OK, we're rolling. This is tape one of an interview with Hanne Liebmann in her home in Bayside, Queens for the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum. And the interviewer is Joe Richmond. Let's start going all the way back, just talking about your family a little bit. Just tell me briefly who was in your family.

In my family at what time, at what point of time?

Before the war, when you were growing up.

When I was growing up, OK. How far do we go back?

As far as you want to go back.

[LAUGHS] Well, I was born in 1924. And you have that on some of the tapes already. And at the time I was born, I obviously had a mother. I had a father. I had a brother, 3 and 1/2 years older. However, my father died in 1925, about three months after I was born. So I grew up in a one-parent household. OK.

My mother maintained my father's business, which was a photo studio. At the time my father passed away, we still had an art gallery as well, which my mother gave up on around 1926 because she could not maintain a business, and an art gallery, and two children, and everything else. Besides, at that point, in Germany, after the inflation, the art business was not the hottest item anyway.

So I grew up like any other child. My mother had several sisters. She had three that lived in the city where I was born. She had, equally, a brother who lived in Karlsruhe. She had a sister in Switzerland. She had a sister in Czechoslovakia.

On my father's side, I had an uncle who lived in Munich who was a photographer and auctioneer and a brother who lived in Berlin. He was an agent for artists for movies, opera, concerts. That was his business.

And did you mention your brothers and sisters?

My brother-- I had only one brother.

One brother.

3 and 1/2 years older, as I said. And well, we grew up like all children do, I suppose. I remember the rise of Hitler. I remember the street fights in the '20s. Our place was next to a left-wing newspaper. And there were a lot of street fights, and shootings, and flag burnings. And these are some of my earliest childhood memories.

Included in that is the people who came begging for food to our apartment door, carts going through the street-- horse-drawn carts going through the street, collecting clothes for the poor. It was a very, very bad time in Germany.

Hitler came to power. I remember, April 1 is the boycott. I remember that very well. I went to school, public school. There was some harassment, obviously. There was harassment of us kids in the street.

I did not have Gentile girlfriends, probably, after 1935 because it became too dangerous for them as well as for us. And my mother had Gentile friends till the very end. Till the day we were deported, we had Gentile friends who came to our house at night, in the dark, when it was-- what do you call it, brownout here, blackout? Blackout, really.

And school, of course, for us Jewish kids, we had to leave public school in 1936 and go to an all-Jewish school. Many of the larger cities already had established Jewish schools, long-established Jewish schools. Karlsruhe did not. So it had to start a Jewish school.

I do not remember how many children we were, probably 200-300, I would say, at the beginning. And with parents emigrating, it became, of course, a smaller and smaller school. We were first located in a public school building.

Actually, we had one or two floors in that public school building. The other floors were for retarded children. And eventually, we had to get out of there too and have the school in the community building.

I remember November 10th very well. I remember the synagogue being vandalized and whatever. Actually, a friend and I went into the synagogue a couple of days later to see what we could save. And since the community building was adjacent to the synagogue, we literally watched the destruction of the synagogue as it was being torn down.

The community sold the real estate where the synagogue was standing on because they needed that money to feed the families who no longer could make a living. Things became very, very tough. And we had a lot of Jewish people who no longer could afford to feed themselves. So the community had a soup kitchen. And they needed this money to feed all these people and take care of whatever needed to be done.

1940, I was, for, ooh, five months in the area of Hanover in the north of Germany in a place called Ahlem. It had a Jewish agricultural school and long-established school. As a matter of fact, this school did not only teach agriculture, it also taught homemaking and all sorts of other things. And since my mother didn't know what to do with me and I was hanging around the house, she sent me up there for several months.

Beginning of 1939, actually, the three sisters of my mother moved in with us because end of '38, we could not have businesses anymore. We were deprived of our livelihood. And in order to save funds, we all moved together. It also meant that no other Jewish family could be moved in with you if you had a large apartment. They had a large apartment. We had a large apartment.

So it was-- also, my grandmother had moved in with us. She was a very elderly lady of 90. Maybe she was only 80, 89 when she moved in with us, whatever, so that the household consisted, actually, of six women.

My brother left Germany summer of 1937 to come here to America. He was first with a half-brother of our father. That didn't work out too well. Then he was down in Atlanta at the university to study whatever. I think he studied radio technology or something like that. He got a scholarship.

And actually, when he left in '37 was the last time I saw my brother. He eventually joined the American Army and was killed in the Battle of the Bulge in January of 1945. We ourselves were deported in--

Let me stop. What was your brother's name?

My brother's name was Alex. His full name was Alexander. But he was referred to as Alex.

And your maiden name was his name?

Hirsch, yeah. October 22, we were deported. We were the second deportation out of Germany, the first one having been from Stettin to Lublin in February of 1940. Of course, previously, in '38, the Polish Jewish people who had lived in Germany had been deported to Poland.

And that was this miserable situation. They did not have a-- they didn't have-- they had not acquired German citizenship. And the Polish government said, no, we don't take them back, and so on, and so forth, which by the way, was the official reason for the pogrom on November 10.

The German took this incident in Paris, where this young fellow, Grynszpan, murdered a consular employee, vom Rath, because he was so angry that his parents had been deported out of Germany. This is the official story. I know a book has been written about it. I have not read the book. There might have been other reasons for the shooting. But this was the official version. And this brought about the government-organized pogrom of November 10, what you call here Crystal Night or Kristallnacht. It was a frightful time.

In any case, we were deported in October of 1940. We were deported to France. French did not know who we were or whatever and simply sent us in the unoccupied zone of France. Or the Germans actually sent us in the unoccupied zone

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of France.

And the French sent us all the way down south, southwest, to Gurs, a camp called Gurs. It's spelled G-U-R-S. It's very close to the Spanish border, only about 40 kilometers to the Pyrenees and the Spanish border.

And here we were in a camp, not a nice place to be. It was awful. The trip was awful. My grandmother, at this point, over 91 years old, lost her mind on the train.

On this paper here, you have the name of Weil. This Mr. Weil was with us in the same car when we were deported. He also was a very elderly man. And he, as well, lost his mind, as did my grandmother, became totally confused, was totally out. OK. So we had two in one car. It was a horrible situation.

Did you know at that point on the train-- did you know-- did you get this--

Where we were going?

--where you were going, what was happening, how long it would be?

Not at all. Most people did not know. My mother and I knew that we were going to the south of France. And we knew because the morning of the deportation, my mother sent me to a Mrs. Fite. These were very decent people. And my mother was friendly with them to the very last.

And she told me to bring them certain items from our household, which they very much liked. It was Bohemian glass. It was very-- crystal. It was very beautiful stuff. And she said, go over there. Bring it to them and come right back. And so I did.

And when I came to Mrs. Fite, she told me, my husband said, you will be going to the south of France. But of course, we didn't know. What does it mean, the south of France? Where were we going to be, right?

And I came home and told my mother. And she said, you're crazy, because she fully expected to be taken to a concentration camp in Germany or even to Poland because we knew already from the people who had been deported from Stettin that they were taken to Lublin. So our expectations were not the south of France. And my mother said, you're crazy.

So OK. We did go to France. But what was going to happen to us? I mean, it was very obvious once the train, when it was set in motion and we were going west, that we were not going to go, let's say, Dachau, which is in Germany, or any of the other camps. And indeed, we were taken to France.

And on the train, we were allowed to take with us 100 marks. Our money was changed into French francs. We got 2,000 French francs for the 100 marks, which was a pittance. So the trip took three days. And then we found ourselves in Gurs. In Gurs, I don't know. Have you heard about Gurs? Have you read about it?

Most of what I know is from your interviews. So tell me in your experience.

My experience? Well, like everybody who got there, 6 and 1/2 thousand people got there, was utter confusion. Most of the people were totally traumatized-- understandably so. First of all, the three-day trip.

Then we were taken off the train in open trucks in pouring rain. From the railroad station in Oloron-Sainte-Marie to Gurs is about 15 kilometers-- not terribly far, but enough to be thoroughly soaked. The camp itself was built on a land that had been completely deforested. There were no trees. There are trees today. But that's 50 years or 60 years later.

And the ground was mud. It was real mud, like clay-like, sort of. And of course, with the rain, this became an impossible situation. So here we came to the place. Already, we stepped right into the mud.

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The barracks were totally empty. They were wooden structures, only tar paper, no windows. There were no windows. We had flaps that could be opened. But you had to prop them up. Now, if you open the window, so-called window, it would rain in. You closed it, you were without air and light. Had a door on each end, at each end. And there comes my husband.

I'll stop the tape first.

Yeah.

OK.

Yes.

We're back. So yeah, just the daily life and the conditions that you were--

The daily life--

Talking about.

--daily life was very hard. The first night we got there, we were given some straw, and not sufficient for everybody, that for days, people were really lying on the wooden planks. There were no carts. There was nothing. Eventually, we were given blankets. We were given straw. We were given a cotton, something like a sack to put the straw in, make something similar to a mattress.

The food, like in all concentration camps, was, I guess, almost everywhere the same. We got something that resembled coffee in the morning, half a pound of bread. That was our daily ration. We got a watery soup at lunchtime with some vegetables in it, mostly root vegetables-- turnips, carrots, things like that. It had also some chickpeas, and occasionally, a little meat. Our meat ration per week was about four ounces, a good-sized hamburger for the whole week. Evening was the same thing.

Life was very, very difficult. No one who ever was in will forget the mud we had to live in. No one will forget the rats, the mice, the fleas, the lice, and the bedbugs. There were no beds, but we had bedbugs.

And I think this was the most-- the constant dampness in winter, the constant rain, the constant dampness, being cold all the time, even so we had our own clothes. They did not take our clothes away. We were constantly cold and damp.

And heat-- yeah, there was in every barracks, was a stove. But we very rarely had even two pieces of wood, whatever. We had electricity, contrary to some reports that I have read. We did have electricity. We had two light bulbs in each barracks, small ones.

We did not have to work. We were not forced to work. People created their own, in that they started handicrafts. A cultural life was born. My husband, by the way, participated in that. Music was made. The Y provided the instruments.

You have to understand that in France, the camps were just a little different from what you usually hear in that social service agencies could function in the camp. And so we had the Young Man's Christian Association. We had the Quakers, which is an American organization.

We had the Swiss Red Cross Children's Division-- or Children's Aid. It was first the Children's Aid Society. And then they combined it with the Swiss Red Cross because, otherwise, they could not have functioned. We had them. And we had Catholic and Protestant agencies.

And most of all, we had the OSE, which is a Jewish child welfare organization in France. And OSE did tremendous work, absolutely tremendous work. Their social workers were far superior to anyone you can find, really and truly. And most of these social workers, if not all, were Jewish. And so they really took a lot of chances and faced a lot of dangers

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helping us in the camp and taking children out of the camp to place them in their children's homes. Because they had to travel, they were on the road. They had to.

And even in unoccupied France, things became even more difficult. So they did a tremendous job. The Swiss Red Cross brought in some food for the most desperate. And they would feed young people in the morning. And it went in rotation. And then in the afternoon, day or something, they fed adults who really had nothing at all.

We could receive money in the camp. We also could write letters and receive letters. So these are things that did not exist in other concentration camps. It was most helpful. The money we could receive, well, it created a black market of phenomenal prices.

This was possible because we had a lot of Spanish people with us who came to this camp around 1939 from the Spanish Civil War. These were refugees from the Spanish Civil War. For them, this was not a concentration camp. For them, it was a place where they could live, so-called.

But they could go in and out of the camp. They had special-- that was a completely separate situation. These people [LAUGHS] brought in food, as much as they could get from the farms around or wherever, and then, of course, sold it at tremendous prices in the camp. That was their way of making a living.

So the prices went up, and up, and up, till one day, we ourselves decided, this cannot go on because not everybody can really participate in this thing. And a lid was put on the amount of money that you could get each month. It was something we instituted ourselves.

We kept an account for everyone. And out of this account, twice a month, you got a certain amount of money-- several hundred francs. But that meant that you no longer could pay total fantasy prices. And it curbed this thing.

We also instituted, you could say it, almost self-help in the following way-- if people got money that was sent to them from wherever, they had to pay a certain percentage into a fund. This fund was used to help the people who received nothing at all.

I'll take it.

OK?

So you just--

I don't think there are many camps where you have ever heard that people who had-- sometimes, it was a struggle to get people to really pay up their whatever percentages it was. I don't remember.

So it was a self-government situation.

It was-- a certain amount of it was self-government, definitely. Each block-- now, the camp had-- was divided by one main road. On each side of the main road were the wooden barracks, subdivided into blocks, each block, of course, surrounded by barbed wire, and a ditch, and a gate with a military guard standing there or whatever, and a rifle. Little did we know, they didn't have ammunition. [LAUGHS]

But we could not circulate between the blocks. We had to invent a system by which the men and the women were separated. So that was a great hardship because husbands and wives could not talk to one another. They could not see one another.

So the first thing that happened is, then, when people died, they would go to the funerals because we did have funerals. And they would meet at the cemetery so they could talk to one another. And that was one way in the beginning.

And people died very, very soon, very quickly. Dysentery broke out, meningitis had broken out. There were a number

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of diseases that very rapidly spread. And so many, especially the elderly, died very quickly. I can show you the list of the people who passed away. I have one.

And eventually, we instituted a system, these little tickets that were given out, for an hour's visit or else in the men's block so the wives could go to the husbands. And then the husbands would get a ticket to come another day to see the wife. But this, of course, also went in rotation. Not everybody could go every day.

And you said, we instituted this system.

We instituted that system. Again, that was a system that you had put up.

Yeah. But this system had to be approved by the administration. On holidays, when there was a holiday, you could get out of your block and circulate. And there was no problem. But this was a holiday treat. But for the rest, this was instituted with the approval of the French administration.

So you describe an administration that was fairly hands-off. They just wanted--

It was not entirely hands-off. When it came to cultural things, they were all with it because that's the way the French are. There was no problem. You have to ask my husband because he worked more in the office than I did. I worked in the office in our block. But he was-- in his block, he also worked in the office. He was more involved then I was. My job was more of giving out the mail, giving out the mail that came, run the errands, do some statistical work, things like that.

Anyway, life in camp was very, very hard. I would not say it was life like you hear about from Auschwitz or any of the other camps. No. That it wasn't. It was tough, nevertheless. Once you're a prisoner, you're a prisoner. So we didn't have to stand in formation. This did not exist.

We were counted, however, in the morning. There was a woman who came through the barracks every morning to count us God forbid if she overlooked a small child, because we had some small children with us, and you know how it is. Children go almost under the blanket. And if she didn't see them, she would miscount. And then she was just horrible-- screaming, stamping her feet. And I mean, it was just terrible, totally unnecessary.

There were some escapes. Some people were unfortunately caught and brought back. Others made it. It depended on if you had contacts outside, if you spoke the language, if you had money, you knew where you were going. Most of us-- only some young people tried from our group, I think.

The group of German Jews that came from Baden and the Palatinate were an over-aged group of people, very-- percentage-wise, very few young people and children. It was mostly 50 and up. So 50 and up, people are not quite this adventurous anymore. And they were all traumatized and in shock. And it took a long time before people started to function. The ones who functioned from the beginning were the young people.

Did you live with your mother at that time and with other relatives there?

In Gurs?

In Gurs.

Yes, with my mother and my three aunts. The first few months, I think, we were in the same barracks. And then my mother and I were shifted over to another barracks. But we were just a couple of, what, maybe 50 meters, something like that. So that was not a problem.

And communication and information?

Between us? Between the people in each block? Constant communication. What did people have to do others than talk?

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I mean, let's face it, my cousin was in the same block. That was the daughter of my mother's brother. Her mother was in the same block. Cousins of my mother were in the same block, as long as they were female. The males were all in separate blocks.

So there was constant communication between us and the other people-- also, many times, fights. Bread-- distributing the bread, cutting it into portions because you got the whole loaf, usually, was the flashpoint for a fight. Some people were very good at it. Some were not.

And when the bread was cut in portions, everybody watched, obviously, that none should get even one millimeter more. And there were some women who were not as good at it and bingo. My mother did it. It went in rotation to make it equal. My mother did it, there was never, never a question. It was very funny-- never. There were some other people doing [AUDIO OUT].

OK. This is side B of tape one, interview with Hannah Liebmann. OK, you were saying about the social service agencies.

Do you know my name is misspelled? It's L-I-E.

Oh, it's misspelled. Yeah, we'll fix that on here. It's spelled about three different ways on these forms. So we'll make sure it's the right way.

Possibly, there's a P too. The social service agencies were very helpful to us. And indeed, one day, a social worker came to my mother and asked me whether she would let me go out of the camp to a village called Le Chambon. And by now, you must have heard about Le Chambon.

There was a concerted effort to get the children and young people out of the camp. And they started with the younger ones first because they were in greater danger-- danger of malnutrition, danger-- you know, I mean, the whole thing.

So this young lady from the OSE came around and asked whether she would let me go to that village, that there was a minister there by the name of Trocme. And they wanted to take some young people out of the camp. And my mother left the decision to me.

And I decided that I wanted to go. And so after quite some time, actually, maybe six-seven weeks, we were finally told we would leave. And we were seven young people, seven teenagers altogether to leave for Le Chambon.

How long had you been in the camp at that point?

At the point I left, well, we got to the-- we were arrested on the 22nd of October and arrived in Gurs on the 25th, 1940. I left the camp on the 7th of September, 1941, so 11 months, little more than, or whatever, more or less. We were four boys and three girls to leave.

And we came to Le Chambon. And that was the most marvelous experience anyone could have had ever. I don't know if you have seen the documentary, Weapons of the Spirit. Well, you have to see it to understand what I'm talking about. We were placed in a home that was run by the Swiss Red Cross children's division.

We were quite well taken care of under the circumstances. France was very hungry. They had very little to eat. And even so we were in the country surrounded by farmers, these farmers were very poor. We had enough to eat, with the exception of one or two of the boys, who were growing like weed. And you know how teenagers can eat nonstop, 24 hours.

However, we were free. We were in wonderful surroundings, people who appreciated us. It was a flip-flop from Germany. It was a total flip-flop from Germany. After having been persecuted, discriminated against, segregated out of society, we now were the people that were wanted.

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And no difference was made between the French and us, whether in the children's home, in the group home, or anywhere. Obviously, we were foreigners. Obviously, we did not speak French-- or not a good French. Obviously, we were dressed differently. I mean, we were very obvious in the village, no doubt about it. And there was-- we were just always appreciated. People always helped us.

There came the moment when we had to be hidden. The farmers took us in and hid us at their own risk. I mean, the risk of their own lives and the family. Even so, till 19-- what was it, 1942? The unoccupied zone became totally occupied. All of France was occupied. The danger for the farmers to be arrested because they were hiding us, had they found us, was real. And they shared their bread with us, shared it with us. They had children to feed. And yet, there never was a question.

In fact, in one of the farms where I was hidden-- I was hidden on two different farms in a four-week period. Both farms, the police came to search. And the second farm, the police asked the farmer, are you hiding anybody? Are you hiding any Jews? And we could hear this upstairs in our hiding place.

And the farmer was very calm and said, not hiding anybody. And I don't know what Jews look like. And after a little pause, he said, would you care for a glass of red wine? Our hearts sank to our feet, believe you me, thinking that this guy is now going to accept and stay. We have to stay in our hiding place, being scared to death. And then we could hear, no, thank you. I am on my way.

But this farmer was so calm about it, it was unbelievable. Just with a few words, he finished the whole thing. I'm not hiding anybody. And I don't know what Jews look like. Well, no Jewish person had ever lived in Le Chambon except for a few years. A Mr. Sesh lived there maybe a few years before the war.

They had never known Jewish people. They knew the Jewish people only from the Bible. That was enough. They were the chosen people. And you helped them and you took care of them. Being Huguenot, they knew their own history of persecution. They knew what this was all about because, like the Jews, they always talk about their history. And so there was never a question.

So this whole Chambon, the whole attitude, everything was the total flip from what we had experienced in Germany. I was in Le Chambon until February of 1943. In '43, I went to Switzerland.

And before you go on, how many Jews do you think--

Live in Chambon today?

--no, were there at that time. How many were being hidden?

The official number is 5,000 people. Among the 5,000 were Christian people who were persecuted for one reason or another, being that there were German Gentiles who had fled into France because of political reasons, people who had become Protestant but were of Jewish background. They had become or were baptized at birth. We had a friend like that. She was in Le Chambon and she was in a Protestant home. We had all sorts of people.

The number of 5,000 is the accepted number today by the papers, the false papers that were issued in the village and the surrounding area. People came, stayed, got their papers, went on. Because once they had the false identification papers, especially the French Jews could maneuver.

So if you figure 5,000 people, or approximately 5,000, to a equal population of about 5,000, this is a tremendous amount of people saved or given an opportunity to survive. It's tremendous. There were no 5,000 people surviving in hiding in Germany, Jewish people. I think the number is 2,000. But I'm not quite sure. So think what one village did-- or one village and the surrounding villages, what they did in comparison to others. It is enormous.

I must tell you that in the summer of 1942, I went back to Gurs to see my mother because she had been very ill. I was promised a week's stay and they would let me go. That was the arrangement that was made for me through the various

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social service agencies. And I went.

About a week or 10 days before I went down to Gurs, my husband, then-boyfriend, was able to leave the camp. And he was placed on a Jewish Boy Scout farm outside of Lyon. Now, in order to go from Le Chambon down to Gurs, you have to come down from Chambon, go to Saint-Ã‰tienne, go to Lyon, because that's the way the train would go. And he was outside of Lyon. So I stopped there first to see him. Then I went on to Gurs.

And he told me, because he had been working for some time in the so-called hospital in Gurs, that the ambulance comes through Oloron at such and such a time, such and such a blah, blah. And when I asked-- when I arrived in Oloron, asked for the ambulance from the camp, they said, the ambulance had not come for several days. So this already didn't sound too good.

So I went by bus to the camp. And when I came to the camp, I could not enter. I was not allowed to enter. And then I found a room in a nearby village in an inn, a very simple inn. But it was fine.

And within-- I went, saw my mother because she was notified that I'm there. Saw my mother through many layers of barbwire, great distance away. And it was sort of shouted conversation, like if I shout from here across the street to the other house from the road. And they chased me. Police would come and chase me. I would go back.

And then within two days, I think, I was told that the first deportation trains would leave. And my mother was on the first train out. I was given permission to see my mother at the railroad station, the freight yards. And I believe the people were loaded on the trains during the night.

And I was told that I had to be there very early in the morning. So I went to Oloron, back to Oloron, slept in the street between two houses, was at one time asked for my papers, which then were still my real papers, not phony papers, by the police. And after that, they left me alone.

I explained to him why I was there. And as soon as day broke, I went to the rail yards, freight yards, and found my mother with the help of a French policeman, actually. He was sort of keeping himself separate from the rest. And he asked me why I was there. And I explained it to him. And he found my mother for me because I didn't know in which car.

And so he also offered me, 5:30 in the morning, a drink of alcohol from his hip flask. And I said, no, thank you. I wasn't used to drinking at 5:30 in the morning. And I spent probably an hour or an hour and a half with my mother. And then, of course, the trains were closed and locked. And the train pulled out.

On my way back, I went to see my boyfriend again and told him what happened. And at that point, when I was there, I heard the first time round-ups for the people who lived free. And when I came back to Le Chambon, I told some of his friends who were in an American-funded student home, and told them, told my friends that we had no longer any parents, that they were taken away. It was a horrible job. It was a horrible mission, really. The whole situation was incredible.

And I told some of his friends, we have to leave. We have to make our way into Switzerland. And they looked at me and said, you're crazy. I said, OK, then I'm crazy. But that's where I'm going to go. Guess who went first? The ones who called me crazy. [LAUGHS] They went way before I did. I only went in February of 1943.

I told my husband at the time I saw him, on that Boy Scout farm, Jewish Boy Scout farm, run by two rabbis, incidentally, that if he felt it was not safe there to come to Le Chambon, which he did, together with another young fellow. And I took him to Madame Philip, the wife of AndrÃ© Philip, who was a right-hand man to General de Gaulle. And she asked me only one question-- can we trust him? And I said, of course, you can. And by evening, he had been hidden away.

He was hidden away for four weeks. He didn't know if anyone remembered where he was. He will tell you himself. And when he came back, he was given false papers. And together with some others and a guide, he was taken to Switzerland.

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So this village has done more in every way than anyone else that I know.

Before we talk about your-- about going to Switzerland, tell me how you met your husband. You met in the camp.

We met in the camp, yes.

So how did that happen? How did you?

How did that happen? Well, his mother worked in the office, in the block where we were. She worked there. Everybody-- there was no pay involved or anything. But she spoke a fluent French. And we needed people in the office who spoke French in order to understand the orders that came from the administration, the statistics that had to be done, and all of that. All right, you had to have people who could communicate.

And I happened to be helping in this office. And he would come and see his mother. And that's how we met, very simple-- [LAUGHS] very simple story.

How do you maintain a courtship, though, in a situation like that, in a camp?

Courtship, I don't even think it was a courtship. It was a friendship, really. Young people are sort of drawn together. Yes, I fell in love with him. Of course, I did, I would be foolish to say not-- that I didn't. But it was a totally platonic thing. There was very little privacy. Most of the time, people saw us with his mother. Some even thought we were brother and sister. I mean, it-- some others, maybe they found some privacy or were looking for it. We weren't.

And you know, I speak in schools and colleges to the students about this time. And I mention, my boyfriend became my husband. And not too long ago, in one class, at Greensboro Community College, one girl, in the question and answer session, said, I don't know how you could look for a man under these circumstances. [LAUGHS] I corrected her that I was not looking for a man. I said, it was totally platonic, which she couldn't understand. it was almost funny, you know.

So we kept the-- I kept up the correspondence after I left. It's as simple as that. I always knew where he was-- when he left the camp, where he was, that's why I could go visit him. Once he left Chambon, went to Switzerland, as soon as he came into Switzerland, he let me know where he was.

And we kept on corresponding. There was no problem corresponding between France and Switzerland at the time. After all, it was supposed to be neutral. We know a little differently today. Let's see, maybe we always knew. There was not a problem, really.

I guess, but when-- in a situation like that, do you think that there are both advantages and disadvantages to having a new relationship, whether it's a friendship, or a boyfriend--

Or girlfriend or whatever.

--or girlfriend, that there-- there's an advantage in having a close companion in certain spheres?

There is an advantage to having someone, yes, especially if you're in the same situation because you're each other's support, the same as when you're a group of people, like we were seven young people. We were each other's support. There's no doubt about it.

And it made things easier for us than being alone. If you're totally alone, without having this support, it is much more difficult. One of my friends who came from the camp with me, eventually, after I had left, split from the group. I'm not quite sure why she split. We assume she had a boyfriend somewhere. And she split from the group.

And I think she, in that time that she left the group, and till the end of the war, she suffered more psychological damages than any of us did because, all of a sudden, she no longer had the support group of the group-- of the group who was in the same situation. But she suffered, really, psychological damages to this day.

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And she's now in her 70s. She cannot deal with it. She lives outside of Washington. And to this day, she has not gone to the Holocaust Museum. She cannot deal with it. Her mother was deported. Her father was deported. Her brother was deported. He lived in Berlin. And she just cannot. And I feel it's very much the time that she segregated herself from this group.

Did you maintain or do you still maintain contact with other people in this group?

All of them. Or all-- well, one lives in Brazil. I don't actually have contact with him, but with his twin brother in Paris. One, we know he came here to this country. And we have lost track of him. And all the others, yes, of course, absolutely.

Can you say some of their names, just to put a face on them?

Well, there is Elizabeth Koenig, nÃ©e Kaufman. She was with us. She did not come from Gurs, but she came to us in Le Chambon. She was, by the way, the chief librarian of the Holocaust Museum till she became too ill and had to retire.

There is Wiltrud Lavell, nÃ©e Eanee. She lives partly here in the States and partly in Spain. There is Jack Lewin, who lives right here, out in Long Island. There is Rudy Appel, who was not originally from Gurs but came from Rivesaltes, the Atlas boys.

Yeah, we all have contact with one another, absolutely. And we wouldn't miss it for the world. It took us a long time to even get together because somewhere along the line, we lost each other because everybody, after they emigrated here, we didn't all come at the same time.

Jack Lewin, yes, he was in Switzerland. He also fled into Switzerland. I had contact with him. But then he came, I think, before we did. And somehow, we didn't know where he was. So it took years, and years, and years to find him. But eventually, we found each other again. So we are, really, in constant contact, yes.

Let's come back to that a little bit later. Let's keep going. I'm talking about how you made it into Switzerland.

How I made it into Switzerland? I went on my own.

And why.

I just felt-- well, there were two reasons. First of all, Max had gone there. He was there already. I had made up my mind after I saw my mother being deported that I was not going to stay in France, no matter how safe in Chambon. I just felt. And I had family in Switzerland. So my eye was focused on Switzerland.

One of my friends who lives out in Palo Alto, who came with Max from the Jewish Boy Scout farm outside of Lyon, we had arguments. He said, you go to Switzerland, you go in a mousetrap. Something happens, you're lost there. Come with me, we go to Spain. I said, I'm not going to Spain. I go to Switzerland. So we had arguments back and forth.

He went exactly to Spain with the help of the French underground, Madame Philip. His way was Spain, North Africa, England, joined the French Army in England, and came marching back into France. [LAUGHS] He then lived again for some time in France and then came here to the United States. So yes, we did have arguments whether we do go to Spain, and from there on, or to Switzerland. So I chose Switzerland.

And my trip to Switzerland, well, I went on my own. I went alone from Chambon, which I left on foot to go to the next village because I did not want anyone in the village to see me take the train. This way, I just disappeared.

I stayed one night with the minister in Tence, which is the next little town. And in the morning, I took the train from there to go to Saint-Ã‰tienne And from Saint-Ã‰tienne, you have to change to go to Lyon. Then you go from Lyon to Annemasse-- Annecy, Annemasse, and Geneva.

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And I did all that. It was not easy. It was not a joy ride. I was stuck in Lyon at the railroad station for a long, long time because there was no train going. Had to wait for hours.

At this point in 1943, all of France was occupied. The railroad stations were full of German military. So I put myself in the waiting room, bought a magazine, pretended to read this magazine, watched what was going on, was as invisible as possible. I had bought my ticket. And when the time came, I just walked quietly to the train, to the pier-- or to the platform and took the train.

Trains were overcrowded at that time. Stood a long time in the-- now, what do you call it? They have compartments in Europe. And there's this-- it's like a corridor it runs along. I stood there for a long time.

And I put myself right next to a policeman. I figured, if I stand right next to him, he won't know that I'm scared to death. I did not start a conversation with him. He didn't talk to me. But I figured, if I stand close to him, he will not think even to ask me for my papers. And it was exactly right.

Took a long time before I found a seat. And there were three people-- funny enough, a lot of people must have gotten off. I found a seat, put myself in the corner, pretended to sleep. And these three people were talking about work in the resistance, which was a terrible mistake, because I could have been anybody who was going to denounce them.

And in Annemasse, I got off. And I-- no, Annecy, Annemasse, Geneva, right-- got off in Annecy, was supposed to go to an orphanage, a Catholic orphanage. And the man on the train who was in this compartment said to me, do you know where you're going? I said, yes, I have to go to the orphanage. Do you know the way? I said, I will find it, thank you. I will take you there. I said, thank you, I will find it.

Well, he insisted on taking me there. Turned out not to be too far from the railroad station. He came there, nobody would open the door. So he said, what are you going to do now? I said, well, I guess I have to find a hotel. I had very little money. And he said, OK, I will find one for you.

Well, what he found was a very simple place. And downstairs was some sort of a bar-type thing. And there were a lot of people in there, some of them from North Africa. And I had never experienced that. And I got a room. And I made sure I locked the door very tightly.

I gave them a totally phony address. I gave them the name as it's in my identification paper. And as an address, I gave an address in Lyon. Every town, every city in France has a Rue-- oh, god, I can't think of it just now-- Rue Garibaldi. Doesn't exist a town that doesn't have a Garibaldi-- such and such a number Garibaldi, Lyon. They didn't look too closely, and neither did they care.

And in the morning, I paid, and I left, and I went back to this orphanage. And then I could get in. They simply did not answer bells at night for security reasons, obviously. And they gave me a little breakfast and told me how to go on, which path to take, where I had to walk, what I had to do.

And so I made my way to Annemasse. And from Annemasse, I walked to another little place. And on the way was a customs office. And I figured, customs office? It's war time. There's no trade. What customs office? And I walked by.

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