

### **TRACK 01 – INTRO TO RECORDING**

Today is Saturday, January 17, 2015. This recording is of Henry Weinstock, one of the hidden children of the Holocaust. It is being made at CedarHouse Sound and Mastering, in North Sutton, New Hampshire. This recording is a production of Story Preservation Initiative. All rights reserved.

### **TRACK 02 – Belgium Before and After May 10, 1940**

My name is Henry Weinstock. I was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, in 1934, in Belgium, in the City of Antwerp. My parents divorced in 1935, one year after I was born. Belgium is a very small country. It's actually broken down into three languages. In the north, we call that Neelandophone, the Flemish section. In the center, you have Brussels, the capitol, which has two languages, Niederlander (Flemish) and French, and in the south it's mostly French, but there's a very small section called Malmedy, where German is spoken.

When I was a little boy, I was told it had eight million people, the same quantity of people that New York City has. A very small population for a country. Belgium has a constitutional monarchy and has been independent in many ways. It's a country that unfortunately had a Colonial experience, just as Great Britain, Spain, France, and Portugal. It colonized the Belgian Congo. That's a naughty part of Belgium, that experience of colonization.

It had always maintained a sense of neutrality in international politics. Of course, in WWI, that neutrality was breached by the invasion of Belgium by the German Army, by the Keiser's Army. Alas, a parallel situation transpired in WWII. The war was started on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1940, and it was perhaps 18 days later that the Belgian government capitulated to the German occupying forces.

We were not Belgian citizens. My father was born in Hungary. My mother was born in Romania. They immigrated to Belgium because of economic opportunities. Hungary had a racial policy, Romania had a racial policy. They had their own anathema population – people who were considered unacceptable. So Belgium seemed like a perfect place for political asylum. If you were considered an unacceptable citizen, this is where you would go. They thought about France, but France had the Dreyfus affair, so there was a question of anti-Semitism, but Belgium seemed like not a racist country, a country in the lowlands, part of Holland, part of Benelux. I mean, what a perfect place to go.

My father was a carpenter, and he got a job working for Ford, in Antwerp, as a carpenter. We were not religious Jews. We were secular Jews. In fact, my father met my mother through a Marxist organization. They were both Marxist Communists. They were not interested in their religious identity. Judaism was not – they were secular Jews. My father proceeded to make plans to come to America, the land of milk and honey, as it was known. He had his mother, his brother, and sisters here, and the plans to come to America appeared to be solidified. So the invasion, of course, created a terrible imposition. We could not travel so easily across the Atlantic, but we thought – at least, they thought – that we could go to France, and from France go to England, and from England find passage to America. Alas, it was already too late. The phony war started in September of 1939, and the real war started on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1940.

We were still optimistic about the possibility of getting to England. We joined a massive army of refugees trying to go to the coast in Belgium and, from the coast, try to cross into the Flanders region of France and, ultimately, we would make it to England. The period of evacuation was, of course, very, very treacherous. That's where the German Luftwaffe was coming down and aiming their machine guns on the evacuating thousands. As my father, in his book – my father wrote a book about his experiences – says, there is nothing more terrifying on the scale of fear than a child's fear of death. Of course, so I was worried that we would be the people killed, because there was a lot of destruction, a

lot of barbarism, a lot of inhumanity. This is the first time that we saw people dying in front of us.

When we got to the border between France and Belgium, we were considered persona non grata. My father was of the wrong nationality. He was Hungarian. Hungarians were considered part of the Axis, so we were considered collaborators. Although we were determined to do so, by suggesting that as Jews we were considered pariahs by that community of oppressors, it didn't matter. Bureaucracy was so preponderant that they turned us back. So we went back to Antwerp.

### **TRACK 03 – Juden Verboten**

In Antwerp, life seemed almost as it was before the German occupation of Belgium. Each day there were new laws about what we had to do, new mandates from the occupying forces, institution of ration for food, and subtle changes. But I felt, as a child, that everything seemed normal again. Little by little, we saw signs that said Juden verboten, Juifs interdits, Jews forbidden. Signs that were more and more conspicuous in places like parks and cafes. We were not in any way practicing Jews. As secular Jews, I asked my father – I had just learned how to read and write – what's a Jew? He said a Jew has no definition. It's only an anti-Jew who can tell you what a Jew is. So that was the answer.

We were beginning to worry. We had heard from different friends, acquaintances that the Nazis are imposing more and more laws as to where Jews can go, from point A to point B. We're not allowed to go to parks or libraries. All public institutions were forbidden. Schools were interdicted, as well. Beginning the end of 1941, 1942, they imposed a law that all Jews had to wear the Star of David. The Star of David had the word Judah. They tried to give it sort of a Hebrew character. My father was inclined not to have that, because he felt that we never were practicing Jews. We were secular Jews, as I had mentioned before. There was no reason for it. But then, he was told by

acquaintances again, if we do not wear that Star of David and they do arrest you, you will be severely punished. Little did we think at that time that severe punishment – what could be more severe than being exterminated, at one point, for having worn that?

My father, being a Marxist, he joined the Belgian underground, the Maquis. He got a job working for the German military industry, where he would be a saboteur. We moved to a village called La Louviere. He realized that this was a war where even children were not safe. Not just from bombardment, but even children could be deported to a place somewhere in the east. The idea that a war should involve deportation of entire families was very suspicious to him. He said it's inconceivable that children should be prisoners of war or civilians should be participating in a war, where there is no *raison d'être* for that. The idea of adults being taken to offlag, to prison camps for German military labor, that's understandable. Anyway, we did not wear that Star of David, but I have first cousins, my mother's sister's children, Jackie and Yudi, who did wear that Star of David, and they were very proud of it. They said, we are like sheriffs. That was very impressive. Ultimately, we found out that entire families were being arrested, deported to a place called Malins (Mechelen), which is a city between Brussels and Antwerp, and these families were being taken somewhere in the eastern part of Poland. My father, the older people, the adults, the friends, the family, said there is something suspicious where an entire family can be deported to Germany. It's not just labor that they want. We still had no idea that there was such a thing as an extermination camp. Extermination camps only became a reality around the end of 1943, 1944, and absolute reality at the end of 1945. The idea that was such a thing as a gas chamber, with crematoriums, and that children could be ultimately taken to such a camp, they would be gassed and cremated – once again, because they were Jewish, because they were not in harmony with the philosophy of the Third Reich – this to us was so mindboggling that this is just another propaganda against the German occupation forces. Little did we realize that this was not propaganda. This was a reality. But that reality would come much later.

#### **TRACK 04 – Becoming a Hidden Child**

At this point, we had to hide. We learned that no one was safe from deportation into somewhere in the eastern part of Europe. So, who was safe? Well, anyone who was not Jewish. If you were a Christian, you would be acceptable. But if you were Jewish, if you were a homosexual, if you were a Russian – we had a whole numeration of who was considered anathema to the Third Reich occupation. So, my father, through his underground activities met a wonderful human being called Pere Froidure, Father Froidure. Father Froidure was running a camp for underprivileged children of Brussels, called les Stations de Plein-air. This was an outdoor recreation center outside of Brussels, where poor children, living in the slums of Brussels, were invited to spend their daytime, like a summer camp, and at night they would be taken back by trolley car to the center of Brussels. This was my first hiding place.

I was one of the first children hidden at the Stations de Plein-air by Pere Froidure. Pere Froidure was ultimately denounced by a Belgian Nazi collaborator, Rexist they called him. He was tortured and he wound up in Dachau, the concentration camp Dachau. So, as a hidden child, I had to assume a total identify. I became a Catholic. I was a Sacred Heart child, and my name was now Henry Gerard. Henry Albert Gerard. I actually fell in love with the idea that I was now a Catholic. This was my first religion. My highest aspiration was to become a priest some day. Anyway, from 1941 to the end of 1944, was a vicissitude of hiding places, from one place to another. My father would come and visit me wherever I was, as much as he could. It was very hard for him to travel. He had to be very careful. There were a lot of Belgium Rexist, collaborators, who would get some kind of a reward for denouncing who they considered pariahs, a member of the Jewish population, or a member of any kind of Slav population, or any kind of illegal immigrant that was hiding in Belgium somewhere. So we had to be very discreet, as to how we would get together. I was in a camp called Tervuren. I was in another camp called Darmantier. Finally, I was with some private families. Ultimately, into early 1943, we found a place called Jamoigne. Jamoigne is where I stayed for the balance of the war. Jamoigne is really in the heart of the Ardennes. To the south of Jamoigne you have the country of Luxembourg. Luxembourg is even smaller than Belgium. Then, further to the

east of that you have Germany. So, Jamoigne is really sort of the crossroads between France, Belgium, and Holland, and there in the south you have Germany. You could see a lot of the activities of what was going on in WWII.

I remember being nine years old. I was walking in one of the cemeteries, not far, with a Catholic priest, who was the priest with whom I was doing my altar boy work. He, at that time, was in his 80's. He was an old priest. He was born in 1856. He was 14 years old when he lived in that same area, during the Franco-Prussian War. He was too old for WWI. He was talking about all the battles that this area, geographical area, had experienced. The battle of the Franco-Prussian War, with Bismarck and Napoleon III, WWI, between the Kaiser and the Allies, etc., etc. Little did he anticipate that in this very same place we would have, about eight months later, the Battle of the Bulge.

#### **TRACK 05 - Jamoigne**

Anyway, we were in Jamoigne. Eighty-three Jewish children, not knowing that each one of us was Jewish. We were all good Catholics. Some of us better Catholics than others. Jamoigne was run by the Sisters of Besancon. This was an order that has existed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They were the kindest, the most affable, the most generous. They were true Christians, in the essence of the word. They did everything for the children. They themselves could have been harmed by what they were doing.

We had frequent visits from the German – the Nazi authorities. I have to always make that clear, because there were some good Germans. In fact, I'm sure that the majority of the Germans were good. It's just that you had a military organization, the Wehrmacht, and they had the Gestapo, and they had their police. But this was not necessarily representative of the German population, so we should always say Nazis, rather than Germans. So, I apologize. But after the war, we were so bitter, we were so angry at what happened that we simply said German, and now we have to qualify that and be a little more discerning. These things always transpire like that. Anyway, Madame Taquet, who was the coordinator of the Chateau, saw the German troops, but they were looking for British pilots, who had parachuted in the Ardennes. There were a lot of British planes

going through a reconnaissance. They wanted to know exactly where they would land. They were trying to coordinate their landings. There was a plane that was shot down, right near the Chateau and, obviously, they didn't find the bodies, so they must have assumed that the British pilots parachuted. So they came to the Chateau looking for British aviators. But they said, since we're here, we heard a vague rumor that there were Jewish children hidden here, but that's not our primordial objective. We want to find that aviator. Madame Taquet, the directress of the Chateau said to one of the counselors, look, one of you will have to sacrifice and pretend that you are one of the British aviators. This way, the children will be saved.

Mouton was the name of the young man who pretended to hide, but they had German shepherds. The German shepherds immediately identified Mouton, and he said yes, I'm one of the aviators. At least take me with you. But the candy incident was still in the back of the mind of the commandant of this particular group searching for the British pilots. He said, children, how many of you gathered together here - we were about maybe 60 of us - you speak many languages in Belgium. How many of you speak Dutch? A few of us. How many of you speak - and candy was distributed. How many of you speak French? More of us. How many of you - ultimately, three of the younger kids, they were maybe five years old - they wanted the candy. Candy was absolutely a luxury in that period of history. They said, we speak Yiddish. They were taken away. They were never heard from again. Another thing, what could they do to a four- or five-year-old? I mean, that age? This happened. We were once again, after the Nazis left, told to please never, never be seduced by candy. We'll give you anything you want, but you are here admonished, because of the children that had gone. We were worried that they would also visit the infirmary. There was an infirmary at the chateau, and that the children in the infirmary - there were three or four kids in the infirmary - who could be revealed as Jewish.

From 1942, to September 1944, life in hiding was not too complicated. The war was going on. But somehow, the only thing we experienced was hunger. We were incessantly hungry. There was never enough food to be had. As children, we always

talked about food. The way sailors talk about women, we always talked about food. One kid would say, I remember I had this much butter on my sandwich. Oh, it was fantastic! Another kid would say, I had even more butter than you. Food was an obsession. Well, the nuns did as much as they could. We were all vulnerable. From hunger, we did not have always the strength to fight diseases. But the nuns always took care of us in that respect. Some of us had ear infections. There was no penicillin. I had a very bad ear infection, and one of the nuns took me to the city of Arlon, which is a border between Belgium and Luxembourg. There was an infirmary there, where I was treated temporarily. But this was the problem. We were not fed enough. We did not have enough food. We were just waiting to reunite with our families, never knowing how the consequence of this war was going.

The Germans, when they invaded Belgium, did not really have a political strategy. Once you incur your power in another country, you have to have some kind of a plan, economic, political, whatever. They didn't. It was just a question of occupying this country as ultimately you would be the slaves of the One thousand-Year Reich. Ultimately, all bad things come to an end, and the occupation of Belgium finally came to an end, as the Americans liberated Belgium. We thought that September 1944 we would begin to see the end of the war, we would reunite with our families, and all would be like it was in the beginning, before the war.

Alas, it didn't turn out that way. There were no computers. There was no way of coordinating reunions with our family. But, somehow, after September, we were placed in different families that could accept us. I was placed with a Madame Stephanec, who my father worked for, and then we were sent back south, because they couldn't accommodate us. Life was absolutely difficult, economically speaking. Unfortunately, we were in the one area where the Germans came back in WWII. They went from Dinant, and that was the Battle of the Bulge. Terrible aerial bombardment. The worst part of my experience of WWII was when we saw fields of American soldiers who were dead, German soldiers who were dead. We were looking for food.

**TRACK 06 – The Term: Hidden Child**

The term “hidden children” was not coined until, I think, shortly after 1947, 1948, when the diary of Anne Frank was found. The Diary of Anne Frank is the first concept that we had that we had to hide, as children, for being not responsible for who we are. In other words, the idea that because we’re considered pariahs, anathema, whatever you want to call it, marginals, we were – we had to be hidden, in order not to be exterminated. That whole concept of hidden children just is a concept that transpired after WWII, with the finding of the diary of Anne Frank. I never heard the expression until about 1948, 1949.

You would talk at the dinner table. So, what happened to you during the war? I was in hiding. Oh, good, pass the salt, please. It was trivial. It had no meaning. Of course, after Anne Frank’s diary became world famous, the world realized that there was such a thing as a hidden population; children, primarily, because even children were considered anathema. So, here I was, a hidden child amongst millions of hidden children. I’m sure that every war has a group of children who are in hiding, but nothing equal to WWII.

Amongst the children in Jamoigne, I doubt if maybe three of us or four of us ever found our parents. It was such an exclusive situation. My father was arrested in October of 1943, and he was taken from a place called Malin, to Buchenwald, which is Weimar, Germany. It’s a city where Goethe was born. Goethe is a German writer. The whole romantic school of German literature, Klopstock, Schiller, Goethe – in that particular geographical area of Germany. In fact, when my father was taken to Buchenwald, he met a professor of German literature who said, isn’t it nice to be near such a concentration of romantics? He realized quickly that it was a concentration camp, that it wasn’t a concentration of romanticism. Eighteen months’ experiences were revealed in his book, *Beyond the Last Path*. He was liberated by General Patton’s American Army on April 11, of 1945. This is the same day that Franklin Delano Roosevelt died, so here was an exuberant moment of liberation and, at the same time, the Americans were in their state of despondency. It was a sad moment for them, so there was sort of a conflict here, celebrating liberty and, at the same time, commemorating the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was a very sad period for the liberators.

Shortly after we had our first meeting, and before too long, in 1946, we came to America. One of the first immigrants to come to America, right after WWII. My father had his mother, his two sisters, and two brothers, who came to America in the late 1930's, just before the war.

L'abbe Froidure came to New York City in March of 1946, to raise money for his camp, which was called Le Camp des Enfants de Tervueren. This was a camp for children who came from the slums of Brussels. He wanted to give them an opportunity to breathe fresh air, to get out of the slums. He found this opportunity – did you know that there is a Henry Weinstock here who you hid? My God! So we went to the Belgian Consulate in Rockefeller Center on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1946, and we hugged each other, and then, of course, it became a mediatic event. At that time, there was no television newscast, but there was the radio ABC, WCBS and, of course, the New York Times, the New York Post, and there were all sorts of journals. It says, “Boy Reunites with His Savior from the Gestapo.” That was very moving moment.

I will always remember those people who, at the risk of their lives, did what they did, with no recompense, just having a clear conscience. I just wonder, those on the other side, those who did what they did, that's what frightens me, that they may not have a crisis of conscience. You can rationalize whatever you do, without a crisis of conscience, because you have this ideology, this passion, this ferocious tenacity, which is beyond me.

So you try to reconstitute the little bits and pieces and you find the goodness in the human condition. Just like Anne Frank's very last pages, she still believes in the humanity in us. I think that's the most important thing, to be sensitive, to be gentle, always put yourself in the other person's shoe. Even if that person does not agree with your philosophical sentiment about the meaning of life, respect it. What else can you do? We have only one mortal existence, and we have to assume that it should be done as harmonious as possible.