

Tape 3, and the beginning of the interview with Max Liebmann. And the interviewer's name is Joe Richmond.

So let's review your childhood, talking about your brothers and sisters, their names--

No, I don't have brothers and sisters. I was an only child. I was born in Mannheim, Germany. I had a perfectly normal middle-class childhood.

And I started school after Easter 1928. I switched schools in 1932, meaning that in Germany you normally completed either four years of public school and then went into high school, or if you did not qualify for high school, you continued for four more years of public school, then became an apprentice and went to school twice a week in the afternoon. So I switched schools after four years.

I went into a high school called Realgymnasium, which meant that in the first year we had Latin. And Latin continued, of course, throughout school. In the third year, we added French. So we had Latin and French. And in the fourth year, we had Latin, French, and English.

The difference between my high school and a gymnasium was that in a gymnasium you would learn Latin first. Then they would add a Greek. And as a third language, I think they added French. But the Greek was meant particularly for students who would become either lawyers or doctors.

In your upbringing, though, was it a religious household? Was it--

No, we were not religious. I mean we knew we were Jewish. My father was very active in the Jewish community. In fact, he was an elected official to the, let us call it, Lower House. And he was requested, I think, in 1935 or 1936 to join the executive branch of the Jewish congregation, which he declined because he felt he was not religious enough.

But he was active in a Jewish Choral Society, where he was the secretary since the end of World War I. And this choral society, eventually after we were excluded in Germany from cultural life, was converted into what was called Kulturbund, meaning we were in our city the cultural organization. We produced concerts. We produced opera.

When we were excluded, we added an orchestra, a string orchestra. And thus, we were able to perform all kinds of things. And I was in this orchestra by the time I was about 15 or 16. In 1935 or 1936, I joined the orchestra. And this went on until Crystal Night.

Now, I have to emphasize that I was permitted to stay in school and not changed to a Jewish school because my father was a front-line war veteran. And the children of Jewish front war veterans had the privilege, some privilege, of remaining in school till Crystal Night. However, I did not stay in school after December 1937. I had decided by then that enough is enough. I could never go to university in Germany.

So it made no sense to stay in school, learn Latin, and continue with Latin. And I switched from the high school to a private commercial school, with an emphasis on languages, where I continued French and English studies. I also learned some steno, German steno. Why I learned this I will never know because I knew I would never use it.

This has brought us to Kristallnacht, which was during the night of November 9 to November 10. I went innocently to school on November 10 in the morning not knowing about anything. And my mother called me on-- I don't-- 9 o'clock, 9:30, I should leave the school now and go to Heidelberg. Heidelberg was a smaller city which was quite famous all over the world, and I should go in the woods and stay there until the evening and call her again, which I did.

And on my way from the private school where I was to the railroad station, which was about a 10-minute walk, I finally understood what was going on in the city because I saw small crowds clustered around houses where I knew there were Jews living. And furniture flew out of the windows, et cetera, et cetera.

My father left Germany in March 1938. He was offered by the firms he represented-- he was a representative of textile

goods-- to go to Greece and try to start selling there on their behalf and thus create a new existence, which should permit us eventually to follow him to Greece. This did not really work out. The competition became aware of his activities when he started to sell goods. And the competition managed to get him expelled.

In 1939, my father went to Italy. And from Italy just before the outbreak of the war illegally went to France, where he was first arrested, put into jail for six weeks, and then lived a precarious life until he was caught in 1940-- in Nice until it was caught by accident in a raid and was deported to Auschwitz.

My mother remained in Germany. By the way, she saw my father for the last time in August of 1939 and came back instead of calling me and telling me to come down to Italy because we all had passports. And my mother and I were trapped when the war broke out. And we never saw my father again. And then we were deported on October 22, 1940, to Gurs.

How old were you when you were deported?

I was deported-- when I was deported in October 1940, I was 19. By the way--

Can you tell me about that?

Slow. Let's step back first.

OK.

Let's go back to Kristallnacht first. We had moved in order to preserve money because there was no more income. We had given up our own apartment and moved into the apartment with my grandmother.

My grandmother happened to have been a French citizen. And the house my grandmother owned had a loft in the back, where there was a Jewish firm, which sold electrical fixtures. On-- not on Crystal Night, during the day when they started smashing everywhere, they also came into my grandmother's house and went into the back, in the loft, and had a field day with smashing all these electrical fixtures, which were stored there and were hanging, et cetera.

But my mother had enough presence of mind to call the French consulate because after all this was a French possession. This was not German property. And the consulate called the police. And within 10 or 15 minutes after these hoodlums had entered the loft, there was a uniformed Brownshirt who pulled everybody out and stood guard the whole day so that nothing would happen to my grandmother's apartment because after all she was a foreign citizen. Thus, our apartment was whole, was never smashed.

When the war broke out, of course, with mobilization, we also had to report to the military. But we are immediately discharged as not fit for service as being Jews, mustered out. And the next thing we knew is I was drafted for the first type of forced labor. We were sent to the eastern part of Germany, fairly close to the Polish border, to help harvest, potatoes, sugar beets, red beets because a lot of people were drafted right away when the war broke out.

And I was somewhat more lucky than some others I know of because when the harvest was over, I was permitted to come back to the city where I lived, while others were not permitted. I know of other people who also were from my city who never were permitted to come back home.

So when I came back home, my mother saw to it that I was able to work starting January 1, 1940, in the equivalent of HIAS in Germany, which was centrally administered by the German Jewish administration in Berlin. And for the next 10 months, I served as a secretary in what was called-- what we called in Germany Hilfsverein. And we devoted all our efforts, this whole office was devoted to helping people emigrate.

And the one benefit which came out-- I got a pocket money. I didn't get the full salary. I got a small pocket money, a monthly pocket money. The one benefit which came out of this was that on October 21, in the morning, the telephone rang. And we were permitted to keep the telephone in the Office of the Jewish Community, but we were not part of the

Jewish community as such because we reported to Berlin to the central administration.

And the head of my office, who was at the same time the contact person between the Gestapo and the Jewish community, was called down to the Gestapo. And they told him that we would be deported the next day to France. Unfortunately-- and we closed the office, and I went home-- unfortunately, we could not publicize this because the German Jews were deprived of their telephone when the war broke out.

When I came home on that day, I told my mother that we would be deported the next morning. She didn't want to believe it. So I started to pull out former sandal bags from my father and started to pack. And I finally convinced her that I'm not kidding. This is not a joke, that we really would be deported.

So by the time the Gestapo came the next morning to arrest us, at least we had reasonably packed what we could carry. We had warm clothing. We had the right shoes. We had the blanket. So when they told us this you can take, we were already, which we didn't tell them. And this was how the deportation started.

Then we were taken by the police to the railroad station, where once enough people were assembled, we were loaded into very old passenger cars, which in Germany you had four classes originally. By the time we left, there were only three classes. But they used the old fourth class passenger cars to load us and send us to France.

We were permitted to take along, besides food which we were told, 100 marks. And we were told, if you take more and we find it, you will be shot. So we took like good Germans each 100 marks, which on the train were exchanged by the SS against 2,000 francs, French francs.

You forgot to mention what suitcases, as long as--

You can speak up.

Oh. I can?

Yeah, go ahead.

The other things we could take along or we are permitted to take along was one suitcase as long as we could carry it, a blanket, set of cutlery per person, and what else? That was it.

And we were told to take food.

Food for a couple of days.

A couple of days.

Yeah.

So you knew that you were being deported--

I knew, but we were--

Did you know anything else? Did you know where you were going to go?

No, all we knew is that we would be sent away to France. That's all we knew. Now, the SS left the trains at the so-called demarcation line. The demarcation line was that part of France which was occupied and the other part was unoccupied. The Germans left. The train went on to Lyon.

And I happened to have been in the first train which went to France. There were seven trains altogether. I was in the first train with my mother.

And it so happened that in my car was a former German officer of World War I. And somehow or other, he caught the attention of SS. And they came to him and said, you are the transport chief. He didn't ask for it. He didn't want it. But you are the transport chief.

So when we arrived in Lyon and the French gendarmerie, the French police, wanted to know who's in charge, so he descended. He said, I am in charge. And since he didn't speak French, I came along as a translator.

And what was interesting was we talked to a colonel of the French gendarmerie, which is more or less say equivalent of what we have here is state police, but on a national scale. These people didn't know who we were. They were told there are Alsations coming, or Lorraines coming who don't want to stay under German occupation. It was not true.

They were not prepared for us. They didn't know who we were. And so we first had to cue him in who we were.

So I believe that while we were talking with this man, the people on the train got a soup by the French Red Cross and possibly some bread. We were eating. We were fed. It was my first acquaintance with pate. We had pate. And they gave us some bread and something to drink.

Then we went back on the train. And these trains then went on very slowly towards the south. I think we were on the train at least two days.

Three.

Or three days. This was taken to the 25th. We arrived at the railroad station, which was close to the camp, which was called Camp de Gurs, which incidentally was built by the Spanish when the Spanish Republicans lost the war, the civil war, in Spain and came across the border. We arrived there on October 25 in a downpour, which was unparalleled.

And--

[INAUDIBLE]

And from the train, we were taken in trucks to the camp, which was about 10 or 15 miles. The trucks were operated by Spanish internees who were in the camp, who had many more privileges than we ever got. And since it was night, there was nothing. We had absolutely nothing.

There was straw, which I think we got the next day. And it was very primitive. And so eventually, they issued covers to stuff the straw into so that we had some kind of mattresses. And this is how we began in the camp.

Each block had about 30 barracks, 25 barracks. The barracks were built from wood, flimsy wood, and were covered with tar paper. There were no windows. You just had wooden flaps, which in order to have some light you had to open. There were two lights in the barracks, one at the beginning and one at the end, and one stove, which gave a little heat when we had wood in winter. It was brutal.

Were you able to maintain contact with your mother?

Yes, we were able to maintain contact with our relatives. There was a system where the so-called block administration was issued little tickets-- I don't remember how many-- which permitted you to go to visit maybe one hour every so many days. I don't recall the details.

I was somewhat more fortunate because I had office skills. So I very soon made my way into the office. And I worked in the office. So I had privileges. I could go more often to my mother.

And then eventually, we were also able to obtain musical instruments. And we started a string quartet. And once we started with the string quartet and began to concertize in each block, we were given camp passes. So I could circulate in

camp day and night. I visited my mother every day.

It was [INAUDIBLE].

Yeah, that's how I met my wife.

Tell me how you met your wife.

My wife was a runner in the block--

A messenger.

--a messenger, where my mother worked in the office. She was the principle-- my mother was the principle clerk in the block where she was located. And my wife served as a messenger. There was mail to be distributed. There was mail to be picked up.

So the youngsters, us youngsters, adapted much better to these brutal conditions than the grownups. And you have to visualize that the so-called streets within the blocks were earth. And when it rained hard-- and it rained out there very often in this region. It was about 25 miles or 20 miles north of the Spanish border-- the ground turned to mud.

Now, you have to realize I had riding boots. And with my riding boots when it rained, I would sink in almost up to the top of the riding boots into this mud, which meant that we had at least one or two deaths of old people who had to go to the latrines at night, fell, and couldn't get out-- and couldn't get up. I think it was one woman.

The food we got was between 400 and 600 calories a day. Not only was it very limited, but it was also established later that a lot of the money which was assigned to the camp for provisions was stolen. So we got even less than we would have normally gotten.

And we soon had all kinds of problems in the camp with starvation signs. People collected water in their legs due to malnutrition. It was called Odem. I don't know what you call this--

Edema.

Edema. This was the condition in the camp.

You both talked a little bit about how it was, to some extent, a self-government governing system--

Well, each block--

How did that work?

Each block had a so-called block eldest, a vice block eldest, and an office. In every camp, you have to keep track of numbers. You have to keep-- for food rations, you had to do your own cooking in so-called field kitchens, whatever we got. We got-- the bread was assigned, so you had to count. And there were constant reports to be made. That's why there was an office.

Excuse me, I mentioned before, there constant statistics to be made. You had to report the people who died.

And we soon had death because the old people died like flies.

Just a moment. I brought you here, what I usually take to.

I mean I think my wife gave you much more detail about the camp because she's talking about it constantly while I am out of this since I'm working with the American Gathering. We started speaking together at the time when it started. But

when I joined the American Gathering, I stopped speaking. I speak here and there once in a while, but not to a great extent.

So you forget some of the details. I would have to refresh myself by reading and doing. We have the literature here to do that.

Well, you're still remembering good details.

Oh, yeah.

Tell me how it came about that you left the camp.

Well, let's finish with the camp first.

OK.

Eventually-- and I'm sorry to say this-- it became evident to the French supervisors that the so-called two block eldest of our camp were more corrupt than other block elders. And so one day they decided to dissolve our block to stage an example for the others. And whilst this was going on, one day shortly before the exodus started where people were distributed to the other blocks-- and actually, they probably did this also because they had moved a certain amount of people, transferred a certain amount of people to other camps.

So one day, the supervisor of our block stood in front of me and said, I want you to do something for me. I want you to do the inventory of what you are giving back to us, you know, blankets, et cetera, kitchen stuff. So I did this. It was a lot of work.

It was my first experience with what you call inventory and, after all, had never worked commercially. And so when we were all finished, I was the last one to be transferred out. The supervisor said to me, now, look, I will put you in another block. But you will hear from me as a thank you. I will find something for you.

Well, he found something for me a few weeks later. I didn't believe anymore. Fortunately, I still had my pass. I could circulate. By that time, I didn't play any music anymore. But I had a pass. I could go in and out.

And one day, the man stands in front of me. I have something for you. And what he had for me was really something extraordinary. He transferred me to the hospital, the camp hospital, which meant I lived in a halfway decent barracks. I shared one room with hospital beds and a stove for which we had wood, in the barrack, the personnel was partially sleeping. And I ran the office of the hospital.

In the meantime, there were social workers at work, who were very busy to find places for the younger generation, under 21. My wife left-- she wasn't my wife then. She was my girlfriend-- left after 11 months in camp. And I was in camp much longer. I was in camp 21 months.

But one day I also was approached, would you like to get out? And my mother, of course, said, yes, let him go. So I was-- and we have the documentation for that-- I was let out of camp on July 25, 1942.

Had I been there one week longer, you wouldn't be talking to me. I would have been deported to Auschwitz. And--

What happened one week later?

One week later, they closed the camp. They surrounded it with the gendarmerie. And people were simply taken from the camp via trains to Drancy, which was a interim camp outside of Paris. And from there, there were regular transports like clockwork with about 1,000 people per train to Auschwitz.

Excuse me, at Drancy was what is generally referred to as an Umschlagplatz, what the Germans called an

Umschlagplatz. This was a camp or place where transports arrived, people were taken off the train. And a day or so later, new transport trains were put together.

And these transports went to Auschwitz. So I was taken out of camp on July 25, 1942. And I was taken to a farm in Taluyers. That is a village outside of Paris, where there was a farm operated by the Jewish Boy Scouts.

Boys scouting in France was run along religious lines. So there was a regular farm, which had about 50 or 60 young people, all foreign, foreigners, foreign Jews, who lived there in what--

[AUDIO OUT]

This is Tape 3, side B, continuing the interview with Max Liebmann.

Yeah, I think the facility was run by a French chemist and two rabbis, who had managed to get from the camp where I was in Gurs to this farm. And unfortunately for me, it was an Orthodox-- it was run along very Orthodox lines. The chemist, a Frederick Hammer, or Hamel, was Orthodox, as well as the rabbis.

So I was in this farm-- August, September-- about three weeks, four weeks. How long was I in Taluyers? Three or four weeks?

Yeah.

Yeah, about. And my wife came by, she had obtained permission. And you heard the story from her. And on her way down to Gurs to visit her mother, we saw each other. And then she came on the way back again to tell me what had happened in Gurs.

And at that time, we arranged that should I get into trouble for whatever reason, I should try to get up to her village because while she didn't know what was really going on there, she felt they would help. Little did I know that I would run-- within a week after she had left-- into the worst kind of religious bias you can imagine.

There was one Friday evening for the Shabbos meal an announcement that on such and such a date, a week from now, there will be a raid on the farm. But don't worry, we'll take care of you.

Only when the time came to take care of us and to distribute us, to hide us, there was room for everybody but four of us, a fellow who came with me from Gurs and two young Polish Jews. We were the four non-religious ones. And for us, we couldn't do anything. You are on your own.

Because you were not--

Because we were not religious. And so the young fellow was a few years younger than I. And I said to him, I'm going to join Hanne, to try to find Hanne. And so the next morning, we set out and went up to Le Chambon. We arrived-- Hanne had told me how to get there. So that was not a problem.

And the problem was that I arrived there in the middle of the night. It was at 10:00 or 11 o'clock. Now, where am I going to find my girlfriend? So we came somewhere, which turned out later to be a tennis court, in what looked to us like a wood. And we both had sleeping bags.

And the next morning we got up at daybreak. And lo and behold, shortly thereafter, we heard girl's voices. There was a group of girls passing by. Amongst them, Hanne. They had camped out from where they normally slept to avoid arrest in a possible, potential rape-- raid.

So she, Hanne, took me to Madame Philip. Madame Philip was the wife of what was after the war the first Finance Minister in de Gaulle's cabinet after the liberation. At the time she took me there, Madam Philip was alone because her husband was already in England with de Gaulle.

And from what I understand, Hanne was asked, can we trust him? So she explained that, yeah, he's my boyfriend. He comes from Gurs, like I did.

And they put me up for the next night in the villa. People were very nice. They fed me.

And the following evening, I was taken to a farm somewhere in the outreaches of Le Chambon. I don't to this day the name of the farm, family, who took me in. These farmhouses are very small. This farmhouse had only two bedrooms. So the farmer put me up in the grange. So I was sleeping in the hayloft.

And the man was very practical. The first thing he did was he took his saw. And he cut a hole into the floor on the other end of the hayloft so said I had a toilet. Below where he cut the hole were the animals. So this was my toilet.

And I was there, I must have been there about two or three weeks. And I thought they had forgotten me. I was well-fed. I ate the same food the farmer ate. And this gave me some of the vigor back, which I needed when the underground, the resistance movement, in the village when I came back helped me to get out of France and into Switzerland.

Now, I have detailed this in the video for a long time. We were given false papers.

Before you go into that, at this time, did you know-- first of all, did you know where Hanne was?

Yeah, sure.

And did you have any sense of how often these raids would come?

No, we didn't know anything.

How often?

Nobody knew. Hanne was somewhere else.

You had to stay hidden the whole time.

I was hidden for two or three weeks. But they took me back. The first thing they did is they photographed me. They explained to me we will get you false papers now. And then we will help you to escape to Switzerland.

And I think there were four of us who were helped escape to Switzerland. I think we were the first group. Because we went by railroad from Le Chambon to a village in the French Alps. I believe it was a-- I don't remember the station where we went to. But I believe it was the station one station before Saint-Gervais, which to this day is a major vacation point in the French Alps.

And there, there was a 10-year-old who picked us up. He knew we were coming apparently. His father sent him. He took us to the house of his father, where we stayed overnight.

We met there also a young French pastor, who would go with us part of the way the next day because he was supposed to learn how to get people across into the mountains and into Switzerland. He didn't know the way. He had never done it.

So the next morning, early on, we had breakfast. And we set off into the mountains. Our guide was a 10-year-old.

And we climbed all day. Became night, and it started to rain. And we found fortunately an overhang of rock, where we could duck under. And that's where we spent the night, fairly dry, because it was big enough to be not in the open.

The next morning at daybreak, we started again. And we climbed most of the morning. And then around 12 o'clock, the



boy stopped and said to us, now, look, you go down here.

Now, you must understand, we were very high in the mountain, well above the tree line. There was nothing but rock. It was totally open. There was nothing but rock. And we had to climb-- we get down there, which was a tough job because we didn't have the right or proper-- no we had no equipment and not the proper shoes. And my shoes went to hell within about an hour or two as we were going down these rocks.

And fortunately, somebody had another pair of shoes which fitted me. Otherwise, I would not have made it. And so we climbed pretty much the whole afternoon.

We were at about 12,000 feet. We had to come down. And so eventually, we ended up on a small-- on a road, which was drivable by a car. It was narrow. And we walked. And we came to a tunnel.

And all of a sudden, we heard steps behind us. Halt. And whom did we face when we turned around and looked? A Swiss military patrol, who told us, we have been following you for hours with our binoculars.

They took us to a mountain hut. And Switzerland has-- we have it here too in the mountains-- a facility which is quite primitive but where there are dormitories where you can sleep, where you can get some food. And that's where they took us. There was a command post.

And we found when we got there that there were about 30 or 40 people which have been caught over the last 24 hours. So we were able to buy some food, even though we had no rationing coupons. And Switzerland was strictly rationed. And breakfast the next morning, the same way. I still had just enough money to buy breakfast. And just as a commander of this platoon of soldiers told us, we are going to be returned to France. You are not going to be permitted to come in.

And so we started up back up into the mountains to a point, which was called no man's land. It was between France-- it was between Switzerland and France. But on the way up the mountain, something very strange happened. And that was a non-commissioned officer of this platoon started to speak to me, or yell at me, in a very loud voice.

And he enumerated very clearly what I am not supposed to do. I'm not supposed to come back to Switzerland. I'm not supposed to do this I'm not supposed to do that, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. It went on for about five or eight minutes.

And it dawned on me after a few minutes that the man is giving you a message. What is that message? And the message was-- he didn't say so, but what was really happening is that if I took out the don'ts, I had been instructed how to get back to Switzerland. So when the platoon stopped and told us now you go down there and we go back and don't you dare to come back, we went on further down. And when I was sure that they couldn't see us anymore, I stopped the whole group and explained to them what had happened there.

There were 40 people. I was one of the youngest. And nobody understood what had been going on. They all heard the same thing. The man was speaking loud enough that you couldn't miss it.

And so we spoke. We argued. We discussed this for half an hour. I finally found one guy who understood my argument. We have nothing to lose. We can only gain. If we make it, we will be in Switzerland and we'll be safe. If we don't make it, we have lost the day.

So I went back toward Switzerland. I looked at the map in this mountain facility. And I knew approximately where I was. And lo and behold, we found our way. And we came out in a village in [? Val. ?]

And when we left Chambon, we were given an explanation that we should find Protestant ministers. If you can't find a Protestant minister, go to the Catholic local priest. So I went to the church. And I was told by the housekeeper, he is down in the valley. He's not here today.

So we went down because I didn't want to stay there overnight. It was too big. And eventually, as it became dark, we came into-- I don't know if it was a village. There were some houses along the way where we walked. And I picked one

because I didn't want to stay out overnight. Besides we had no food. And my sugar was running out, which was what sustained me on the way up the mountain and down the mountain.

So I knocked at the door. And they took me-- as they took us in, we explained, we are refugees. They took us in. They fed us. They gave us a bed. They gave us breakfast the next morning and explained to us where to go and where not to go.

For instance, these people were nice enough to tell us not to go to the next village because it was a big military assembly point, and there would be a lot of military police who would stop us. So we went to the next village, all the way down into the Rhone valley, where since I had no more Swiss money, we went to the local Catholic priest. He fed us. And he gave me enough money to buy a train ticket to Lausanne.

You were traveling by yourself at this point?

No, I was with this other fellow. And so he cautioned us, don't go into an express train because the express trains are being patrolled by a military police. So we took a local train. It wasn't that far into Lausanne.

And in Lausanne, I went after some moments of hesitation-- I didn't know where to go-- I said to myself, you have to go to the Jewish congregation. So I went to a telephone, looked up the address of the Jewish congregation of Lausanne, which happened to be within half a block of the railroad station. And then we went there.

And when we explained to them that we were refugees, just came into Switzerland, they told us, look, welcome to Switzerland. We have to turn you over to the military. But we can promise you, you will not be returned anywhere. We didn't tell them that we were already once returned. And this is how I got first to Switzerland.

So somebody came with a car, I think, and picked us up and took us to one barrack in a park in a suburb of Lausanne where we spent the night. We were interrogated there. And fortunately, the interrogator was a Swiss-speaking-- a French-speaking military who did not understand German. So I translated for the other guy who didn't speak French for my companion. And I translated the way I wanted to translate, not what he necessarily had said.

And from there we were taken to a so-called quarantine camp in Meudon, which was a very primitive setup in the school where we were in the gymnastic hall where they had set up some kind of possibility to sleep on the floor. And there, we had to fill out a questionnaire of 36 or 40 pages. And eventually-- By the way, I arrived in Switzerland on September 22, 1942.

And eventually, I was transferred not with the fellow I came with. I was transferred, because after all, since there was at one time an application made for a visa for me to come to Switzerland, they were able to establish who I was very rapidly. And I was transferred to another quarantine camp in the other end of Switzerland in the canton of Appenzell, where we were quartered, I believe, in a village inn, again in the ballroom, which was set up as a quarter where you could sleep, et cetera, et cetera.

And there, we--

When you say quarantined, were these like DP camps? Were they--

No. No. Everything in quarantine was military control. We were guarded by military personnel. And this is where we first-- and everything Meudon where I was and then up in Appenzell, this was military control. Everything was military. But the military-- that was now German Swiss, not French Swiss anymore-- they took us out every day on a walk with a gun, bayonet on the gun, you know.

And we started an argument with a company commander, or the platoon commander. We explained to him there is absolutely no reason to guard us with guns because where does he think we can go? Does he think we are escaping Germany or escaping elsewhere? We cannot go anywhere. So we eventually prevailed. And the Swiss soldiers walked with us without any arms.

On December 22, I was handed a ticket, a railroad ticket, to a labor camp, again in the French part of Switzerland, all alone. And I want to emphasize this because there was all kind of brouhaha about how badly we were treated in Switzerland. Even the quarantine camps never had barbed wire or anything of this nature. Yes, in the quarantine camp we were guarded by Swiss troops.

But I was given-- when I was transferred to a labor camp, I was given the ticket to go there alone. I went strictly on my own. There was nobody with me. I was the only guy who was transferred on that day.

And when I arrived in the afternoon in this labor camp, the director of this camp looked at me like if I'm a ghost. What are you doing here? It was the 22nd of December. The camp was closed. There was not a soul in the camp besides the camp director, who had a military barrack, which was outfitted as an apartment where he lived with his wife and his daughter. Everybody else was on leave.

So the next question was, you have relatives here? Can you go somewhere? I said, yes, I have a cousin.

So I called my cousin. And he said, all right, come on. So I was handed another ticket. And I was told you'll be back on such and such a day, the day after Christmas.

And I went right back practically where I came from because I was in Appenzell and my cousin lived in a village in St. Gallen. So I spent Christmas 1942 with my cousin, who was married to a Gentile woman. And then I started my career in the Swiss labor camp.

Now, at that point did you entertain thoughts about not reporting to the labor camp? Do you have any sense of what the labor camp would be like?

I had no sense of anything. And where would I go? Where should I have gone? Switzerland is a small country. You can't hide. You know, I mean, it would have been futile. It never occurred to me either. I mean, if you were brought up in Germany, you thought like a German and you follow orders.

So I went back to the labor camp. And by the time I came back, there was a few feet of snow. And the first thing we were supposed to do was clean the access road from the highway to the camp. The camp was in Sierre. And it was, oh, maybe a mile and a half or two miles to the access road, which you walked. And then you walked the access road to the camp.

The camp was put there in order to clear land. But the first thing, of course, we had to do is clear the access road. And I didn't like that kind of physical work. So I made it my business to get into the office within a week.

And now, let me explain, the labor camp had barracks, had military barracks. They were no better, they were no worse, they were identical military barracks which were used by the Swiss military. We had barracks which had bunk beds and vacuum mattresses. I don't remember with what they were filled. But we had mattresses.

It was a two-tiered affair. You slept either high or low. And there was a barrack for dining. There was a latrine. There was an office barrack.

There was another barrack where there was a sick room, a sickbay, where the Swiss personnel who helped run the camp lived. I think we had one or two people in addition to the camp director. But there was not a single guard.

And there was, of course, no barbed wire anywhere. It was open. And in fact, something very funny happened along the way. In the morning, you made a count.

So one day, I was already long in the office, we made a count. Everything seemed fine. And we reported by telephone that everything is in order. And within 20 or 30 minutes-- there was a central office in Zurich, which ran this, all of these facilities around Switzerland-- we got a call back. How come you reported everybody is there when we are

holding a guy who belongs to you?

What happened was that we had apparently a homosexual whose companion was somewhere in Zurich. And he had gone to Zurich without our knowing. And the man who was in charge of counting missed him. We miscounted.

I mean nothing happened. But I mean, you know, they had caught him somehow. We would never have known.

I was in this camp quite a while. I don't have the exact dates anymore. You can look them up. The museum has my so-called Swiss identification book where all the camps are listed and where it was and when I was issued some, shoe coupons or some shoes or whatever clothing because all that was rationed.

And eventually, once you are in these camp offices long enough-- there is a three-tiered payment-- by the way, we were in these camps, in all Swiss internment facilities for civilian refugees, there was, number one, a three-tiered payment system. There was the rank and file. Then there were two classes above, supervisors above, who were paid somewhat more. I mean the maximum you could earn there was 4 francs a day.

And eventually, I became one level up. And then I became two level up. And I was transferred a number of times from out of camp into so-called refugee homes where I was running the office because there was a lot of work scenes in these, in the offices.

Because everything was rationed, you had to account for every meal. You had to account for every presence. And that had to be done on the typewriter. It was a job you had to learn. And there were all kinds of things to be done. So I was busy all day long in the offices.

So the way you describe it, there were no guards.

No.

You were getting paid, although a small amount.

Yeah.

How was it different from maybe just having had a job? I mean, what made it feel like a labor camp?

Number one, it's a labor camp. You did physical work. Or if you were in these refugee homes, the homes had to be maintained. So I happened to be in the office. But the other people-- there were people who had to work in the kitchens. There were people who had to clean the house.

Were there bad conditions?

No, there were no bad conditions. Number one, in all of these facilities, every six weeks you were entitled to a pass. You would get a free railroad ticket anywhere you wanted to go if you had the money to go. But the railroad ticket was free. You had your pocket money.

The food was not luxurious and not gourmet food. But it was totally adequate. I mean you weren't hungry, notwithstanding what many people claim that they were hungry. There was always enough food.

There were some facilities who had Swiss personnel who stank, meaning mostly small petty people who took their power out on-- they felt the power of being a director of a camp. And these lousy refugees now are going to do what I tell them to do.

And they made life-- could make life quite miserable. There were some rotten apples amongst the Swiss personnel. There's no question about, as we had rotten apples among us. I encountered some of these people. But by and large, these facilities were adequate.

Who was in the facility-- who were in-- was it mostly Jews? Was it--

There were mostly Jews. But we were in some facilities later on after I was married where we had Gentile political refugees. For instance, in the labor camp, we had a German doctor who was a political refugee.

And in fact, I got sick. I had hepatitis. And this man absolutely did not want me to go into hospital because he didn't trust the Swiss that they would feed me properly because I had to be on a diet. In those days, you know, I didn't get any meat. I was permitted bread. I was permitted a jam. I was permitted some cheese and liquids.

And he didn't trust them to give me what I should have gotten because of rationing. So in the camp, it doesn't matter if one person gets more from one thing and less from something else. So he kept me for two or three weeks in the sickbay until I was recovering and could go back to work.

So how you got back in touch with Hanne and how--

Well, look, once I was in Switzerland, Hanne and I corresponded. And eventually, Hanne came to Switzerland. And, you know, that was the only time I ever had an extrasensory perception. I knew that she was coming. And eventually, she either called or wrote, I'm with my relatives. And from then on, we were in regular contact.

It seems like it would have been difficult just to-- her letters to find you.

No, she knew where I was. I wrote her immediately when I got to Switzerland.