And we went France in 1948, October '48.

Q Now, when they said they wanted your sister, the people at the orphanage said she has a brother?

A Right.

Q He has to go too.

A Yes.

Q So they got, they then adopted two children.

A Right. We were both adopted.

Q And then they wanted a family then.

A I never talked to them about it.

Q Yes.

A Things were beyond your control. That's---

Q Yes.

A They wanted a family but they never asked or talked about it and you were moved from one place to another place and it just happened.

Q Yeah.

A To be alive you just didn't have fate.

Q Um hm. And these were American people who came over?

A No, they were visiting, they were visiting friends.

Q Um hm.

A I never asked them why they were interested.

Q Um hm.

A And seeing, you know---

Q So you came over and on your own you had to learn English.

A At ten. Well, I was ten. I learned English and everything.

Q Yeah.

A And grew up here in the United States.

Q Um hm. And have you been back?

A I was back in '66 for, well, for four days in Paris and I have cousins which we never really talked, it was kind of strange, I had broken contact, we had broken contact completely, we had, I had another aunt and uncle who died in '70, I think, and basically we broke contact. I guess it was my fault but---

Q Yeah. Now, who told you about your parents?

A I have, officially speaking I got money back from the German government in 1965 for, you know, the war crimes, and part of it,

I have papers that---

Q Um hm.

A ---somewhat official saying, you know---

Q From the Germans?

A I don't know. I think from the French government.

Q Oh.

A From the police department.

Q Um hm.

A As far as they tell me. I just never recall any parents or, you know, exactly what happened I obviously do not know, except what my parents have told me and it makes sense. There's nothing---

Q Yeah. So your odyssey when you were young was, somehow people took care of you.

A Exactly. Somehow without having any control over it, and I know if more than likely I would've been, you know, gone to Israel, I believe. I think most of the kids went to Israel, you know, after the war. Because I was pretty, you know, younger than Paul and---

Q And at what point did you stay with nuns?

A This is after the war I just recall.

Q Now, you remember because you were older.

A I was seventeen when the Germans came in and I celebrated my seventeenth birthday in the ghetto.

Q Yeah. And how did you celebrate your seventeenth birthday?

A It wasn't much. I don't really remember. Probably, you know---

Q Yeah.

A --got some presents but I don't know what they were anymore.

Q Um hm.

A It wasn't, you know, very joyous occasion.

Q No. So you were a young able-bodied man who could work.

A Yeah.

Q And what did you do?

A Well, we were in Monowitz, I was in Monowitz for about eight months from June till January and I worked making concrete blocks for a while by hand. Then I worked in kind of a workshop with a hacksaw cutting pipe. About August -- the Americans started to bomb the factory and one day, I don't remember when, September or October, they---

Q Excuse me, this was the Farben factory?

A This was the I.G.Farben, yes.

Q I.G.Farben. Okay.

A And sometimes in September or thereabouts the bomb fell and demolished the workshops, so from that point on I was just working, you know, clearing ruins. I remember one time we, about six of us happened to have had to pull away an unexploded bomb from a basement and the SS were outside, you know, telling us how to do it.

Q In what language?

A In German, you know, what to do. And about five of us picked up the bomb -- it probably was about a five hundred pound bomb -- and started walking with it, and we kind of felt funny that the SS were hiding. One of them went whoops and the SS jumped. To us that was funny. But remember we were young kids and kind of---

Q So there was some sense of humor.

A Well, wasn't much sense of humor but really we were so exposed to dust and danger and whatever, you know, we did stupid things.

Q Yes. What did you have to move?

A Well, basically we were trying to survive. We knew the war was going to end, we knew -- perhaps hoped -- that the Germans would lose it, and it was just a question of, you know, would we be alive when the time comes. End of January, on the 18th of January the camp was evacuated, so we went on foot for about twenty-four hours from Monowitz to Gleibitz. During the night snow where other people were falling on the side and then on the way we stopped in a brick factory, okay, and no heat, no nothing, still outside, and we stayed there overnight and following morning we went on. I just met a guy here who was on the same death march and he managed, he was from Poland and he spoke Polish so he ran away and managed to escape right after the brick yard and obviously survived. We ended up in Gleibitz which was another concentration camp, but at that point it was empty, and there was no food, there was no water, nothing. And we stayed there for three days. A friend of mine's father stayed there. He just went berserk, you know, and didn't want to come with us.

Q The father.

A The father. I mean, he didn't -- we found a place in a barrack that somehow or other had some heat and we wanted to get him in there and he wouldn't even go. He just stayed in a latrine all night long and we never saw him again. So we ended up on a

transport to Buchenwald, this was open flat cars, and the size of flat cars were maybe twenty inches high, a hundred twenty people in there. There were fights, this, that, the other. One night I woke up, I got hit in the head unconscious. I woke up almost on the side of the thing. This thing went on for about six days.

Q No water?

A No water. The last night I was scooping up snow and eating it off of something, and when light came on I found out I was scooping it off the face of a dead man. Out of the hundred twenty, maybe twenty people were alive by the time I got to Buchenwald about six or seven days later, and I was unable to get off the thing. My two buddies kind of helped me get off.

Q So you still were with those two guys.

A Yeah. And I ended up in a hospital block for a while in Buchenwald and when I was liberated -- this was in end of January -- I don't remember very much, I mean I was emaciated, I weighed about forty-two kilos when I was liberated. I happen to have a picture with me.

A Norbert Waldheim, he also was in a work camp. You know the name Norbert Waldheim?

A Name Norbert---

A Waldheim.

A Norbert sounds familiar. Waldheim doesn't -- no. Where is he?

A He's here.

Q So this was -- you call them death marches. They just marched people?

A Well basically, you know, they just took, they evacuated Auschwitz, they evacuated Monowitz where I was, they evacuated Birkenau, and they just put them on the road and they were marching. Anybody that tried to collapse or who tried to run away they just shot them. And, you know, this was January. Middle January without---

Q Of what year?

A Of 1945. You know, no overcoat. If you happened to have been lucky or smart and managed to get a hold of a blanket and put a hole through the middle of it and pull it over your head, which I did, and put those striped clothes on, maybe you survived. I lost a shoe but, you know, I had blankets wrapped, pieces of blankets wrapped around my feet, so I did not get frostbite. I know a kid from Holland who was in a hospital, he had one foot totally

amputated and half of the other foot amputated from that march. I mean, you know, the survival rate on these death marches were probably twenty, maybe thirty per cent of the people survived, if that many.

Q And then you survived, you get to a camp where you may be---

A Well, the camp was, we were ninety-two -- well, first of all, I went from what I think was at the time maybe hundred sixty pounds, you know, down to probably about ninety pounds over a period of about two weeks. And in Buchenwald, you know, I really didn't know what misery was till I got to Buchenwald. This was a camp that was built for about twenty thousand people and at one point they had ninety-two thousand people crammed in there. And then they started evacuating Buchenwald one week before it was liberated. So by the time we were liberated, we were only twenty-one thousand people there. One transport, it ended up in freight cars, sealed freight cars in Dachau was never opened, it was on a siding. The Americans found it two weeks later with everybody dead and suffocated there. One of the, there was a radio engineer from Luxembourg, okay, who had no skin on, he had an infection on his leg and these idiots just cut off all his skin to get to the infection and they were bathing it, and the guy died exactly two days before liberation. And they were supposed to, the SD was supposed to burn up the camp with all the inmates in it. We found this out because camp was liberated about four o'clock in the afternoon and at seven o'clock the phone rang from Weimar, which was about six seven miles away. The mayor or whoever it was tried to get a hold of the camp commander to find out if the SD burned down the camp. And an inmate picked up the phone and he said they just started burning it now, they should be finished in about two three hours. So this is how the whole SS hierarchy in Weimar was captured, because they didn't know that the camp was in American hands.

Q Tell us about liberation.

A Well, about eleven o'clock the loudspeakers came on in German and---

Q What did they say?

A They said for all the guards to get out of the camp and they all got out. And somebody who was in a barrack nearby that was about three stories high on a hill shouted down that it was an American tank that he saw that turned back. And we knew that there was

street fighting in airport which was only about ten twelve miles from there, so I figured well, the Americans -- if this was a reconnaissance tank and he'll come back, he ought to be back here about three four five hours. And at three-thirty they were back.

Q Did you have a watch? I mean, how do you know these times?

A Somebody had a watch. I didn't.

Q Yes. The tanks rolled up---

A The tanks rolled up. Of course, I was too weak to walk, so I did not get, you know, I did not have contacts with the Americans for another two days. But, you know, it was unbelievable.

Q The tanks rolled right into the camp.

A The tanks came up to the camp. Actually by that time the camp was disarmed because they had an underground. And when they saw the tanks nearby, the one that turned back, they went up with a sub-machine gun, a hidden submachine gun into the commander's office, they disarmed him and they made him give the order for all the SS to get out of the camp and off the towers.

Q The underground did this?

A The underground did that.

Q Now, is it surprising that the underground just didn't shoot all those German SS people?

A Well, they didn't shoot them, they stayed there, you know. I mean, the SS still had weapons, they were on the outside.

Q Oh.

A The only person that was still in the underground sand was a camp commander and there were two or three people in the office.

Q Now, what was the name of the underground?

A It was a Communist underground, mostly French and German.

Q Communist.

A Yeah, Communist controlled. They were the ones who were in the camps since the thirties, so these were real oldtimers.

Q Old hands.

A Yeah.

Q And did they teach you anything about---

A I had no particular contact with them. They were, one of the things they did for us, there was a reconnaissance plane that came by maybe two days before liberation and there was something called the camp police, and they had white caps versus the striped ones, and they

lined up in the middle of the camp sheltered by the barracks around it in an SOS so the reconnaissance plane knew hopefully or they'd notice that.

Q Now, how did you know there was an underground?

A This became known very well after liberation, but---

Q Yeah, but not before.

A Not before. Well, people knew about it, I'm sure, but I didn't. I mean, I was a young kid, I could hardly walk, so, you know, they didn't need me.

Q So we're at three-thirty.

A Three-thirty, four o'clock, thereabouts.

Q Tanks roll in.

A Right.

Q Americans jump off.

A Well, I did not see the tanks.

Q No.

A The tanks came up to almost the wire and the GIs came around the other end of the wire to the gate and they opened the gate and that was it.

Q You don't remember what they said.

A I did not get in touch with a GI for two or three days.

Q Yeah. But you didn't hear what anybody else---

A Well, you know, everybody was ecstatic, everybody was yelling, jumping, running around. I could not walk, you know, I could not walk up. I remember two days later I tried to get up a flight of stairs, I ended up on all fours trying to get up because my legs were so weak.

Q Yeah. So you couldn't even rejoice.

A Well, I rejoiced. I just, you know, you did not see me running around jumping up and down.

Q Yes.

A I mean there was a tremendous feeling.

Q Yeah. Freedom.

A Yeah. I mean it was something, you know, that I didn't think I'll ever see.

Q Yeah.

A Because, you know, they were evacuating the camp, and the night

before I was trying to look for a hiding place because I knew that within the next forty-eight hours they're going to evacuate it, but I wouldn't have the strength to really go. The only thing I found was a manhole inside the barrack that I was at, you know, where they had some water pipes, and I was going to hide there and if they burned down the barracks they burned down the barracks.

Q Yes.

A But, you know, there was no way I could survive a march.

Q No, because if you walked and you fell down on the march they'd shoot you.

A I couldn't walk.

Q Yeah. So they'd shoot you. And then after liberation is when you went to---

A Well, after liberation one of the things, the Americans made a meal -- the Germans blew up the water tanks, so they made a stew for everybody was almost no water, mostly oil and fat, and I don't know how many people got dysentery and died from it but they removed us up into the old SS barracks and life there became more bearable. Also, you know, a lot of us suffered from dysentery and sickness and whatever.

Q Typhus.

A No, we didn't have typhus, we just had general sickness, but this was April 11th and I remember May 7th a couple of friends of mine and myself, we walked down to Weimar and I got with American cigarettes and money and whatever we got some sugar and flour and I was going to make a birthday cake for myself but, you know, we ended up making crepes. And that's how I celebrated my birthday while the Red Cross were looking for me to give me plasma that day. So by that time I was in better shape. And then in June the OSI took us out of France.

Q And your two friends went with you?

A They came with me with the OSI. One of them contacted TB and he ended up in Switzerland in Davos and he still lives in Switzerland near -- it starts with a B -- Basle.

Q Basle.

A And the other one, I came out to the States in '47, he came out in '48. He's in Dallas, Texas.

Q Okay.

A Not a specific date but I remember things. Like going to school. The school was not in the orphanage, it was in town about like a ten minute walk along the sidewalk.

A No, it's like over a walk, you have to jump over the wall. Okay. Go ahead.

Q As long as you speak one at a time, I don't care.

A Okay. Well, I remember -- because I remember a lot of -- I don't remember two years of Travail, which was right after I left my French family, the Catholic family, but I remember Tav--- very well. You go over, you go to school in this town. Very strict school, very strict. We had to wear tabliés, it's like a big apron, and we always had to sit with our hands folded and if you weren't good they hit you, they tapped you with a ruler.

A Yeah, I remember that. When I was adopted my parents here sent me candy and I was giving candy to the kids and the teachers find out I was the one who was giving chocolate candy, as a matter of fact, and I got a ruler from my fingers and a wingo. They were strict.

A Yeah, they took very good care of us, the orphanage, the counsellors there, but it was very strict. I mean, we had certain -- we didn't really do anything because we were so young but we had to really pay attention, we were in a certain group, and I was two years younger than my sister but they didn't want to separate us. I was put in the same group as she was and the counsellor was Elaine E--- who is now Elaine Wexler in Paris, she's a wonderful lady and she took really good care of us. And once everybody contacted lice and I had very long hair like this and we all had to cut our hair very very short and they put this white powder over us to make sure. Then another time they were giving us shots and they gave us shots in the shoulder and it was terrible, we couldn't move, it was terrible terrible reaction. But we had our own little cabinet with our clothes. I mean, everyone had one shelf. And we had to keep it clean. I slept, I think, with four or five girls in one little room. Not one -- not small, but nice size.

Q Separate beds.

A Separate beds, right. And there was a big kitchen downstairs and we had, we ate together, and like I said, for Shabbos we had nice cake in the morning, Shabbos morning, Saturday morning, and then on Friday night we sang songs together and walked around. I did go back, by the way, where I was born in 1961 and everybody told me don't go, don't go to Germany, and I said no, I have to, and Elaine I went to visit her first and she said no, she has to, she has to go back. So I went back and I went to this town and I walked up to this man and I said my name is Felice Zimmer, I was born here and I want to rent a bicycle. And he says what is your last name? So I said Zimmer and he says to me, he sort of, his face lit up and he says go down this street and knock on this person's door and they own a bicycle shop, as it turned out. So I went and I knocked on the door and I showed them my passport and I think this woman almost passed out because she thought I was my sister. And her daughter had played with my sister. And she started calling everybody in town, everybody had to come and look. It was as if I was a movie star. And there was only one person who spoke English, I spoke no German, and this was the principal's wife. And she used to be Jewish but she converted because her mother had died, and she sort of took over. I was going to be her charge and she showed me the town. My grandparents still, there are graves of my grandparents, so I went there and I started pulling weeds. I mean, here I was on all fours pulling weeds from the grave and I saw my name. I mean, it wasn't my name, it was Frances. I think I was named after her. And my sister was named Berthe after my other grandmother. And then they wouldn't let me stay. In the end I had to stay with them in the house. It was like the whole town literally came out and looked at me. It was like I was an enigma. And they kept saying we had nothing to do with it, your parents were good people, I delivered milk to your house and your father was, he was like a shmatta dealer, he delivered---

Q Rags?

A ---rags, you know. They were very simple peasants. I mean, they didn't harm anybody.

Q They wanted you to forgive them.

A Yeah. And I kept taking pictures of the house where I was born and everybody wanted to get into the picture. After a while I had no more film in the camera so I made believe, you know.

Q Yeah.

A And they said to me, You're coming back? And I said no, I said I'm not coming back, I said, but I said no, I can't. That's all I said. And I left and I went to Zurich, Switzerland and I stay with Monsieur Smun, who was the director, and I literally sat there with his family, I couldn't move for a week, and then I went to Israel thinking I'm Jewish, they're going to welcome me with open arms. I had not made one reservation. I walked, I'm travelling to Israel in '61 and this woman, old lady sitting next to me, she wants to know where was I staying. I said I don't know, I don't know a place. I literally went to Israel without a reservation. And she let me stay with her for a few days. And I was zonked out from three weeks because of that experience in Germany.

Q Yeah. And you've not gone back, have you?

A I did in '66 I went back to Paris for three or four days and I do have cousins which I've got contact with essentially and had an aunt and uncle. We just kind of stayed at their place while I was married by that time. I'm divorced now. American style. So completely Americanized. With two kids also.

Q You didn't take your family with you though when you went back?

A I didn't have any---

Q Oh.

A We didn't have any kids at that time.

Q Um hm.

A We talked and I never said, you know, like -- I didn't want to talk about it obviously. And then my sister lives in Israel for the last, since '62, I think. She's an artist. And we visited her for about ten days.

Q Um hm. Do you and your sister share any memories?

A We are not very close and until very very recently like last year I sent her a, well, like a year and a half ago she sent me a letter saying we should be closer and I answered her about a year later and -- well, something else happened. My parents are getting rather old and I said this is about time I find out what's going on---

Q Yes.

A ---from somebody who's living. And they had this batch of papers dealing with the, you know, being orphaned and the official papers and the letters they sent back and forth to the OZ people. And then I sent my sister a letter around Thanksgiving time of 1982 asking her what she knows, and I know she knew things, and she sent me a picture, two pictures of my parents and me. I never knew, you know, I have them. I mean, they were available. And I wrote to her again a few months ago, I mean a few weeks ago, and hopefully we'll get -- I don't know what's going to happen.

Q Yeah.

A It's not only that, but getting closer to my long, you know, lost cousins, so to speak.

Q Yeah. And I suppose this experience will---

A Well, that was part of the thing coming here. Not only was it the right thing obviously, but not knowing what was going to happen and---

Q Yeah.

A --- saying who knows.

Q Yes.

A Now you know the law.

Q Now you're beginning to know.

A Yes.

Q And is there anything you want to add?

A Well, I also, I went back in 1968 to visit my foster mother in France who's not Jewish. I checked out where she was living through OZ and I wrote to her and then I went to visit her and she was waiting for me at the platform and she -- to me this was very important -- she's a very, she was a very old lady and she wasn't wearing her teeth. She said they hurt her. But the moment I stepped off the platform, I mean the train, I saw and I recognized her right away. I mean, she kept saying my Felice,

my chere petite Felice, and then she took me to all her relatives and we all stood in a circle and everybody kissed me, and it was like I went home. I mean, it was a very very very special experience and I got for her -- I worked for the Jewish organization, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, and we have a special program where we give medals of recognition to non-Jews who helped Jews in the war. It's Yad Vashem that gives the medals but we support them, we give some money if they need it. So I really went after Yad Vashem, and after three years and saying to them I am a witness, me, alive. So her cousin went to France, to Paris, and got for her the special medal of righteous gentiles. And when she died her son sent me the obituary where it said about her medal. So she was very proud of that. So I felt in my way this was repaying her.

Q Yes.

A I wasn't in contact with her until '68 and it was only through -- really had gotten back and was able to deal with all of this.

Q Yes. Well, dealing with, I mean, she was, it was almost being deprived of a second mother.

A Yeah. They cut it off. I mean unfortunately they didn't realize this but they really cut it. I mean, I understand now what they were doing.

Q Right.

A They wanted us to get back with the Jewish religion, Jewish---

Q Culture.

A ---culture, but in a sense I lost her again. And it took me until '68 until I dealt with it to really find her again. And she had saved all these pictures. I mean, I like Jacques didn't bring them with me, but she saved. I mean, I had pictures of me when I was two and three of her and with her children and every known thing she took -- people were taking pictures of me. It was again I was an enigma.

Q Yes. Something out of their past that they wanted to make peace with.

A And I brought her a few presents. She wouldn't take anything, you know. And I got this, when I went back to visit her son I told him I wanted a memento, and I said I wanted a bijou -- I was very daring -- so he opened up this box and he says well, take something, so I took this ring.

Q It's beautiful. It is beautiful.

A So it's really like a memento.

Q We're done with this tape.

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