

--deport the Jews. And so I will-- I still remember, we were-- I was told go downstairs for release, and there found my father. Didn't know he were there. And we lined up.

And we got our release slip. It had to be signed by an [? S-sergeant, ?] a Kommandant. And I still remember my father right in front of me, and presented his slip. And he signed it. And then sneered, oh, a judge you have been. Oh, then you certainly have ruined the lives of many people. No, said my father, I hope not.

And then we left. And we did not go to the factories. We were on a-- required to report to the labor exchange, and then wound up at the gang that cleaned up after air raids, tore down, demolished buildings and so on.

And didn't--

There was one more time.

Please go ahead and tell us that.

Yeah, one more time. Sometimes, after an air raid, you took off your star because what did you do. It was very crowded, and you wanted to get in the subway. And it wasn't always healthy to be there with the star.

And one time, on another occasion, I didn't have the star. And lo and behold, I was stopped. I knew right away this was a Gestapo. You could tell the behavior, the way they behaved.

Well, why did he stop me? I knew, what is a 16-year-old young man doing out of uniform? Well, I showed my identification, and that I was excluded from military service. And of course it said that there was a Geltungsjude. This would have worn the star.

Well, I was lucky. A good friend of mine wasn't-- he was sent into the collection center. And now, there the guy was standing. And of course, what happens now, I assume. I can't tell for sure. He was looking me up and down for quite some time. I think he was deliberating whether the German or Jewish blood was predominant. Well, then after a while, he handed it back, and like [INAUDIBLE].

This protest by the wives and the daughters of those of you-- like you that were incarcerated, that is the subject, as you mentioned in this film, Rosenstrasse.

Exactly, yes. It is mentioned. But it is a film--

You've seen the film.

Yes, yes. It's a dramatized version. But I think it is quite accurately describes what happened at the Rosenstrasse, and particularly it gives a picture of the setting under which it occurred.

One of the things I was struck by, as you were describing to me, when we talked earlier about being on the cleanup crews, having to do heavy labor after air raids, with bricks and things like that you're moving. Yet there was still a commitment to education.

Yes.

Share with us a little about that.

Of course, we-- I was 16 years old. And we were-- the older men actually kind of took care of us. They also explained to us some of the four-letter words that were bandied around. That was very helpful.

And I came later on to Saint Paul, Minnesota, and I worked in a factory. And there--

You knew how to talk.

What?

You knew how to say the right words when you got to Saint Paul as a result of that?

Yes, and, well, they tried to teach me. Let's teach the young fellow some four-letter words. He will use them and be embarrassed. No luck, I told him. Those words of Anglo-Saxon origin were almost identical to German.

[LAUGHTER]

So tell us about the educational part of it-- apart from the four-letter words.

Education-- pardon for the word. Of course, the older people, that young fellows are not learning anything. Well, what happened with the kind of school we had. We came with a wheelbarrow, an empty wheelbarrow. And while it was being filled, we were given a question-- geography, literature, mathematics, or so on. And by the time we came back, we had to have the answer.

And I still remember one of the questions that I got. Well, when you come back, you will name the Great Lakes of the United States. How many of you can name them?

[LAUGHTER]

Some takers out there. Fritz, eventually, at some point, as you were doing these various forms of pretty heavy labor, working in the streets, cleaning up buildings, you were selected for I think what you referred to me as a catastrophic mission.

Yes. We had been [INAUDIBLE]. The second time we were bombed out, we temporarily lived in the Jewish hospital. And of course, I had to go to work every morning with the work gang.

And one morning, I was leaving. And lo and behold, at the main entrance, some SS-- you, you, you, you, you are selected for catastrophe duty. What happened? Well, put us in a moving van, and off we went.

The catastrophe was that Eichmann's headquarter-- Eichmann was the lieutenant colonel who was in charge of deportations. His headquarter had taken a bombing hit, and they needed some people to clean it up. And there we went.

And there too, my name held. I was lucky. At the headquarters, we were assigned to various SS officers. I got an SS officer. Name was Hardenberg-- actually, von Hardenberg.

The man didn't belong there. Polite, never raised his voice, never treated me.

Even though he was an SS officer.

In SS. I still don't know how he got into the SS, or to-- even to Eichmann's headquarter.

And Eichmann too. It was Devil's Den, I said. Well, Eichmann, the head devil, I saw once. We were working, and suddenly they say, Eichmann is coming. Of course, everybody knew who Eichmann was. And I wondered now, how would he look?

Well, there he came-- ordinary. Nobody would have noticed him in a crowd. Actually, the real nasty person was his deputy, Gunther.

But aside from that lieutenant, Hardenberg, who was decent, was another guy which was-- we did work and were--

while we were doing the work out in front of the building, there were SS guards marching up and down, changing every two hours. One was very nasty, and the other didn't say a word.

And whenever we took a break, he found something else to look over. The man made a point of not harassing us. Now why? I still wonder, how did he get in the SS and into Eichmann's headquarters? It's strange where you find apparently decent people.

You mentioned earlier the importance of humor in just part of just daily survival. Tell us the story about the fellow who falls in the river.

Yes, actually that's, I mean-- well, the story, Goebbels, the notorious minister of propaganda and people enlightenment, had a bad luck. He fell in the River Spree. It's a little river in Berlin.

Young man comes by, pulls him out. Oh, my boy, thank you. You saved my life. What can I do for you?

Well, he said, I want a state funeral. Why you-- a state funeral? Well, he said my father, when my father finds out that I pulled you out of the river, he's going to kill me.

[LAUGHTER]

You know what substitute is? Ersatz? When will the war be over? Well, when the British eat rats, and the Germans eat rats ersatz-- rat substitute.

[LAUGHTER]

Oh, there was another one, not quite-- and SS man said, look, I'm going to kill you. I'm going to shoot you. But if you can guess which one of my eyes is made of glass, I let you go. Oh that's very, very simple. It's the right one. Now how did you know that? Oh, it looked so human.

[LAUGHTER]

You hadn't told me that one before. [LAUGHS]

Of course, as the war as the war grinds on, and the bombing intensifies, and things are turning worse for the Germans, the situation in Berlin, of course, gets worse and worse and worse. Tell us, even though you had access to some very limited rations, what did the food situation become for you?

Well, it was-- actually, I tell you what was eaten. You used-- if you had potatoes, you used, actually, mineral oil to fry potatoes. Even you can use castor oil, because when you use frying, the laxative properties go away.

And what do you do? You eat potato peels. And we had bread. And if the mice ate a little bit, you just cut off the piece and ate it. Well, you did the very best.

And it just simply gets worse and worse and worse. And finally, the Russians are on the edge of taking Berlin.

Yes, that was--

And as the German defense of Berlin is collapsing, again, going back to a little bit of your humor, you and your friends figured it would take-- the labor you were involved in, if I remember right, was building tank traps, Panzer barriers.

Actually, there are two, if I could talk about logic. We worked at the demolition work. Took us away, and got us to build a foundation for a new Berlin. For a new Berlin, where the Russians had set foot on German soil, and the British and the Americans were at the Rhine. We still were building foundations for a new Berlin.

But then they came. No. Took us away again to the southern outskirts of Berlin. And there we had to build a Panzer, or a tank obstacles, with a big sign. I remember. I translated. On to work. No shirking. Death to Soviet Panzers lurking. This was the equivalent.

Well, we did. We dug ditches and put beams into the ground. And after all through the night and the next morning, we were ready to leave. He said, now, how long will it take the Russians to get through here. Looked at our handiwork.

Well, we decided 31 minutes. Why 31 minutes? Well, the Russians' tanks will come to the obstacles, will stop. The crews will laugh for 30 minute, and so they're taking one minute to get through.

[LAUGHTER]

Actually, pretty much what happened.

[LAUGHTER]

The Marshal, Marshal Konev, came from the south. One army came from the east, Zhukov. Marshal Konev came from the south. He got in, got in so fast, the part of Berlin where we lived, there was little street fighting. And lucky. I tell you, we didn't do a very good job with those Panzer trenches.

[LAUGHTER]

Fritz, in that time then, when the Russians did come to the outskirts of Berlin, and then, of course, then take Berlin, I know I've read this. Probably many people in the room have read different accounts of the assault on Berlin. And it sounded like just extraordinary in every way in terms of its ferocity. What was it like for you to be a relatively young male as the Russians are coming in, who don't know that you're Jewish, certainly?

That is right. Yeah, actually, at the end-- actually, the first sign that the end was near, we worked in close to an SS barracks. And lo and behold, one day we saw it's trucks being pushed by the SS. We knew the SS, they don't have gasoline, the end is near.

But the Russians came in. And of course, we had to be clear to him that we were not deserters or Nazis. And we tried to explain. They said you are Jewish? [TONGUE CLICK] Not possible. All Jews are--

But we were fortunate. There were some-- we lived with someone who knew some Russian, and we explained to them, showed them our stars and our identification. And they were fortunate.

Once the city was occupied by the Russians, how were you, and your family, and other surviving Jews, how were you treated? Actually, quite well. Of course, the most important part, of course, was during the bombardment of Berlin, waiting for the Russians to come in with new water and so on. But once this was over, actually, the Russians did, actually, the best they could.

The cemetery, the greenhouses in the cemetery were used to grow vegetables-- tomatoes and so on. And they distributed as much as they could. Under the circumstances, they did the very best.

Yes, there were some-- the front troops that came were very decent, actually helped out with food. Later on, there were some difficulty when people came afterwards, had nothing to do. But all in all, they behaved quite well.

Conditions, though, in the city were really, really bad.

Yes, it was there. Well, we stayed. In our building there was a horse butcher. And of course, some of-- some officers, the Russian officers, mounted are brought to the butcher for slaughter. And in return for slaughtering, he was given some meat. And we took part eating. Get lucky to eat some horse meat.

Actually, it's quite good. You wouldn't know the difference. The difference only if you have a broth, then you perhaps. But you wouldn't know.

In fact what happened during the war, friends of ours told my mother, my husband and her daughter wonder how he can serve so much of this wonderful meat. You got double rations for horse meat. If it was 100 gram beef, we 200 gram for horse meat.

And the family never knew they were eating horse meats. Only wondered, how can she serve such meat? We were lucky there too.

After the war, you would stay in Germany for several more years before you came to the United States.

Well, actually, I left in '47. I came in '48.

In '48. So it'd be two to three years before you were back.

Actually, I went back to school. But I decided to leave. I did not consider it my duty to rebuild Germany. And I decided - in fact, I applied. The Joint, American Joint Distribution Committee, briefly called the Joint, sponsored immigration to the United States.

You were interviewed, I think, you said extensively by the forerunner of the CIA at the close, after the war. Tell us about that.

Actually, when it was time to get clearance, my visa, I had to go to the other consulate. And there was an-- wanted to know, well, tell us a little about your past. And I mentioned that I had been in the headquarters of this Eichmann.

Oh! Would you please wait outside? And after half an hour, somebody will say, oh. And I had to relate whom did I saw or what did I saw. How was the building laid out and so on. They were very-- for some reason, they were very interesting in that headquarters.

And that was the OSS, which became the CIA.

I think it was.

Fritz, at some point you made that very profound decision to come to the United States, and your parents decided to stay in Germany.

Yes. How did the family come to that decision?

Well, should we want to stay. But my father was 60 years old. What could he have done? He couldn't have practiced a profession here as a lawyer. Therefore, he advised me, don't take a job.

As you said earlier.

But he said, we stay here, but you go. [AUDIO OUT] --fortunate to come here.

Tell us about coming here by yourself with no family.

Well, I remember distinctly, it was January 30, 1948. And the boat arrived was a Liberty Ship. And there I was waiting, looking, standing at the deck, seeing the skyscrapers and some lights. I was told Riverside Drive. Cars moving back and forth.

And there I was, torn between anticipation and apprehension. But it was lucky. Well, lucky again to come here. And I never forget the welcome I received and the opportunity given to me. I have been always lucky.

And it was quite interesting in New York at that time. Of course, I had to wait till sent to a final destination. What happened, each-- Jewish Family Services had agreed to take, in various cities, had to take a certain number of refugees. And until the decision was reached in my case, I was exploring New York. Well, you were given \$10 spending money. And at that time, haircut, \$0.50, subway ride, a nickel, almond bar \$0.10. It was quite a amount of money, I tell you.

And I really, it was amazing to see store windows with goods that actually could be bought. [INAUDIBLE] mock-ups. And that you could do in a restaurant, or restaurants, you could get food without handing over ration coupons.

And my English, well, I was grateful every day to my English teachers. It wasn't perfect, but in contrast to some of my fellow immigrants, who did not study at all, who disdained any language study, let it be known that they would learn in the country, I wasn't helpless. I could ask for directions, and I could read signs, and I could order food.

You were just 21, though, when you arrived, correct?

21. Yeah, and then came the day. The decision was made. Well, I was called into the office, and they said, well, there's a choice here between Detroit and Saint Paul.

Well, I had read quite a bit about the United States, and I decided Saint Paul, Minnesota. I knew it was cold in Minnesota, but it had not yet described to me as having only two seasons-- July and winter.

[LAUGHTER]

It isn't quite correct. Let's say July, August and winter. And then they put me on the train to Saint Paul.

I remember how unencumbered I was at that time. All I owned I could carry-- just a backpack and a suitcase. And now look at me, accumulating stuff.

Fritz, you shared with me something about-- you referred to American cigarettes were valued currency before you came over--

That is correct.

Tell us about that.

Actually, before we entered, stepped on board in Germany, he told us--

On board the ship.

Sure. See, at that time, the currency American cigarettes. And there was a very definite rank order. Camels were the most valuable, followed by Lucky Strike, Chesterfield, Pall Mall, Old Gold, and Raleigh. But even Raleigh was very desired. If you have cigarettes, you had it made.

But he told us, just before we got on board, ladies and gentlemen, the moment you set foot on board, a cigarette is just a cigarette. Don't forget that.

Fritz, why don't we now turn to our audience and ask them if they have some questions they'd like to ask of you. And I'm going to-- make it brief, if you can. I will either summarize it or repeat it, and then Fritz will respond to it. And so you had your hand up very quickly.

Were you aware of the deaths in the death camps? Were you aware at that time?

The question is, Fritz, were you aware of the death camps and the murder of millions of Jews that was taking place in Europe at that time?

We were aware that something was going on. People were deported or resettled, first to cities. And at the time, you occasionally sent some food and got some postcards, just three or four sentences. "We are well." Of course, that stopped.

And we knew something was going on. Exactly what, we suspected, but we didn't know.

Yes, sir.

Wondered if you could just summarize what it is that kept you alive? Was it the fact that your mother was not Jewish.

Well, I tell you, obviously three things kept me alive. One, my mother. Two, good luck-- very good luck. And Marshal Konev, he came in so fast from the south. They could-- the zealots couldn't get to us.

OK. Do we have some other questions? Yes, sir, with the hat on.

Yes. Explain to me the subject of the zealots. In other words, the Russians came through much faster than expected. What were you concerned about with respect to the zealots?

The question is, as the Russians came in so fast you expressed the fact that the zealots couldn't get to you because Marshal, the Marshal came through so quickly. What did you mean by that? What was the fear with the zealots?

Well, of course, that's-- the Third Reich came to an end, and there was still some fanatics around, and even the northern part of Berlin they went around trying to find the Jews or to kill them. It was that simple. But they came fast. I'm very fortunate. There were much more street fighting in the eastern part. But the southern part, where the Marshal Anton came in, no street fighting.

We were-- well, we survived the bombardment. And yes, we were concerned what would happen, particularly the younger one. But we were lucky again.

So as he came through, in a portion of Berlin it was liberated, but there was still intense fighting to continue elsewhere in the city.

Much more fighting. Actually, it wasn't really organized. But they came in very fast, and this sort of part, the southern, western part, very little street fighting. And that saved us too.

OK. Yes, sir. Right here. And then I'll come here, and then back there. OK.

In 1940, you were 13 years old. Were you able to have a bar mitzvah? in [BOTH TALKING]

Yes, in '41.

The question is, you were 13 in 1940. Were you able to have a bar mitzvah? And say a little bit about that.

Yes, I had a bar mitzvah. In fact, there was a synagogue. The synagogue became later on one of the collection points. See, when I was picked up, first from the factory, first in one place, then released, and picked up again, and brought to another collection point, the [PLACE NAME] synagogue was used as collection point. Pews were taken out. Only the gallery. And the-- I could have a bar mitzvah, yes.

Sir? My question is similar. Religious practices did your family do, and how did that change [BOTH TALKING]

The question is, what religious practices did the family do, and did that-- and how did that change during those years during the war?

My mother was Lutheran, but she never converted. My father said, why should you give up what your parents and teachers taught you? And to actually-- occasionally, even, I went to church with her. I found it very interesting, the organ and so on. But I still was raised Jewish.

But look, I had-- we had Christmas Eve. When a non-Jewish relative had Christmas, we were invited. And they got presents for Christmas and Hanukkah. And I had Passover and Easter. I had--

[LAUGHTER]

--both. Yeah.

OK. Yeah, we had one here. Yes, ma'am, right there.

Do you know how many Jews survived in Berlin?

Jill-- hi, Jill. The question is how many Jews survived in Berlin?

Frankly, I don't know. Actually, some, either in mixed marriages or there was a number of people in hiding. Honestly, I can't give you the exact number. But it's available. I'm sorry. I ought to know, but I don't.

OK, back there, sir, with the hand up.

What became of your family and how did you meet your wife?

The question is, what became of your family and how did you meet your wife?

Well, my father got his job back. He became a judge again. And my wife, well, I-- on the University of Minnesota I got a job as caretaker of the Hillel House, Newman Foundation, the various religious student organizations. And I got the job of the--