

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

TRACK 01 – INTRO TO RECORDING

Today is Thursday, September 10, 2015. This recording is of Holocaust survivor and Ritchie Boy Stephan Lewy. It is being made in the studio at CedarHouse Sound and Mastering, North Sutton, New Hampshire. This recording is a production of Story Preservation Initiative. All rights reserved.

TRACK 02 – 1930s BERLIN

SPI: Before we begin, I would like to explain to those of you listening that much of what Stephan is talking about is geared into images that he has made available to Story Preservation. If you would like to see those images, you can go to storypreservation.org and click on either our blog or Learning Lab site. Okay, let's begin. I'd like to ask you to start by introducing yourself.

STEPHAN: My name is Stephan H. Lewy. I was born on March 11, 1925, and I was an only child in the family, due to my mother's illness that she was not supposed to have children. So I am the proverbial accident. My father was Jewish and my mother was Protestant. We lived in the city of Berlin at the time I was born. It was considered maybe a problem that my mother was Protestant, but as far as the German government was concerned, if a child had more than 2 percent Jewish blood, which in my case was 50 percent, then you are considered a Jewish person and acted accordingly. My father made his living by running a retail tobacco business. In addition, he was also a wholesaler of pipe tobacco. That's a picture of my mother. She was just about thirty-one years old at the time. I was six years old, and this picture was taken out in the apartment where we lived. My mother was thirty-one years old, probably between six and nine months before she passed away. Then my father tried to cover me - or cover himself and he approached the two brothers my mother had, who, of course, were Protestant, and he asked them could these two families help him to take care of me during the daytime, so that he could take care of his business. The answer came back very straightforward, we can't do it because the boy is Jewish, and, therefore, we don't want to get involved in it.

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

So my father was at a loss as to how to take care of me, but then he remembered that he was a child in an orphanage in Berlin, and it was still operating at the time when I was seven years old, so he entered me into the orphanage. You lived there basically on a continuing basis, and you were allowed to visit your parents once a week, on Sunday, generally between 9:00 and 5:00. If we misbehaved in the orphanage, we were then punished for the day and we could not visit our parents for that weekend. We went to a public school at first, which was later changed to a Jewish school, which meant that Hitler decided, in 1936 or so, that it was not wise for Jewish students to be in the same classroom as regular Christian students, so we were all transferred to separate school buildings in the city of Berlin, to go to school there, but we had the same classes. We had some religious classes, because it was an all-Jewish school, so it was fairly easy to transfer. What had happened was that as we came out of the school buildings, we had a forty-five-minute walk to go back to our orphanage building. On many occasions, we were met by a group of Hitler Youth in front of our school building, and they organized in two rows of kids in Nazi uniforms, who took off their buckle belts and then gave us a—they actually whipped us through the line with these buckle belts.

SPI: Before you were segregated and put into an exclusively Jewish school, and you were still together in the same school with Christian students, can you explain to us what happened when nurses and doctors were called in, and the various tests that they took? What is it that they were doing?

STEPHAN: On one of the occasions in the public school, we came in in the morning and we were told that all the Jewish kids had to stand in the corner and face the wall. All the other kids sat in a circle, and in came a nurse, a doctor, and a Party official. What the nurse did, as can be seen on the picture, they had the colored dots, and with it they could determine the color of your hair, the color of your eyes, the color of your skin, and to make sure you fit into the requirements of the Nazi pure organization. The typical Nazi had blonde hair, light skin, and so on. Then came a doctor who would measure the consistency of your hair, reconsider the color, and with this tool, he measured the distance between your ears, and the length of your nose—so, all the rest of the features

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

above your shoulders, basically. Then, if you could fit in many of the points, you could become a member of the Hitler Youth. These kids had periodic meetings with the leaders and the leader was well trained. He used to ask the kids, what do you talk about at home around the dinner table? And a kid says, oh, we talked about this, we talked about Hitler, and all that. If there were any indications that they talked about what the government is doing - if the parents said—well, I don't approve of that. That shouldn't be done. The next morning there was a Party official at the door and telling the family, you're talking against the government. If you don't stop it, we will remove your food rationing. Food rationing is not food stamps, as we know it. But foods were rationed. Like, butter was rationed. You had a certain amount of butter for the family, and any left over was used to make grease for the cannons. For instance, coffee was rationed, because it had to be imported from Africa. Bananas came from Africa, and so on. So the father had a choice of keeping his mouth shut or feed his family.

Then, in that apartment house where my father lived, there was a young boy, not Jewish, and when I came home on Sundays, I had somebody to play with. Suddenly, he was stopped playing with me. My father told me he approached the parents, and they were told the same thing would happen with rationing of foods—if his boy plays with the Jewish kid.

TRACK 03 - KRISTALLNACHT

SPI: After your mother's death, your father remarried. Can you tell us about this picture of your father and stepmother?

STEPHAN: My father remarried in the early part of 1938. I never refer to her as a stepmother. No, she was my mother.

SPI: This next image is of Herschel Grynszpan. He was an important person historically. Can you explain?

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

STEPHAN: This gentleman was the cause of Kristallnacht. He was born in Poland but lived in Paris. Then the Germans decided, we don't want the Polish Jews anymore in Germany, and they pushed them across the border into Poland, which is adjacent. Then the Polish government said, oh, no, no, back where you came from. You didn't live in Poland, go back where you—it went back and forth. When he found out how his parents were treated, he went into a store and bought a gun, walked into the German Embassy, and he killed the first German that he saw. He was hoping that he would kill the ambassador, but he was out for the day, so another one was killed.

The interesting part about it is, by the end of the day, every police station in Germany and every fire station in the entire country had a telegram from the central government—that night people would be arrested, synagogues would be burned, Jewish-owned stores would be destroyed. You are not to interfere with them. In other words, the police disbursed all the crowd that wants to watch the fire department—don't put out the fire. But remember, with no building in which Jewish people live, like a synagogue and so on, should not be burned if the adjoining buildings are occupied by Christian German people. You may destroy it, but you can't torch it, because the fires may spread and kill the rest of the population. This was all, let's say, within hours—this thing was organized and all the stores were destroyed. The government also said the Christian population is not to remove any merchandise, which they did anyway. Then the Jewish people had to pay one billion German marks for the one life that was lost. This was payable, because the German government knew everybody's wealth. With your tax return, you file a form that says I am the owner of so much cash, so much real estate, and so on. So based on this information, everybody was billed in four installments to pay their pro rata share of the \$1 billion to the government. And all the Torah scrolls, the prayer books, the prayer shawls, they were laying all in the street for everybody to step on as they go along.

SPI: And where were you during all of this, Stephan?

STEPHAN: In the synagogue. What they did here, the Germans, they took the kids. We were about roughly fifty girls and fifty boys in two separate buildings in a V-shaped

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

setup. They put us into the synagogue, and they couldn't torch it, because we had Gentile people living on either side. So, above the arc, there is an eternal light burning in every synagogue, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Ours was a gas-fired light. It could be electric, it could be a large candle that burns for seven days, and so on. But ours was a gas-fired light. What they did, they cut the gas line to this eternal light and let the gas escape. We were all sitting in these seats—one hundred kids. They walked out, locked the doors on us, and walked away, hoping that we would suffocate in the process. So, fortunately, one of the boys, who probably was about fourteen years old, had enough sense to take a chair and break some windows, figuring he would be punished for breaking the window, but that's what saved our lives that night. There were 279 synagogues which were either burned or demolished. Every Jewish store, the windows were broken and the merchandise was taken. The Germans insisted that these Jewish storeowners obtain the money from the insurance company for reimbursement, but they took the money ahead of time and the Jewish owners had to repay it out of their own pocket.

SPI: What happened to your father's store, Stephan?

STEPHAN: On that day, he was home with my mother. He lived in a one-room apartment, shared a joint kitchen with a Gentile woman, which eventually created a problem. He was not affected. Of course, he didn't go out, because if they would see you walk in the street, then they would arrest you. He had to give up his business. They gave him five hundred dollars for it, approximately, which was a wholesale business, and he lost it and he had to... Some of his non-Jewish storeowners slipped a list of things they need from a tobacco store, and he made deliveries during the night, so he made a certain amount of profit and maintained the family for the two of them. But we went back out after the second day and went to school and saw all of the destruction on the way. We had a forty-five-minute walk. We could see all the prayer books out on the street, and everything else.

SPI: At this point, you were fourteen?

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

STEPHAN: I'm thirteen years—thirteen and a half years.

SPI: Hatred, anger—how did you cope with these feelings?

STEPHAN: Basically, what you can do here, you do the best to survive. So when we came out of school, we—well, my parents, sometimes—at the end of the week, when I was home, my father slipped me some pocket money. So on the way out from school, there was a store that made waffles. For ten cents you could buy a bag full of odd pieces and so on, and we used to just sneak into the store—before we came out, made sure there was no Hitler Youth looking at us in any way, and just continued our way back to the orphanage for the day. Made sure that we don't get attacked by anything. We were chased sometimes, on the street, you know, by kids who didn't realize we were Jewish, and so we'd just run a little bit faster. Another interesting part was that the building was a V-shaped building, and on top of each end of the top part of the V, they put up, I think they were, policemen or soldiers with machine guns, looking at us into the backyard of the V, where we had a little soccer field. It was illegal measurements, but we used four trees, and we had two goals. We could see the guns pointing at us, and they were looking, hoping they would catch us doing something against the government, and they could immediately get the police after us, and so on. But it never happened—they just watched a good soccer game, that's what.

TRACK 04 – KINDERTRANSPORT TO FRANCE

STEPHAN: After Kristallnacht, my parents felt that we, as a family, should get out of Germany. My mother had a second or third cousin living in Haverhill, Massachusetts. How she found them, I have no idea. But he gave us an affidavit, and, because the U.S. Government said you cannot enter the United States until you have somebody who is the sponsor of you, financially and otherwise, this person had to pay my education, feed us, our rental, my doctor bills, and so on. Whatever money we needed, he was obligated, because there were no social services permitted to German refugees. So we had this affidavit, and we went to the American Consulate to get on the waiting list to get a visa. The first thing is, we had to pass a physical exam. My father had high blood pressure that

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

automatically disqualified us to get on the visa list. Then my mother and father said, listen, we can't get out as a family, what do we do? And there were countries like Holland, Belgium, France, England, and Denmark that took in children under the age of fourteen. I left there on July 4, 1939, and the war started on September 1. I said to myself, how come I'm still here live [alive] today?

SPI: So your parents saw that you were put on a *Kindertransport* to France. Can you explain to us where you went, and where you were housed?

STEPHAN: We were just north of Paris. We went straight to this home, but the ownership of the castle is a French count, and the niece of the House of Romanov. The Romanov family came from Russia, and Stalin pretty much eliminated all of them after World War I. So she survived. She had some money, and they bought this castle. We lived there and went to a public school locally until the following May, when the Germans had invaded France.

SPI: And what happened at that point?

STEPHAN: Well, we first escaped—tried to escape—from the Germans, and we walked through the River Seine, and just as an inland water transport ship—it could not go on ocean waters, and the red things on top are separate compartments, and the captain walked us along the side of the ship, and he looked at every compartment to see if there is room to put in forty kids. Well, he found one spot, and he said, sit down there and await what will happen. It turned out to be it was filled with coal, so we sat on coal all night long, and the following morning we could hear the German soldiers with their boots with nails underneath walking on top of the metal bar. They opened up each cover to see what is being transported. They saw us sitting on the pile of coal. We could hear them, in German, saying they all look like a bunch of Jews, and down came the covers. We did a little bit of praying that they wouldn't start shooting at us. But we didn't get anywhere. So we disembarked, and the next three or four days, which would be of interest, is that I knew that we got off of the boat – and we had an old wagon that they put a horse in front

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

of it, and we carried our luggage upon the wagon. We came back to the chateau that we lived in, but I don't remember a thing about those four days. And I didn't, until just about maybe two years ago, and a diary was found—a handwritten diary on plain paper of one of the boys who kept almost minute-by-minute activities of what happened those four days.

We were first involved with the French Army, which was escaping from the Germans. Then we got caught with the Germans, who were chasing the French Army. Then, also, we were involved with the British Air Force, who were bombing the Germans coming in, so we were all involved in that, with policemen pushing us into bombs to cover us in all that, but it's a total blank in my mind. But we came back to the castle, and it was occupied by the German Army. A couple of the older boys opposed the Germans. We are forty Jewish kids from Berlin, and this is our home. Well, the German officer in charge could have called for a freight car and shipped us to a concentration camp or labor camp. He offered us a deal to sleep in the basement and do chores for them, and they would feed us. We took that deal. In fact, some of the soldiers that were living there were not really Nazis. The reason I'm saying that is because when they went on furlough back to Berlin, they asked us—not of my kids, but they asked some kids for the address of their parents, and, while they were on furlough, they would visit those addresses and see if the parents are still living there and tell them they are in good shape. You know, you don't have to worry about them, because there was no communication between Germany and France during the war.

After about six months, one night we were woken up to move again, and it turned out that the American Quakers came, and, I think, three truckloads, and took us over a period of a few days and, keeping some of the kids separate, depending on the living quarters they had, for overnight stays. They took us to the border of Occupied and Unoccupied France, and then we walked across the border, and then we were taken by other transportation. I don't know who sponsored it, but they took us to the location in Chabannes which is about fifty miles from the city of Limoges. That's where all of us were housed. Some kids went to a public school. The public school was expanded, by using space in

**STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO**

Chabannes and to the local town, because there were two hundred kids which entered the school system. I was not permitted to go to school, because I was fifteen years old and too old to be educated. I'd learned a trade, though, so in case I come to the United States and I can't get a job, so I had a job after three days at a leather factory, because I was trained for that purpose.

TRACK 05 – IMMIGRATING TO THE US

SPI: Your mother's relative in the United States filled out a new affidavit of support, is that correct?

STEPHAN: The sponsor updated his affidavit after I left, and all of the – my parents can reapply for a visa, because my father had reduced his high blood pressure to a normal level.

SPI: So this time, your father and stepmother were able to get out of Germany, but not with you. They didn't know where you were at this point, correct?

STEPHAN: Well, they couldn't leave from Germany. There were no boats leaving for the United States, and they had to travel to Holland, which had not yet been invaded, and to board a ship to come to the United States, which they did. Two days out at sea, after they rounded England and were out in the ocean, there was an announcement that Germany had invaded Holland, Belgium, and France. So, needless to say, they were very upset that I'm now stuck, because they really didn't know where I was. Between Occupied France, Unoccupied France—when, I wasn't sure, but one of the things I did after a short period of arriving there, I wrote to the Red Cross in Switzerland, because they specialized in reuniting families. They found my parents after about six months or so, living in Haverhill, Massachusetts, and that's how I found out that they left in the spring of 1940 to come to the United States.

SPI: So can you tell me how the Safe Conduct Form came to be? Is this safe passage to get to Marseilles?

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

STEPHAN: First, I went to Lyon to get my visa, in which I found out that I was attached to a *Kindertransport*. But since I had my own affidavit, I was an independent traveler. I had to get permission to go to Lyon, because the Germans controlled the rail system to get my visa. Then, when I was in Marseilles, we had to wait for about seven weeks, and then we came aboard ship - the French ship which left from Marseilles, and the first stop it made is to pick up fifty refugee kids, but who left, because their parents were Communists in Spain. So they also said, let our children be saved. From there, the captain told us—normally, if you go on a cruise, the captain will tell you, oh, we're going to go out on the ocean and we're going to visit this island and all that—our captain said we have a choice of two things. We can cut across the Mediterranean from Barcelona to Gibraltar to Casablanca, and I will go a different way. I will travel along the coastline of Spain, in and out, so if we get torpedoed, I can scuttle this ship and save our lives, because we'd be falling on land, versus being in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea and get torpedoed. So it took a little bit longer. So we went through Gibraltar, right to Casablanca, the Serpa Pinto [name of ship] was waiting there, but it took him close to seven weeks to get all the papers signed and leave.

When we finally left, the early part of June, I think, of 1942, what I figured out, had I waited ninety days more than what I did, I would have been caught in the American-English invasion on North Africa, and I wouldn't be here today. So, I have, it was ninety and one hundred days. Then we went across the ocean, and one night the engines stopped, and you could always tell when the engines stop on a ship. Up came a submarine. They pulled alongside us. The German naval officers investigated the entire ship and the papers, and everything else. Then they left again. The submarine went underwater, and you never saw seven hundred people pray so hard that we don't get torpedoed, because we're in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, seven hundred people and Jews are gone, except the Spanish kids.

As we arrived, we started circling the Statue of Liberty, and I knew my parents were waiting on the pier. But, as it turned out, one passenger was running a high temperature,

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

and the authorities were afraid that we were bringing in a major disease, like cholera or something like that, but after three days, I think it was, it worked out and we could land. I met my parents and my father hugged me and grabbed me by the shoulder, and he says, I've got to buy you a new suit. So we went in the store and bought a new suit. Because any suit that I got from France, it had splinters in it, in the weirdest places. I think that's [how?] they manufactured it. Bread was made from sawdust. So why not a suit with a piece of wood, or whatever? He bought a new suit, and then I think we stayed one night in a friend's house, and then we went by bus back to Boston. We came to the apartment where they had their home, and there was a sign on the door, greetings from the FBI, that we searched your house twice while you were gone, and I'm to report to the FBI immediately. Which I did, of course, being a good German. You know, you obey orders. They said, you're an enemy alien. I told them, when I left Germany, when every Jew left Germany, we lost our citizenship. They said, we don't care if you were born in Germany. We, the United States, in 1942, are at war with Germany. So, therefore, you are an enemy alien. My parents were not enemy aliens, because they came in 1940, when the United States was not yet at war with Germany.

TRACK 06 – CAMP RITCHIE

SPI: So you're brand new in the United States, escaping Nazi persecution, just reunited with your parents. Can you tell us what then happened?

STEPHAN: So they gave me a pink-colored passport, with my name and address, with no letter J on the front. I had to carry it twenty-four hours a day. I could not leave the city of Boston for more than two hundred miles. If I wanted to go to New York, which in the old days, going through the old Hartford route - that took a long time—that I had to get two letters from American citizens that I'm of good character and I will come back at the appointed time. Then they were also wondering—they came into our house, where they did a search, they showed us two books that they took, but they gave them back to me. The first thing is there's a big swastika on the front cover. Well, it was the picture album of the 1936 Olympics. They satisfied themselves that I'm not a spy and I could go home. Then I went to night school at Boston English High School, to learn English at night. My

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

mother's boss gave us money. He hired me as an office boy. It was nice to work with fifteen guys, and you don't understand when they talk to you, because I didn't know English. But we managed.

Then I turned eighteen, in 1943. I figured I wanted to be a citizen. I registered in the army and they assigned me to the medical corps to get my basic training. Then I was told to go to Camp Ritchie, Maryland. But don't tell anybody, it's top secret. Well, I came in my uniform to Camp Ritchie, Maryland. I got off the bus. There is a sign with print that says, United States Intelligence Service. This was supposed to be top secret. Anyway, I came in, we got acquainted, and then we got our training in camp. The American soldiers in Camp Ritchie were drawn from people who immigrated to the United States, primarily Jewish people. I worked with one individual and he came from Switzerland—not Jewish, but he spoke three languages, like every Swiss person does. But it's primarily Jewish refugees that were taken into the camp. The way they trained us is to identify the German Army, because I would be facing the German Army, going overseas. Which division did they come from, and German division? And which insignias did they have, and all that? At nighttime, at 4:00 in the morning, we had what sounded like a million machine guns going off, and we had to identify from which country they came by the sound of the bullets. At that time, the Italians had the fastest machine guns. I don't know about today. So that's the way they trained us. And then we had our test. Once a month a test, and then a final test, where they gave us a compass reading and you go through the woods, of course, and suddenly you were being shot at with blank bullets. We had to identify the guns, we had to identify the soldiers that were shooting the guns at us, and then reach a tent where they'd give us a final exam. Then we got three hours' sleep, and we got an assignment to go to the next tent, and they had other things that we encountered on the way, so they could ask us who were they and their identification.

Because once we finally went overseas, and I took a prisoner, I saw his insignia, and I said, you are from such and such a division, your general's name is such and such, you were recently on the Russian front, you have left because of major casualties, the firing powers in your artillery is of such and such. See, we had all this information. Then the

STORY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE
STEPHAN LEWY TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO

prisoners in 99 percent of the cases felt at home, because we knew more than they did. Then we'd give them a pack of cigarettes and probably some chocolate and all that, and a good meal, and we could get all the information we wanted. I did a lot of translations. One incident, when we hit the secret line with all the bunkers, there was one bunker where the soldiers did not want to surrender. But I had found a telephone index, so I called up that bunker and we tried to tell them, you're surrounded—some of our troops are way past already. It's no sense—they didn't do it. So the American commanding officer, what he did, he told the artillery boys to put a couple of cannons in the holes and drive them out. So things of that sort. Then also we had—I kept about two maps of the—the black maps. One is for the American front, and one is for the British front, and the Germans in the center. So I kept track of it for the commanding general, to see how things are moving along the entire front line. That was also one of my duties.

Our final stop before the war officially ended was—I mean, we were still doing occupation. We were the first American troops in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Needless to say, you couldn't distinguish between those people that had passed away from the others, which were still living, but you may as well think they would pass away shortly. Food was not there, and treatment, and all that. So we made one big mistake. The first thing we did, we gave them food and rations that we had. That's like giving poison to a person. Because they were so run down and so little strength left and to eat highly concentrated food caused more problems. After about three days, they took us out and they brought an American battalion to do it, and we tried to speak to them, the ones that were still alive. We were not very successful. We could tell in their faces that they did not—because we spoke in German. I was, and there was another fellow that did a presentation, sort of, and he had no results. He was very upset about it, because as far as the inmates are concerned, they saw another uniform. Otherwise, what difference does it make? He started talking to them in Yiddish, and he was very successful. They opened up and so on. Then gradually they were taken care of by the medical battalion, and as far as we were concerned, everybody knows that General Patton says, let's go on to Moscow. Thanks God for Eisenhower, who said no. Otherwise, I probably wouldn't be here today.