HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

EDITH R. LEVY

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Gloria Schwartz
Date: May 9, 1995

Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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EL - Edith R. Levy [interviewee]
ML - Marcus E. Levy [spouse]
GS - Gloria Schwartz [interviewer]
Date: May 9, 1995

Tape one, side one:

GS: This is Gloria Schwartz interviewing Dr. Edith Rechter Levy on May 9, 1995, at Gratz College. Dr. Levy, please tell me where you were born and when and a little bit about your family.

EL: Okay. I was born in Vienna, Austria, February 21, 1930. I had an older brother, born in '27. We were middle class, rather religious if you want to. My father was a kosher butcher. I had uncles, cousins-- I don't remember too much because I was little-- primarily from my father's side of the family. My, I had one aunt from my mother's side of the family in Vienna as well. My mother had family in Poland, a rather extended family. But I never knew any of them.

GS: What was life like for you as a child before the war?

EL: Well, like any more or less spoiled Jewish child. We were doing Mother a favor when we were eating, basically. That I remember. We used to go to the park, the Augarten was real close to where we lived. I was fairly sheltered. Mother was protective. And also in Europe, I do presume, the children were raised much more close to home. I was a bright child. I, as I said, I was raised very protected. And then people said to my mother, so she used to tell me, "You have a bright child. You shouldn't keep her home. Send her to be with other children." So, I went to the Kindergarten, one or two, twice, I believe, once or twice. And I was fascinated with the things the other children were doing that I wasn't allowed to do at home because our home always had to be immaculate. I had toys, but they had to be arranged and whatever. And here the children were playing and running and yelling. And I was, I could observe them. And I think it was simply because I was curious as to how they acted. I remember one day they were, we were called in for a snack and had been playing in the sandbox. And you know, you had, were supposed to wash your hands. And so they just ran their hands under the water for a split second. And there was this towel that, you know, that, what do you call, the roll towel. And they would wipe the dirt in the towel. And I wasn't about to touch this dirty towel. Well unbeknown to me my mother was watching me. And the fact that I did not participate, I understand the teacher told her, "Leave her another day or two and she'll get used to it." But she felt this wasn't for me and she took me out. And so instead of that, I went to the Herzl Hebrew School at age five. And I learned Hebrew, and to write Hebrew before I actually went to the regular school. And then when I came into, of course, first grade, I was an old trooper. I'd already been to school and so I did well there, too. But then of course when Hitler came in '38 then they took us out of the schools. So I had nowhere to go any more. And it's

about, one item, we came home from services on Friday night. And I always wanted to be a figure skater as a youngster. And on my way home, my walk home, we passed a store where they were selling skates. So I always nagged and my dad. And then I remember, you know, this day was no exception. I said, "I want ice skates." And so he said, "God willing, one day I will buy them for you." Whether he just said that or whatever, but Hitler came that week and I never got my ice skates. But that was the last of that dream. And so, what do you want, yeah...

GS: Did you have any non-Jewish playmates?

EL: I don't think so. I don't think so. Because where Mother would take us in the Augarten in the park there was an area where Jewish children played with Jewish children. And as I said, I was very sheltered. So, I didn't play much with other children.

GS: Did your family belong to any Jewish organizations or a synagogue?

EL: I wouldn't know. I would assume to some extent to a synagogue because we went. They weren't active in any organizations that I know of.

GS: Did any men in your family serve in the national army?

EL: I don't know.

GS: Do you remember or did you hear anything from family discussions about a reaction to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany?

EL: Yes. It wasn't meant for our ears, but we heard it anyhow. And adults' discussion and the terrible things that happened in Germany. But it, as a young child, it just didn't mean that much. You just knew, there was an awareness there that it was going on. There was the day that Hitler invaded Austria. I remember my mother putting-- every child had to have Shirley Temple curls-- and my hair was really straight. And the radio announced, asked, that there be no resistance, because the German forces were so much stronger and that it would be just an unnecessary bloodshed. And my mother's hands were shaking, and she was pulling and hurting me, you know? But I, as a child, you sense that this was not the time to complain about, so I didn't say anything because I realized how upset she was even though I didn't really know why.

GS: How did your life change after the *Anschluss*?

EL: Oh, everything changed. Everything changed. Not immediately at first, but then we weren't allowed to go to the Augarten. We weren't allowed to go in the park any more. We weren't allowed to wear the clothes that everyone wore, the *Dirndls* for the girls, the *Lederhosen* for the boys. We were taken out of school, put into another school for a short while. In first grade I was eager to participate. In that school I learned very quickly to blend in, because all we were doing was getting punished. There wasn't any education as such. They were just like, whoever they put on, ahead of us were horrible people. My father came home shaken quite a few times. He had brushes with the *Hitlerjugend*. He didn't look Jewish. He looked, you know, he spoke Viennese. And he had a couple close calls. I heard of that. Then we were beaten in the streets one evening and we couldn't, we were not allowed to go into the park any more. So Mother took us-- it must have been in

the summer-- for a walk, or maybe in the fall-- outside the park. And there was a wall. And some punks came up behind us and they said to my father, "Pepo." They used to call people there, like here you say, "Joe." They said, "Your hat's not on right." And my father said, "My hat's on fine." And you know how a child's memory, I felt like saying, "Well, if the hat isn't on right, why don't you let the nice man show you?" You know? This is a child. Now what they were trying to pull the hat over his eyes so he couldn't see. And they started beating him. And they had him against the wall. And my mother tried to protect him. So she got beaten up as well. And I looked, it all was a matter I don't know how long, but I looked around; I was walking to the curb and I wanted to see where my big brother was. Well my big brother had been wearing the *Lederhosen* so he had taken off. He wasn't anywhere around there. And I just, there was just something in me that said, "No!" And I started screaming and stomping my feet. And while I was doing it I realized that Mother had said that wasn't, we weren't allowed to do that. But I didn't care. It was just instinctive. And across the street there was a *Bierstube* [tavern] of some kind in there. And they heard this child crying and they came out and they chased these guys away. And that was, that's who saved basically our parents' lives. My father, I think, I believe, wound up in the hospital. They were bedridden for a while and of course the neighbors came and said, "You know, this can't go on. This is terrible." This was in 1938. It can't go on. It just started. And then one day my dad kind of disappeared. And I was very close to my father and I couldn't figure out what had happened. Mother wouldn't answer my questions. "Everything is fine." And then I wasn't going to school any more at all at that time. And then one evening there was a knock at the door. And my mother looked, and she gasped. And she opened the door, I remember, and my father came in. He was crying. He says, "I'm not going without you. I'm, not without you and without the kids." Here she had given him money to try to flee illegally, because he had already had these many brushes. And he basically come back. And so then she decided on another way. She tried to find out, and she met a couple who knew of someone who would smuggle you across the border. We had tried, we tried legally before that to go to, she had a brother in Argentina. And so we manned the lines, you know, for the passport. You had to literally wait day and night to get to the front. So they would take turns. My father made it in, but then they said the children needed their own passport. He said, "Well I can't do that." Well, my father, again, looked like a German Aryan and he spoke this Viennese. And so he got special permission to take the children through. And so he showed that to the man in the front of the door and we were allowed in. That doesn't mean we were at the passport office, because there were like four or five steps to go up. And, oh I forgot to tell you about the time they took us out of bed. But let's do this first.

GS: Okay.

EL: And so we had to wait and then people would, one person went out and they all pushed up. And finally my father put me on his shoulders so as, you know, not to be crushed in that group. And we went up and got the passports, went to the Consulate

immediately, and got there five minutes after twelve noon. And it was closed for lunch. And when they opened in the afternoon, they had had a cable from Argentina saying no more visas. That was the end of that. But, we had two, oh gosh, we had so many, *Kristallnacht* was one of them. *Kristallnacht*, I remember my mother and I walking the streets. And as you know, *Kristallnacht* comes, that was shortly after *Simchas Torah*. *Simchas Torah* is earlier. And in Europe the *shuls* were Orthodox, the women upstairs, the men downstairs. And my father said to me, he says, "Today," he said, "*Mamale*, today you're going downstairs with me." And he took me downstairs because I was little, and he put me on his shoulders and we were dancing with the Torah. I reached, I reached, I managed to touch the Torah. And there was such bliss, and such, you know, joy. And then of course *Kristallnacht*, I remember seeing them with the, the synagogue was burning and they were bringing, they all had these high boots. For a little child, all I ever saw were these boots. And they were basically burning it all out in the fire, the Torahs. And I couldn't understand this. Didn't they remember how nice it was at *Simchas Torah*? And why weren't they taught right? And that's basically perhaps why I'm so intent on teaching.

ML: You're not recording?

EL: Yes she is.

ML: Well...

EL: We'll stop for a minute. [tape off, then on] And then I remember us going by. And there was a bicycle that was all twisted out of shape and there was an ambulance. And my mother asked what had happened. There was blood there. And he, it was a Jewish boy that had been riding his bike and he got beaten up and taken away by the ambulance. I found out later that my father was worried as to what they would do to women and little girls. So he had taken us out of the house. He just made us go out of the house and we just walked the streets so as not to be recognized. And in the meantime, my older brother had just started the *Gymnasium*, in fourth grade. And they had Greek and Latin, first year. And my brother was very bright. And in the other building there was a young man. And he couldn't hack it. He couldn't do it. He had trouble, so my brother was tutoring him. That same *Kristallnacht* they rounded up, as they came around to rounding up the Jews, it was the father of that young man that knocked at our door with the Nazi, with the SS. And when he recognized my brother he said, "Oh no," he said, "This is a mistake. They shouldn't have been on the list with the Jews. Those aren't Jews." And so they left, and my father was shook up. Then towards the end they double-checked their list, and lo and behold our number was missing. So the guy I understand went back up and knocked at the door and said, "Why aren't you ready? Why aren't you down?" You know. And my father bluffed his way through as he'd done so many times and he says, "This is the second time you're up here. Why don't you leave decent people alone? And don't bother me. You were told that this is a mistake." And the guy profusely apologized and left. How many seven lives do you have? You know, one day he was stopped in the street and, by a *Hitlerjugend* child who wanted his ID, legitimation. And my father knew he couldn't do that, so he did

the opposite and he yelled at the kid, "You little *kausbub dreck* [dirty scoundrel]. Why aren't you in school? What are you doing bothering honest citizens?" Well the child was hurt in his rights as, you know, with his little uniform. He looked around and he saw an SS man. And he called him over. And he said, "This man refuses to give me my I.D." And my father said to himself, "This is it." And the SS man looked over and looked at my father and, "Ah," he says, "let him go. He's obviously not Jewish. He wouldn't have dared speak to you like that." So, that was, and one day he was, when they had to take the-- paint over the Star of David on the butcher shop. And his partner had, was a bearded man. Father was more modern. And he was up on the ladder, he was younger too, and he was, and these punks came by again. And they said, "Pepo," he says, "why don't you get off the ladder and let the *sal Jude* [dirty Jew] up there? We'll have some sport with him," totally assuming that my father was not. And my father says, "Ah," he says, "leave it be. I've got to earn a living." So, you know. But then one night they came in the middle of the night and I remember Mother waking me up. And usually it was still dark when I went to school, but that time it was just too dark. There was no glimmer of dawn or anything. And I said, you know, "You sure it's time for school?" And she helped me get dressed. That was unusual, because Mom didn't play games. I don't know in connection of what that was, but they pulled us out of the bed. These were Austrian police. It was very early. And a storm was howling and it was raining. And it actually nearly lifted me off the floor. So the policeman held me by the hand and he sort of protected me. And he was so upset. At first they were all so terribly upset that, "This is no weather to take a dog out much less little children." He took us to the police station and they took my father aside immediately. They opened the door and people were kind of like popping out. It was like a closet. And the SS man, he tried to push him in, you know, with his boot. And people yelled, "Somebody fainted in the back." So they tried to, they couldn't, finally pulled him out from the bottom, a person. And then they pushed everyone back in with the legs. And that time my mother went up to the, had gotten up to the desk. And she said, "I have a sick child here and we're decent people," and, "We've always paid our taxes," and, "Please let me go home." And she just kept pleading. And my mother wasn't the pleading type. And I always had a nervous stomach and I would throw up easily. And so, and when she kept say-, the situation was such, you know, that it was frightening. And to make a long story short, I threw up and it just came out projectile style on this guy's boots, this SS man that was sitting next to the table. And I thought that was sure we will get killed. And I started shaking. And somehow, maybe they thought I had something contagious, because the Germans were always afraid of contagious diseases. But they let my mother get home, I guess. I don't remember. But the next morning I woke up and it was just my brother and me. And she had gone back, and she'd gone to the police chief and basically to complain and request that they release her husband. And he was sitting at the desk. And behind his desk she told us there was a window. And he said, "Come and look." And there in the courtyard were men-- old men, young men, children, pregnant women, babies. He says, "They've been standing here all

night." He says, "I don't know what you have, how you managed to get out, but if you don't get home, you're liable to wind up there again." And she wouldn't go. She said, "I want to know what will happen to my husband." And he said, "I don't know. I have no more authority," he said. "But I can tell you this, whatever will happen will happen before noon. That's what they've told us. So if he isn't home by noon, they've probably shipped him." And he came home that day. So, we had a lot of close calls before my mother finally said, "Go on your own." And he didn't, and so she found a family where the woman knew of someone but she didn't have the money. And she said to my mother, "If you pay for us, then we can all go." And so that's what we did. And that was a frightening experience. I'm getting tired. I'm nowhere yet. I'm still in Austria.

GS: Can I ask you a question?

EL: Mmm hmm.

GS: When you said that your dad had you and your mother walk the streets of *Kristallnacht*, had he been warned that there was going to be a pogrom?

EL: He must have. I don't know. I asked my brother recently. I have a brother, the older brother is in New York. And he said to me, "Where did you go?" I was out of the hospital. I was in bed at the time. I said, "What do you mean?" Out of the clear blue sky to ask me where did I go. When? What? He said, "*Kristallnacht*." And I said, "We didn't go anywhere. We just walked." And then he told me that. But, maybe there was something on the radio. I don't know how they know. He must have known something.

GS: Okay, so you were saying that your family then decided to leave.

EL: Mmm hmm. And...

GS: Do you want to take a rest?

EL: Well, I guess my husband will be tired. It's not getting any better. I don't, I'm not in the best of health. And it brings back too many memories.

GS: Mmm hmm.

EL: Yeah, we fled over the border and we went at first to somewhere in Germany, in a flea-bitten motel. And I mentioned how clean my mother was. And the rats were jumping. They had eaten the bread we had, so my father, the beds had bed bugs, and we were bitten. I didn't want to be covered. Everything was dirty. I slept with Mom. The beds were like this. The feet of the beds were together and the headboards on opposite sides. And in order to save the bread my father had somehow managed to hang things over the rafters, the *Dauerwurst* sausage and the bread. So the rats jumped all night. And one of them landed on my brother. And he shrieked. And it was absolutely terrifying. I don't know how long we stayed there, but eventually we drove into the woods. And we came to a little station that the German guard, the border guard, was bribed. But then, later on we found out it was a means of milking you of your last penny. They said that the people who were supposed to guide us over the border did not come. And we waited and we got very edgy. They said, "Well, we know of someone else that will take you across but it will cost you all over again." So Mother paid again and within 10 seconds the guy was there. And they

took us past the, they took us to a, fields again. You take this child who is from an immaculate, clean house who wasn't allowed to do anything, and through the barbed wire. And it was dark. It was pitch black. There was no moon. And so I couldn't see. And I was little. I kept falling behind. And when I-- a couple times I got stuck on the barbed wire. I was afraid they would take off and I would be left there. And then one of the smugglers came back and just took me by the hand. But you stepped in dung and everything. And just as we got to the, we saw the lights of the Belgian house, the baby started-- that other couple had a baby-- it started crying. And he came back and he got mad with her so she sat down in the mud and breast fed. It was an experience for me, too. And then we kept being stopped. More money, you know. They put us in a garage and, no, it was a barn. The cows were frightening to me. They were so big. And then a car pulled up. Other people from other smugglers came. And then they said, "The cars are here." I guess they had enough money. "No talk. Let's go." Well, kids, you know, how we were first. We went in the back of the car. And people kept coming in. And our parents aren't there. And I said to Leo, I said, "Mom and Dad aren't here." He says, "Shhh! The guy said shhh!" And he sticks his nose in the car, one of these smugglers, and says, "Are you full?" And the driver says, "Yes." And he says, "Okay, let's go." And I said, "No!" I started screaming. And finally my brother got scared and he started acting up. What happened? So they went and double checked. And my mother had bought us all new clothes for the trip. And my father's coat had gotten caught on a rusted nail and he didn't want to tear it. So they were trying to loosen that up. So then they went, the guy went back in the barn and he says, "Either you come or," you know. So he tore the coat. And we took off. But the whole thing was a nightmare.

GS: Was this an, this was prearranged before you left Vienna?

EL: Yes. They were, supposedly the smugglers had been paid. And when we ran out, when everyone ran out of money and people refused to pay-- they needed money for gasoline or the car was broken up-- then we were dumped in a big, I don't know what that was, a humongous room where everybody wound up. The next day we took off in buses. And that's how we landed in Antwerp.

GS: Did the, were you aware of any help from the Jewish community or community council in Antwerp?

EL: Yes. Yeah, they helped. As a matter of fact, they had a place where they took children in the afternoon. And my mother wanted me to go, because you got a little cocoa and a piece of cake. We were spoiled. Food was, hunger was not yet a question. And I begged that we didn't want to be separated from my parents. So even though my brother

went in, I refused to go. But they helped. They found us a place and they were nice, yeah. I'll let you go through the questions. Otherwise it takes too long.

GS: No, no. I would appreciate you telling me the experiences. That's the important part here. Did you have something you wanted to...

EL: Nnn nnn [negative].

GS: Did they provide any help to your family with lodging? Food?

EL: I don't know. I was too young. We did find a place, I remember. It was one room, four flight of stairs up, in the Jewish Quarter in Antwerp, literally on the wrong side of the tracks. The train tracks were there. The *diamontiers* were on this wrong side, and this was the poor Jewish population. My brother had an ear infection. We had eat, drink, everything. And he just screamed the whole night. My father held his ear. And one day we tried to light Hanukkah candles. We had no furniture, so we had orange crates and we put Hanukkah candles on the window. The curtain caught fire. My father jumped, pulled everything down. But that was before Hitler had invaded, he took a span there.

GS: Oh, before he invaded Ger-...

EL: Belgium.

GS: Belgium. So, did you then leave for Belgium like in December in 1939?

EL: No, it would be...

GS: Or, I mean 1938?

EL: '38, somewhere around there. My first report card-- we didn't right away go to school, because we stayed, you know, Mother didn't register us, but after a while I was registered-- and the first date is March 7, 1939. So, yeah, it was either the end of '38 or beginning of '39 that we left.

GS: Mmm hmm, and what type of school did you attend?

EL: In Antwerp?

GS: In Antwerp.

EL: Just a regular girls' school.

GS: Was it a Jewish school?

EL: No, no.

GS: A regular...

EL: A regular school, yeah.

GS: School.

EL: Yeah, she tried to enlist both my brother and me at the *cheder*, I remember, for a while. And that wasn't a pleasant experience. It wasn't like the thing in Austria. All

they did was translate from the Hebrew. And at my age they were ahead of me because I hadn't had school. Of course I had been about a year without school, so.

GS: Are you aware, was your family aware of experiences of Jews in other parts of Europe?

EL: I would assume so.

GS: Did they get any news with...

EL: I don't know exactly. They knew what was going on in Austria. We had contact.

GS: When you were in Austria, did your father have contact with Jews outside?

EL: My family, we used to go. As I said, I was a sheltered child. Yeah, I would imagine with Jews in the store, with Jews in the synagogue.

GS: Okay, I meant in other countries. In...

EL: Oh.

GS: They had some...

EL: No. My mother was in contact with her father who at 83 she said didn't have a gray hair. And...

GS: And he was in Poland?

EL: In Poland, where she had sisters and brothers who married there. And she had one brother in Argentina.

GS: Can you tell me what happened in Belgium with your family? Did they try and make plans to leave? Were they, did they feel secure there for a while?

EL: Well, a while. Then the Germans came. We tried to flee to southern France. And they bombed our train, destroyed our train and blew the bridge up ahead of us. And if you don't think that was a scary experience! My father took me between the tracks. You had to go down a tunnel. And my mother had packed a feather bed. Of course, what she packed is what you, you know, what is convenient, food and

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

EL: Yeah, and my father took this large bundle, and me, by the hand. My mother, you know, they were afraid to leave the train. And of course the platform was full of blood, and people, you know, [unclear] and like that. [unclear] stretchers. And he took me down in this tunnel, and he put me in a dark corner with this bundle, with the ammunition. "Not, don't let anybody take it." And I stood there. And my thought, besides being petrified, was, if somebody came and took the bundle, how was I going to stop it? And there was constant running, you know, people running. And there was a Belgian, I don't know how would you call, a small group of Belgian soldiers. They weren't stopped, in step. And they marched through that tunnel. And only the double-take, and looked at me, and broke line, and came over and gave me something. He said, "Here, kid," and ran back. And I was just, you know, I was in semi-shock. I suppose I just stood there. Well eventually once they had the bridge blown up, they stopped bombing the train. And then Father came and got me. And we went back. We had to wait, sit in the train for a while. And he said to me, "What have you got?" The man had given me a bar of chocolate, which was a gift. And, you know, I just had held on enough. And my brother says, "Do you want it?" And I said, "No." And so he and Mother ate it. But I was in such, you know, I didn't even realize what. And I always wondered about that man, because you know, what happened to him, and why he had done that. But then we were, you know, in those places where they have refugees, the classic, you know. I don't know how many people were. Everybody, we prayed. They had the rosaries. And we slept on straw. There were 200 people a night, enough were there. And we slept on the ground, on the floor. And I was sleeping on one side next to my mother. And there was a teenager who was sleeping like this. But there wasn't enough room, so when we went to sleep he curled his knees up against his chest. At night he stretched out, and I went flying. So, and then we went back to Antwerp. Of course we had to be back. And at that time Mother had found a job with the Jewish milkman who knew how to add in his head but not how to write. He had a thriving business, and she kept his books for him. Sort of interesting.

GS: Did your father have a job there?

EL: No. He wasn't allowed to, and Mother just didn't want to rock the boat. And I understand, I think we got a little bit of help, financial help, from the Jewish organizations. And we got what she did. Then of course things got a little nastier. We were deported in, oh what year was that--- in January of 1941. We were sent to, well we were in Waterschei, W-A-T-E-R-S-C-H-E-I, which was a burned-out coal mine region in Limburg, Belgium, next to the German border. And...

GS: Were you all together there?

EL: Yes, as a family. They dropped us off. They told a few people who lived there that these were criminals, and not to mingle with them or approach them or anyway. A neighbor did, and he said, "I don't believe what they said." He says, "I'm willing to

believe that the men have done something, and maybe the women. But there are too many little children here. They can't be criminals." So some people thought for themselves. There was no food. As I said, my mother eventually registered us to the school there. It was a Catholic school. And we weren't supposed to let anyone know that we weren't Catholic because the whole village, Belgium is a Catholic country. So, there we had a little bit of soup. Then the neighbor told us there was some grass growing alongside of the railroad tracks that was edible. But I didn't want to eat that. That's the first place where I really knew what hunger meant. You know, day after day. And then my father decided to go down in the coal mines, because even though we had ration stamps they wouldn't sell us bread or anything on the ration stamps. And so he went down, but he couldn't because they were burned out. It was so low there was no air to breathe. But coal miners very quickly get that black line around the eyes, the coal dust. And so when he came up he looked like a miner. He'd been down there one or two days. So they would sell him-- and then it was called a loaf of bread. It was more sawdust than there was bread. One fourth, the ration was one quarter of that a day. My mother would cut it in half and leave my brother and my half. She would give my father his quarter. And from her fourth she would subsidize my brother and me. So one night we went to bed and she came and kissed us goodnight. And my brother said, "I'm hungry." And she went down and cut a slice of bread for him. And I cried half the night because half of that slice of bread was mine. I was hungry too, but I was going to be a, you know, a good girl, and be reasonable and not ask because we didn't have anything. So then ultimately, surprisingly, they decided, the Germans decided to let us go in the month of June. There has been some speculation of what that was all about nowadays. And some say the concentration camps weren't really ready. Others say this was the trial run to see, because Hitler always pushed, he always tried to see what the reaction of the rest of the world was, whether the countries would be willing to give up the people. And so he found out that they did. But he had, he wasn't ready for mass killing at that early date. That was in 1941, right?

GS: Mmm hmm.

EL: So, they released the children, the women and children. And they sent my father to forced labor. Then my mother found out that somehow she could free my father. And I never knew how she found that out. But, that we had to leave Antwerp. He wasn't allowed back in Antwerp. So she went, she got us a residence in Brussels. And she freed, well we moved, and then my father came. Somewhere down the line there my baby brother was conceived and he was born in March of '42. He was born a preemie at seven months and of course, there was a curfew already and we already had to wear the star. So, she wouldn't leave him in an incubator. He weighed about a pound-and-a-half. She took him home. He was like a little red crab, the ugliest thing in the world. And nobody thought he would live. So when he was three months he had enough weight for survival and he was circumcised. And a week later my father got his papers to go to work. And it was in '42 Mom said, "Go into hiding." And he said, "No, if I go, you and the children will be safe."

No one knew, of course, what was going on, till they shipped him first to France to work. Maybe he was on a Siegfried line or something like that. And then from there they shipped him to Auschwitz. And of course that was the end of him.

GS: Did you have any contact with him once he left?

EL: No. I have one paper that says that he was actually transferred back to the, to Belgium, to the Belgium, you know, what they, which one was it? Okay, in, deported to northern France for the Julius Berger Company[1]. And, until October 17, 1942. He's mentioned on the list of Jewish prisoners coming from Belgium arriving in Auschwitz. And then this number, I guess. And that's it, in '42. Transferred to the hospital in Auschwitz which basically meant that was the end of him, in December of '42. So he wasn't there very long before he died.

GS: How was your family able to support itself when you all returned to Belgium?

EL: When my father was...

GS: To Brussels.

EL: When my father was taken, I don't know before that what happened. My mother used to sell, we were in semi-hiding, she used to sell the sheets off the bed. I kept wondering how come people were buying sheets. I didn't realize that this was charity. I was too young. You know, there were Jews who still had money to help the helpless. You know, so whatever you wanted to sell, they bought. I don't know much about that. When my father was taken she was left with, as I said, three kids, the baby, and the equivalent of 60 cents. We had a neighbor Madame Shpieler [phonetic], a Jewish family we used to stay in contact. She had sent four teenage children to forced labor just to go to work. She didn't know it was a concentration camp. Who knew at the time. She was, she knew a farmer who was selling eggs on the black market. And so she would convince him to give us eggs on account. And then she went to the other Jews and told them to buy the eggs from Mother. And so we would make, you know, if it was 50 francs, 60. We'd pay him the extra and so we made some money. We survived, not very well, but you know.

GS: And this was a Jewish woman.

EL: Yes. And then of course later on we had Madame Hoolmann[2], that's after we were in that house where we lived, in Brussels. There were three Jewish families. And across the street there was a young couple living in the basement who hadn't been married-- now I'm talking 1942, in Catholic Belgium; that was a big no-no; it's not like now-- and the girl got pregnant. And she knew that upstairs Jews had stored furniture and had left for Southern France, which was all they could find. And she called the Nazis. And the Germans said, "If you," that there was furniture there, I guess. And she watched the furniture go by.

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[1]During World War II the Julius Berger Company worked on construction projects Hitler had started in 1933 to ease unemployment. (http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/bilfinger-berger-ag-history/ Accessed September 21, 2021)

[2]Elizabeth Hoolmann, designated Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem in 1996. (www.yadvashem.org)

And she saw a crib. And she told them, "If you give me the crib for my baby, I will tell you where there are Jews." She, okay, well the family that lived underneath us saw the truck pull up. A truck with nothing. It was a warehouse district. It was no big deal, but they were German soldiers out, and so they scampered. The second couple, he was a husky young man and he used to wear overalls like the people around him. He was coming towards the building. At that time the guy had already stationed a soldier in front of the door so nobody could get out. But he didn't run. He went in. He said, "Hello! How are you?" And he went right past the soldier, took his family, locked them in the attic, locked the door with the furniture and things, and he walked back out, "Hi!" again, you know. And they let him go. They were young soldiers. Nobody told us. So when they barged into our door, I had scarlet fever. And the doctor who stayed, there was a Jewish doctor volunteered, he said, "If you see the Nazis, will you spray some of that disinfectant around?" They are petrified of scarlet fever. They won't go past the threshold. We didn't know. So there was none of that on the floor. My brother had eaten something, he had eaten what he could find, and he had contracted hepatitis, yellow jaundice. He was yellow from head to toe. My scarlet fever had settled on the, I was just a tyke. I was 12 years old, but I had my period. And I had my period all the time, without stopping. You know. And I was anemic too. I mean, nothing to eat so. And now, not like now that you have the protection, you know, pads, you go out and you buy a pad and you throw it away. So, yeah, and the baby was eight months old. So the baby had just pulled himself up at the door and this guy barged in. And he came in there and the baby fell and started crying. And he picked him up and calmed him down. And to this day I'm going to believe that this was just a *mensch*, a human being enrolled in the army and collecting furniture. He wasn't one of those people collectors, you know? And he started asking questions. And he said, "Where are the other people?" And my mother said, "I don't know." And he said, "You Jews, you never know anything, do you?" And of course my mother was shaking and says, "Look," she says, "I have no contact with these people because we are pro-Germans. My father, my husband went to work for the Germans." Well there was in France, in order to lure people, they would send a check. It was minimal, but we got some money and she had the stubs. So she showed this man the stubs that had come in. She said, "See, my husband is a volunteer. He works for the Germans." Did he believe her? I don't know. Did he not want to take us? I don't know. Whatever happened, he said, "Look," he said, "If that's the truth," he says, "you have nothing to worry about. Calm down." He calmed her down. He said, "I'm going to call, and I will be back to verify. I will be back within a half hour." He gave us a half hour to get out of there. So my mother packed up two sick children and one baby. We were afraid, we went, looked through the door. Because the neighbors had seen the truck. They'd known what happened. She had a big door where she used to have a horse and buggy. And she pulled us in. And my mother cried and kissed her hands. And I was so shocked. My mother kissing somebody's hands? And she said, "I couldn't," she was more talking to herself than to us. She says, "I just couldn't let them take you. I just couldn't." She says, "But

there's nothing I can do for you, because what's happening to you is a punishment from God for having killed Jesus Christ. And for the rest of all eternity you will have to roam the earth." And here's this little kid who's had no contact, like you asked me, with Christians, other than the school. But school kids don't discuss these things. A little girl. And, so what in the world is she talking about, you know? That has always shocked me, and I do tell that in class. And she sent her son out and he said, "The coast is clear," and so we left. But we had nowhere to go. And so we sat in this little square around there and we sat down and we sat. And every time a car went, we heard a car, we froze. But luckily there weren't that many cars in that time. Then it got dark and we didn't know where to go. So Mother remembered Frau Hoolmann who was a German woman, that she had helped Jews before. And she had a Jewish girl that she was hiding with her. So she sent my oldest brother to see whether she could do something. And the woman never hesitated. She said, "Come on up." She took the mattress off her bed and put it on the floor for me and my mother. She and the girl slept on the box springs. She had a tiny little apartment, a third-floor walkup. She emptied the drawer for the baby, but there was nowhere for my brother. So she sent him to the local priest, at the church, who was known to work with the underground. And I also just found out lately that when he went to the door the priest told him, "It's against the law. I can't let you in. But sometimes bums sleep up in the back. The back door is always open." So my brother knew what to do.

And then ultimately Madame Hoolmann found us the place where we hid for the rest of the war. And it was, a young couple lived there and he used to deliver coal. And he used the room that we were having upstairs when he would steal coal. It was open coal. He would swipe it and sell it on the black market. So naturally he didn't want anyone there. So he said to her, "These people look Jewish to me." He says, "They're not going to be here very long." To which she said, "Look, I am German. And if something happens to them, you're next." He never thought twice that if she's harbored Jews she was really a traitor. But she frightened him because they were taking, you know, Belgians. They took anything they could. So, he left us alone.

Then what we did, Mother and I knit for people and she would, and I would be allowed out during lunch hour, and act like a little girl coming to and from school. And I used to go to the flea market and buy used sweaters. And then we would take them home and wash, unravel and wash the wool, and buy some dye, you know, and make sweaters. Because there was no other wool. And Madame Hoolmann used to wind up with, find this, once she said that one of her customers insisted on being measured, because she would say is it exactly. And when I went there, it was Nazi soldiers. And the girl was with them. And she had all kinds of questions. And I was evasive. I measured her for fit, and I went back and I told that to Madame Hoolmann. And she said, "You don't go any more." But so basically, and then towards the end we had, the underground would come and give us some food. And they took my brother. They insisted that my mother tell what would happen to children, to young girls, if they get taken into the camps. And that must have been the

hardest thing my mother did. And she asked me whether I wanted to go with them, into hiding, or stay with her. And I knew if I left she wasn't going to make any more until the end. Even though I was scared I said, "No, I'm staying with you." And the person was frustrated about that. At four o'clock in the morning. We did a lot of work for the underground. And then I had a meeting place where they take the sweaters. And the guy says to me, "Doesn't your mother ever tell you to sleep?" It was so preposterous! I mean there wasn't a normal time of the year. We had to do that. Anyhow...

GS: In the-- was this the Jewish underground or was it...

EL: Yes. Yeah.

GS: And were you aware of the other underground? And was there any communication?

EL: Only the ones who came to the house. They actually came to where we were hiding.

GS: This is the non-Jewish underground?

EL: I think they were Jewish. I...

GS: Oh.

EL: I'm pretty sure. No, that's about all the contact we had, that and Madame Hoolmann.

GS: And she had been born in Germany but she had moved...

EL: She was a German citizen in service in Belgium. When the Germans, I don't know how that went. Somewhere down the line at the beginning of either the invasion of Belgium or whatever, her husband was taken prisoner, as a German citizen, and sent to France, to a camp, where he died of typhoid fever. She could have very easily have turned bitter and said, "I'm getting even," right? "My husband didn't do anything." But that wasn't Frau Hoolmann. She said, "No, two wrongs don't make a right." She helped as much as she could. She didn't, she-- I've been trying to get her into the Holocaust Museum. It takes

forever to get through the papers through Yad Vashem. She is deserving if anyone is, you know?

GS: Can you spell her name for us?

EL: Sure. H-, Elizabeth H-O-O-L-M-A-N, Hoolmann.[3]

GS: Thank you.

EL: Yeah.

GS: Okay. So, where did you and your mother go? You said, am I to understand that your mother explained to you what happens to girls in the camps?

EL: Yes.

GS: And you decided to stay with your mother?

EL: Yes.

GS: And where was this that you stayed?

EL: That was where Frau Hoolmann had put us, basically.

GS: Okay. And were you there till the end of the war then?

EL: Yes.

GS: I see. And your brother?

EL: My brother was with us for a while, then he was with the underground. I don't exactly know where. But they told my mother he was in a home for *enfants débiles*, which is children who are undernourished. There was a lot of that went on. If you've seen the film about Belgian children, this one, there's a video on this too, but in reality he was with the underground. He was there for a while and then he was blowing up bridges. She had no idea. She thought he was safe.

GS: I see.

EL: Yeah. He was a teenager. He required an identity card. He had a false identity card that they'd given him. I didn't. I was too young, so I managed to get around. I got caught in a *rafle* [roundup] once in the flea market. And that was a frightening experience. Because, you know, in the, and usually the flea market was where the partisans used to meet. And it had so many of these small little streets that and the vendors were sympathizers of the underground. So if the Germans arrived you had, "*Voilà les Boches, les Boches sont la.*"[4] And everybody disappeared. But that day I was bargaining for a better price, and while I was buying then I got caught. Ah, this wasn't easy. So I, you calm down. You've got guts as a child. I was flirting with the soldiers. And he scolded me in German to go home and not dillydally after school. And these were just teenagers themselves, these young soldiers. And then at the end of the line were the Nazis. They were looking for something and were kicking me and just pushing me through, shoving me in the back. And I just, shaking on my legs. And I was shaking and I was afraid. I never told my mother I

[3]Spelled Hoolmann on Yad Vashem listing. yadvashem.org

[4]The Germans, the Germans are here. *Boches* was a contemptuous term to refer to the Germans.

got caught because I was afraid she wouldn't let me go. And if I couldn't go to the flea market we couldn't eat. So...

GS: Did you have contact with other children at all?

EL: No, there was no contact with anyone.

GS: Did you notice a difference between life in Brussels and in Antwerp? The attitude toward the Jews and the type of...

EL: I don't know. My life wasn't a normal life. In Antwerp I was strictly in a Jewish Quarter, before the war was, you know, really got bad. But we only played with other Jewish children. There was one, two little boys who were not Jewish, who lived in the streets. And nobody would play with them. And I went over one day. And I did speak to them. And I couldn't see anything wrong with them. And my brother blabbed. Children will be children. He told my dad. And I got scolded. I thought this was totally legal, because my father would never, my mother was the, you know, the disciplinarian. My father was the gentle thing.

GS: Do you remember hearing any news about the mass murder of the Jews in Europe?

EL: Yes. When we were, the last section of the hiding we knew. We knew.

GS: How did you find out?

EL: Madame Hoolmann, Mother. I don't know. I don't know how it came to, but it was told. People would come back, people even, they had the, Malines was the gathering place where they gathered the Jews up in Belgium, in Brussels. And some would jump off the trains.

GS: Oh.

EL: They had the people on top of the roof, the soldiers were shooting in all the trains. And the underground probably brought us the news. That must have been it, that, you know, they would try to sabotage the trains. But when they left, you know, some people would jump the trains. Some would die, been shot, some made it.

GS: Were you familiar with Breendonk?

EL: It sounds familiar.

GS: It's outside of Brussels.

EL: Breendonk.

GS: It was a concentration camp or gathering center.

EL: Yeah, and don't forget I was still a child...

GS: Yeah, I just wondered if you had.

EL: Breendonk sounds familiar. Malines was the most common, because it was my cousin which we tried to find the last thing in Belgium. In Austria [unclear] David. In Austria you buy apartments, like condos here. And they had just saved up and bought an apartment. He was a Czech citizen. Somebody wanted the apartment and accused her husband of having cursed the Führer. So they imprisoned him. But that was very early, in '38. They couldn't, since he was a Czech citizen, they deported him to Czechoslovakia.

Eventually he died in the camps, too. She-- the man then went into the building and threw all her furniture out the window and chased her out. So she went and tried to prove that her husband hadn't said anything. It was really just that the guy wanted the apartment. And it didn't do her any good. So then she went to France. I don't know why she wound up in France, but she did. And the last news we had from her is what that she was putting the child in a convent. And so after the war we were, we knew that she had been taken. We were trying to trace, at least see if the child had survived. But she had been shipped to Auschwitz, the whole extended family, everyone is gone. Everything in Austria, everything in Poland, everywhere everyone was, you know, they all...

GS: The uncle that was sent to Czechoslovakia, do you know what camp he was in?

EL: No, he came back. He came back but he was racked with TB and he didn't make it for very long.

GS: Oh, you mean after liberation...

EL: Yes.

GS: He came back.

EL: He came back to Austria I think he went.

GS: What was the sense of your mother and other, and people in the underground about believing the reports of the mass deportation and murder of the Jews?

EL: I think it was believed. From my mother was willing to believe, yeah. And from our point of view, I remember that all-- maybe not in all the gory details, the Mengeles we didn't know about, that kind of stuff, but-- that they killed Jews and that, yeah. She never doubted it. That's not like the Eastern European Jews who did doubt until 1944, Elie Wiesel lived in, I mean, relative, you know, freedom. And so naturally they didn't want to believe. But we knew. We knew. Because we had been persecuted, because we had already been running for, you know, we had been beaten in Germany. And but see also when we came to Antwerp, the Belgian Jews wouldn't believe us. They would say, "You had to have done something." And my mother said, "No, we didn't do anything." "Well, nobody picks on people if they don't do anything. Maybe you didn't pay your taxes on time. You must have done something." So, you know? People just weren't willing to accept that things like that could happen. But having been already, you know, having seen the beating, now seeing the innocent being killed, the girl that was on, saved on the *Kindertransport*, they came for, her father was older. So in-- he was Russian descent. In World War I he had fought as a Russian soldier against the Germans. They came to get him one night and

brought the mother a box of ashes the next day and asked her to pay for it. They tortured him all night and they cremated him. So, we knew things could happen.

GS: Now, was this a relative?

EL: Yes.

GS: The one they'd sent the...

EL: That was, yeah.

GS: And were you in contact with her at all? Had...

EL: Yeah. As a matter of fact, he was a cobbler, and he used to, when we fled illegally we didn't take anything with us. And so he would take off the heel of the shoe and put our jewelry in it and then send a letter and say, "Uncle Tsiring [phonetic] lived with Tante, you know, Heel. (Uncle Ring lives with Aunt Heel.)" So then he would send us a bunch of old shoes which nobody looked at and, you know, passed customs and my mother would evidently take the heel off and find the rings, which she would exchange and sell and have some money to, you know, to buy bread or whatever.

GS: And how long did the correspondence last?

EL: That was early. That was very early in Antwerp, you know, shortly after we had left. Because as I said, he was taken one day and disappeared the next.

GS: Can you tell me about the liberation?

EL: Well, the liberation was, several stories in the liberation. First of all…

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

EL: I don't remember too much about the liberation other than the fact that there was a certain feeling of, it's over, you know? And we used to go, the troops were, there was a main road about two blocks from where we lived. And like everyone else we would stand there and wave. Then there was the Battle of the Bulge. Somehow we heard of that. And then was the fright of, it wasn't over. Right? They came to Belgium all over again. So that was very scary. Then at the liberation they interned Madame Hoolmann, and my mother ran-- as a German-- my mother ran her legs off to get her freed, which we did, eventually. We stayed friends with her for a long time. And let's see, and then there was little me trying to find my path. They posted lists on all the synagogues in Brussels. There were about three or four which went all the extremes of different styles, mix. And one was, the biggest one was on the *Hollandische Shul* that was next to the Palais de Justice [courthouse] beyond the flea market, which is all up, up, up, uphill. I didn't know it, but I had TB at the time. And it was hard for me but I walked it, practically daily, because I was convinced that my father was coming back. That, otherwise it wasn't over. He had to be back. And the lists started dwindling. You know, they got smaller and eventually there were only three or four names and they would stay on for the week and then big horror stories started, the true horror stories. We started to become aware of how they had gassed people, how they, the death marches and all of that. And then how many had died, the scope, the actual scope of it all. And I started being a little uncomfortable, but I still didn't want to believe. And then one day I came home and I was exhausted. My father had taught himself how to write, so did my mother. At that time, you know, when they were children in Poland you didn't send them to the schools. You know they were in, they went to Hebrew school but not. So he had a very peculiar handwriting all its own. And there was a postcard in the mailbox. And it said, "Dad is in *lazarett*, hospital." And it looked like my father's handwriting. And I absolutely fell apart. And I ran up flights, it was one or two flights of stairs, I don't remember. And I was hysterically crying. And Mother came to the door and said, "What's the matter? What's the matter?" All I could say is, "Daddy! Daddy!" And I handed her the postcard. And she waited till I was a little calmed down. She says, "Honey, it's not your dad. Look." And it was the end of the world. It literally was the end of the, it wasn't [weeping; pause]. Fifty years later, you still can't forget. I didn't want to live after that. It wasn't worth it any more. But, but you continue. You make yourself a reason, a rationale for living to begin again. Because, my dad and I were very close. I guess I scared the daylight out of my mother. I came home one day, she handed me a set of dishes. She said, "Drop them." And I knew my mother. If you spilled a glass of water it was the end of the world. So I said, "What?" She said, "Drop them." I said, "Why should I drop? I'll break the dishes." She said, "Someone told me you will feel better." So I got ready to drop them. But I just lied down with my face against the wall and I wouldn't eat, I wouldn't do anything. I just didn't want to live. There was no sense. I mean if that, things like that could

happen, you know? But then, and I was sick, too, of course. I mean, you'd say, well, I felt very guilty about that, for a long time. And then I started reading Elie Wiesel. I had him as my master's thesis in French. My son, I have a son who's named after my father who died in Auschwitz, who is a rabbi. And I was debating which French author to pick for my master's thesis because I was into languages at that time. And he said, "Pick Elie Wiesel, because Elie Wiesel writes in French." I said, "Well he's not a classic French writer." He says, "Well, try. What have you got to lose?" In West Virginia, I never thought for one minute they would accept it. They accepted him. I wrote. When I went through his life and I spoke of the liberation of Jews on, I thought, someone's gonna kick, one of my, you know, of my committee is not going to call this the liberation. They let that pass. There was sort of, I guess in a sense intimidated by the fact that I was a survivor as well. But he, Elie Wiesel himself, had a moment where, you know, a death wish. And it is quite common. Primo Levi killed himself. But, of course he went through a lot more than I did. But I felt guilty about it. I felt a person should be strong in spite of everything. But I realize now that it was natural, it was normal. Now they have trauma centers and this center and that center. Who cared about us? We were kids. We just struggled through as best we could when we got out of the Nazi horror. That's about it.

GS: So when did you come to the United States? How did that come about?

EL: Oh my. Does he want that on the paper? I don't know. He has all kinds of crazy stories. The last question has just been asked how did I come to the United States. Hoo! No, I'm just paranoid because...

ML: What is it?

EL: It's a string.

ML: A loose string. Oh, after the adventure of the [unclear].

GS: Well, how did you come to the United States?

EL: Yeah, how did, we came to the United States because my husband was an American citizen. I married an American citizen and they wouldn't, I came to the United States via a private bill in Congress, because of my health background and because the quota was closed. And even though he is a native American, the Americans wouldn't allow me into the country. And so I kept renewing his visa in Belgium even though I was not a Belgian citizen. And the officer in the foreign police station where I went said to me, "You give me one reason why we shouldn't stamp his passport and let him stay even though you're not a citizen, and he is a native and they won't let you go." And I said, "Well, you know, we Belgians, we have a heart, unlike they." And he looked at me and said, [unclear].

We had to be out by the end of February. We were married February 26. So once we were married then, he had to be out by the end of February.[5]

ML: It was a break from pretty nice work then. Possibly we could have stayed then.

EL: Yeah, he had some connection. He got a working permit and he could have stayed. And then they finally okayed the bill and we were no longer anxious. I was no longer anxious. We had an apartment at that time, a house. And the Consul said that if I were to go, if there were a war, they would take him and I wouldn't be allowed to come. So we went.

GS: And what brought your husband to Belgium?

ML: [unclear] asked about it.

EL: You decide.

ML: [laughs] What version?

EL: Well, no, come on. What's wrong with the truth?

ML: Well I guess, but, well that's cute.

EL: Okay. I was a sickly child after the war. My doctor gave me a foster parent in the United States. Meet my foster parent. He came out of the army and decided...

ML: Navy.

EL: Out of the Navy, and decided to sign up for foster parent. He paid-- I don't know if you want this on tape-- he paid twice as much as what I got, what my mother got. She had a foster parent for me and one for my baby brother. And we got exactly half of what the foster parents in the United States gave. Whatever was sent came direct. If he would say, "It's raining in New York," New York was crossed out. They didn't let me have any direct knowledge as to where that foster parent lived. Before he was my foster parent I had a couple or a school. They sent me a hair brush and a comb and a mirror. For me who had never had anything, this was very pretty, probably something from the Five and Dime, but it was, you know, it was new. It wasn't somebody's handout. And I wanted to write a thank you note but I didn't know where to write. So I went to the doctor and I asked him where I could write the thank you note to. He was a Jewish doctor and he was already annoyed at the fact, too, that there was no contact. And he said, "Here is the address of the foster parents plan in the United States. And ask them." So I did. And someone rang the doorbell, and from Foster Parents Plan Organization in Belgium, who by the way had Christmas parties and the Christian children got a lot but the Jewish children did not. And he threatened my mother that if I ever tried to contact anyone, he would cut us off. So we didn't. And then his sister decided to send some clothes, and a package came. And

[5]Mrs. Levy's personal history form lists that she was married February 26, 1956 and emigrated to the United States in 1956.

normally, as I said, addresses were-- but this time someone got lazy. Rather than tearing off the old label, they had pasted another label over it. And little old me...

ML: [chuckling]

EL: With my normal curiosity had peeled that off and found the other label. Still, we needed the money, so I was afraid to write. I had a Jewish girlfriend. I said, "Rosa," she knew me, you know, "Why don't we send a card?" Was it, maybe it was Pesach, I don't know. "I will write the card. He will recognize my handwriting," because I had to write every month. I'll give you my number. 834 was my foster parent number, or foster child number, whatever. Or was it yours? Mine was longer, whatever.

ML: Whatever.

EL: And he will know. Well he didn't. He, his address was seven, what was it?

ML: 68.

EL: 768 Bushwick. But you know, European sevens go like this with a cross. And what we have sevens here, they have one. So, he wrote back to her, and said, "I don't know how you got my address, but since you're in Brussels you must have something to do with Edith." You know. So I wrote back to him, then, and explained the situation, and said, "Keep on writing through the foster parents and don't let on we know each other." And that's how he started, and then he came three times, till he got his bundle. My girlfriend in the meantime decided to double-cross me, her motive, because in America the streets run with gold. And she wrote behind my back. But instead of writing to 768 Bushwick Avenue, she wrote to 168 Bushwick Avenue. The letter came back. She had the nerve to confront me, and accuse me of giving her the wrong address! I said, "You had no business writing to him in the first place!" So, that's how we met. And I wasn't much with the, I used to wake up at night and shake, like a shake, sometimes to the point of throwing up, you know? And we used to sit up and play cards. Do you remember all this? And then towards the end, you know, it was enough. I'd wake up with the nightmares and just touch him. And we were lying there. And that's how I would calm down. I was quite a mess after the war. But I was a sensitive child. I'm still too sensitive for my own good. And it hit me hard. So, the scars remain, you know? And I can't imagine people who have gone through the camps themselves, what their nightmares are. But you couldn't afford to be soft there. I have this on tape. I don't know if I mentioned to you and described again. You get tough. You get tough in the situation if you have no choice. But, there is the aftermath. The more you have to work, you know, it balances out in the long run. The tougher you have to be, the more it hits you afterwards.

ML: [unclear].

EL: Oh, well I didn't mention that. You asked me how we were making for a living? I can't remember all of that. That was before we were denounced. My brother and I would go on the streets and take, pick up cigarette butts. Left over. And we had a cousin, Gayzer [phonetic]. He had friends who were German soldiers. And he felt that the best hiding place was among the enemy so to speak. But they were anti-Na-, they were just

soldiers and they didn't like Hitler. And they were plotting against him as a matter of fact. He used to sell the cigarettes. He would give us a little machine, I remember. We would open the butts and take this, the tobacco out. And how we didn't die of every disease in the world, I don't know. But he would bring us tobacco paper and we would roll cigarettes. And then he would sell those cigarettes, with what amount of tar in them since they were the butts.

ML: To the German soldiers.

EL: To the German soldiers. So one day he came and he told my mother that one of his best friends had been captured, had been taken in by the Nazis. Because they were plotting against Hitler. He also knew a lot of people in the country, which we didn't. We didn't know anyone in Belgium. My mother said to him, "Gayzer," she said, "go hide. You have contacts. Go hide." "Ah, this is my best friend and I don't worry." So, then he told my mother the guy was released, within two days. She said, my mother said, "Don't go run." And he said, "Oh you don't know. These are my friends." He said, "He had to pay a price to be released." And he didn't want to believe. So, my brother, since we didn't have enough to eat, the easy punishment was go to bed without food. It served two purposes, right? Not so much because he'd done something terrible but because she didn't have the food. So that night she sent him to bed without food. In the morning she woke him to go to Gayzer with the cigarettes. And he said, "I don't eat, I don't work." So he wouldn't go. And finally in the afternoon she had fed him, he went. By that time Gayzer had been taken. So if my brother had not been punished that night before I wouldn't have a brother now. This is how you, it's just, you know, the luck of the draw at the moment as to whether you made it or you didn't make it.

GS: Right.

EL: Yeah, that was the cigarette butts. I hadn't thought about it.

GS: When you talk about the soldiers, were these Belgian soldiers?

EL: No, those were the Germans.

GS: These were German soldiers.

EL: Yes. These were German soldiers. They were garrisoned in a private home, quite a ways away from where we lived. And, yeah, he was I guess, the ticket for freedom for this best friend, because he could make a deal. But I don't know what happened to the friend. He just, you have to just have nine lives, I don't know.

ML: You had to be born in the country.

EL: [unclear]. Everybody else died but him.

GS: Is there anything else you would like to include?

EL: No. Just, don't let the world forget. Don't believe the deniers. Gosh, that bothers me so much. And I sit there and I have my class debate, because they are, after all,

teachers, "Would you publish an ad, a full-page ad, if you were a college newspaper editor, of the deniers?" And too many say, "Yes."

ML: [unclear].

EL: Too many crazy reasons. The First Amendment, and after all we have to get the other side, and if you don't keep it in the open you know and discuss it. And I say, "What if there is no other side?" He says, "Then I'll bring it to George Washington. If we had lost the War of Independence, history probably would not give these people as heroes." "Okay, but would you accept the publication that says George Washington never existed?" Some you get through, not all.

ML: It's just a matter of goal.

EL: But it's their ultimate goal. They're the new Nazis. The right wings, they're, you know, it's not that they care about whether or not the death chambers existed, you know, the gas chambers existed. It's that they want to slaughter the Jews.

ML: To recreate a Nazi system right now...

EL: To recreate a hatred of the Jews.

ML: And you have to eliminate the Holocaust. I wouldn't say that it has to be anonymous.

EL: Yeah, if there's no Holocaust then there's nothing to feel guilty about.

GS: Okay. Thank you so very much...

EL: You're welcome.

GS: For sharing this story. And we really do appreciate it.

EL: This one I can leave you again. As I said, I cannot-

[Tape two, side one ended; Interview ended.]