

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

JACQUES LIPETZ

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Date: July 21, 1988

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JL - Jacques Lipetz [interviewee]

NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]

Date: July 21, 1988

Tape one, side one:

NL: This is Nora Levin interviewing Dr. Jacques Lipetz, July 21. So, Dr. Lipetz, would you be good enough to tell us a little bit about your family, your background, where you were born and grew up?

JL: I was born in Antwerp, Belgium, 1932. My father was born in Kaunas [Kovno], Lithuania. He had come to Belgium after World War II [He means World War I.] to study at the University in Liège and then married my mother, who had been born in Belgium, or came to Belgium before age one year old. My mother's family came from somewhere in Russia and in her family there was a rabbi, Gabriel Halpern who was known as the Grand Rabbi of the town, the name of which I don't remember, who may've been the only rabbi, but he was the Grand Rabbi. My father's family came from Kovno, as I said, there have been scholars in the family. I don't know of any distinguished ones, particularly, and my father was in business in Belgium. He was in the business of selling animal hair, which he would import from China. And we, I grew up in a [pause; machine off then on.] I had two younger brothers. My father's business was in the house. We lived in a very large house in Antwerp, which is still standing to this day. And it's sort of interesting--a few years back my oldest son went to Antwerp by himself after college and he brought me back a picture of the house and the house had been converted into office buildings and, would you believe it, that the office is occupied by a psychologist?

NL: Which is what you are.

JL: [chuckles] Which is what I am. Which is sort of ironic, I guess. I remember early childhood memories include hearing a lot of languages spoken around the house. There was obviously French, which was the language we used, and Flemish, which is the other language of Belgium. And there was a lot of Yiddish. There was some Hebrew. There was Russian, there was Polish, and there was English. My--the English came from my mother's side of the family. During World War I my maternal grandparents took the family to London, where my grandmother, who I've never met, died during the flu epidemic, and then they came back to Belgium. And my grandfather, who I also never met, and my maternal grandparents I never met, also died. My mother spoke fluent English with a very pronounced British accent and to her dying day referred to the faucet as a "tap". I think she stopped saying "lorry" at one point in favor of "truck," but she did have a number of Britishisms in her talk. As a young boy I was taken by my father twice to Lithuania, by train, to Kovno to meet my grandparents, my paternal grandparents, who were in the agricultural business. And I met a whole bunch of relatives. I don't remember much about Lithuania, but there's a story which my father tells which I don't remember happening, so

it's [crying] very difficult. I was there at one time for the high holidays, and of course I didn't speak Lithuanian or Yiddish. I only spoke French. I was five years old at the time. And it was Yom Kippur and between services we were apparently walking in the streets and I, we passed by a bakery and I wanted a roll. And I was jabbering away in French to my father, saying, you know, I wanted this piece of bread. My grandparents were very *frum* [observant] and my father was very ashamed to say anything. And finally my grandfather said, "What does the little boy want? I don't understand what he's saying, but he wants something!" Father was very embarrassed at this point. He says he didn't know how to tell his father that his son wanted a piece of bread on Yom Kippur. So, he finally told my grandfather that all I want is a piece of bread. He misunderstands it's Yom Kippur. My grandfather said, "Well why don't you get it for him!"

NL: [laughs]

JL: So, I guess I was a brat even then.

NL: No, you were just a hungry little boy.

JL: Uhhh...

NL: How long did you stay in Lithuania? Do you remember?

JL: I don't remember how long it was. It seemed interminable to me, but I'm sure it was a very short time. I remember, the only thing I remember is that I had a, I guess I must have been more than five, because I was reading. And I had a *Babar the Elephant* book in French.

NL: Oh yes, oh yes.

JL: *Babar l'Elephant*.

NL: Yes.

JL: And I remember being in Berlin, and I remember we had to go from one railroad station to another in Berlin, and we had to cross a street. We had to walk for some reason, and there was a large parade. It turned out I may have seen Amalek¹¹ himself.

NL: Mmm. This was what year?

JL: This was, this must have been 1937, '37 or '38.

NL: Could have been some native fascists.

JL: This, no this, no this was in Berlin.

NL: Oh, in Berlin.

JL: So, I believe that Adolf himself was passing by. And apparently I again made quite a fuss about crossing the street. And my father was kind of terrified. You know, here we were Jewish, making a fuss, and apparently the policeman just saw this little boy making a fuss and he stopped the parade and he waved us across just to get out of there. So, I guess my desires to have my own way go back quite a long way in that sense. I remember my grandfather had a long white beard. My grandmother was a sickly woman. I don't remember much else.

NL: Was your grandfather affectionate toward you?

¹¹Amalek: In the Bible the Jews' most uncompromising enemy; here meaning Hitler.

JL: I don't remember. I suspect he was. I remember being hugged and so forth. I was rather not liking it. I remember there being a lot of people. There was aunt, there were second cousins, and cousins and aunts and uncles. I had an aunt Cilla, who was a dentist and I remember being absolutely fascinated by her office because, I'll remember this to my dying day I guess. She had a little alcohol lamp which was lit. And I thought this was the most marvelous thing I'd ever seen in my life.

NL: [Laughs] Magical.

JL: Magical.

NL: Yes. Were your folks observant, Dr. Lipetz?

JL: Please call me Jacques.

NL: Yes.

JL: Well, yes and no. Both my parents had come from observant families. As I remember, we did keep kosher at home. And when I was sent to school--I went to a private school called Tachkemoni in Antwerp--and I wasn't told about how this happened, but all I remember is, you know, that in the morning we, I just told you I was going to school and I was very excited and I went to the school and the teacher, you know, put us in our seats and so forth. I was I guess seven and a teacher said to us in French, "*J'ai oublié tout mon français. Je parle seulement le hébreu maintenant.*" "I forgot all of my French and we are only going to speak Hebrew from now on." And we did. And by golly it worked. By the end of the first couple of months we were speaking to each other and I was able to converse with my father in Hebrew.

NL: Amazing. May I hear again the name of this school?

JL: Takhemoni. T-A-K-H-E-M-O-N-I [Tachkemoni]. It's the name of a very famous medieval poem. I forget the author of it.

NL: I see.

JL: I've seen it listed in a number of...

NL: [unclear].

JL: [unclear].

NL: Thank you.

JL: And, uh...

NL: Did you like the school?

JL: I loved it.

NL: You did.

JL: I became an ardent Zionist within one week and wanted to take off right away. I asked my father why we couldn't go the way--we used to, my father and I used to go for walks occasionally along the docks in Antwerp. I remember asking "Why couldn't we just get one of those boats and go to Palestine?"

NL: You sang Hebrew songs and stories?

JL: We sang Hebrew songs. We learned *Chumash*.² And we learned to read and write Hebrew and in the afternoon we did the same thing in French. So I learned to read and write from left to right and right to left at the same time, and, it worked!

NL: No confusion?

JL: There was, yes there was [laughs].

NL: [laughs]

JL: I can remember one summer trying to write a letter to a friend in French and trying to write the French from right to left.

NL: [laughs]

JL: It doesn't work.

NL: It doesn't work.

JL: It doesn't work. And I remember being very frustrated by this. But I had, my father had, I don't know what happened to this, most of this stuff is of course lost. I wrote letters. My father would go on business occasionally. Various parts of Belgium, France, and when I would write him letters, and you know, those days were before airplanes where people could come and go several hundred miles in one day. And I wrote him letters in Hebrew, without dots,³ and I've seen them since and for the life of me I have a hard time figuring them out.

NL: Oh. Well but I guess if you spent more time and more intensively with the material you'd decipher it.

JL: I'm sure a lot would come back.

NL: Yes.

JL: Although I'm amazed how much has come back over the last few years.

NL: May I ask how long you were at this Tachkemoni school?

JL: Two years.

NL: Just two years.

JL: Just two years, because then the war broke out.

NL: Was there any conflict between your associations with Jewish children? I suppose this was an all Jewish school.

JL: It was an all Jewish school.

NL: Any conflict in so far as your friendships with non-Jewish children, might have ever lacked this experience?

JL: I don't think I knew, I don't think I knew any non-Jewish children.

NL: Ah hah. Did you live in an all-Jewish neighborhood?

JL: No.

NL: No?

²*Chumash*: Pentateuch.

³Without dots: without vowels, unvocalized, the way modern Hebrew is written.

JL: The neighborhood was not all Jewish by any means. I know the people next door were "the *goyim*."⁴

NL: But you didn't have any non-Jewish friends?

JL: I, non-, I had, no the only conflict I can remember, and it's only a conflict in retrospect, is my parents had a series of governesses for us kids and one of them was an ex-nun or had been or wanted to be a nun or something and was apparently trying to teach me all kinds of non-Jewish, mostly superstitious, superstitions.

NL: Christian...

JL: Christian superstitions.

NL: Dogmas. Is that so?

JL: Dogmas, what have you. My parents found out about this, mainly because I got very scared.

NL: I can imagine.

JL: Something about devils taking me or something like that. My parents found out and they fired her immediately. That's all I can remember. I can remember going to synagogue and I don't remember which one. Joe has a book of synagogues. There were four in Antwerp and I don't recognize which one it was for sure. I remember going and what I remember in...

NL: Antwerp.

JL: I think so, but I'm not sure.

NL: But you were what, seven?

JL: Yeah, I remember, seven, eight, I remember wearing a *tallit katan*⁵ all the time. I was, I took it very seriously. And I can remember one of my parents' friends, Mr. Baygan, had gone to Palestine and come back on business of some sort. He brought us all back *kippahs*⁶ from Jerusalem which were hand embroidered and said "*Yerushalayim*"⁷ and I think that was one of the last things I lost in the course of our escape. I had that for years and years and years. It either got so worn out that it needed a decent burial or it fell apart. I don't remember.

NL: You had said you were an ardent Zionist as a youngster. Did your parents share that fervor?

JL: I think my father did. I'm not so sure about my mother.

NL: But they weren't thinking at all seriously about emigrating?

JL: To them, no, not that I know of. If they were, they didn't...

NL: Did they ever talk to you about any antisemitism that they had encountered in Antwerp, or, would you have been aware...

JL: No.

⁴*Goyim*: gentiles.

⁵*Tallit katan*: fringed undergarment worn by religiously observant Jewish men.

⁶*Kippahs*: head coverings.

⁷*Yerushalayim*: Jerusalem.

NL: You were probably too young.

JL: I was not aware of any and I don't know.

NL: They seemed happy in Belgium.

JL: They seemed happy. There was a very large Jewish community there, which had been established for some time. I think the Jewish community, well in Belgium dates back to I think the 13th century or earlier. But the modern Antwerp community dates back to the independence in Belgium, it was in 1831 or '32.⁸ And I was also a very ardent Belgian.

NL: Loyal and supportive?

JL: We, I used to occasionally get a, I remember one franc from my mother and I could buy a chocolate bar. The chocolate bar I liked best was *Chocolat Jacques*. I liked it because (a) was with chocolate but (b) it had my name on it...

NL: Sure.

JL: It was very special. And in these, in this wrapper there was a picture, a picture with the royal family. And if you collected enough wrappers, enough pictures and wrappers, you could send in the wrappers and they would send you an album. And I had, I was working on my third album of photographs of the royal family. So I was, you know, a very loyal little Belgian boy and I watched parades where the king would come by and things like that.

NL: From what I have learned of survivors and what I know about the history of Jews in Belgium, the experience was generally a very benign one, and Jews, as you say, liked their life there. Were you aware as a child of anything ominous happening before the invasion? Did your parents indicate any apprehension they may have had?

JL: Yeah, they did.

NL: They did.

JL: There's one funny incident. It is not direct, it is related but indirectly there. Apparently just before the Russians invaded Poland, there had been some more talking about the bombing of Warsaw and so forth.⁹ I had some hunch that something terrible was happening in some very far away place. And apparently one morning, I would go down, downstairs in the morning and bring in a newspaper which was delivered. And I would then bring the newspaper up to my father. And I came in screaming one morning. I was not going to school and they weren't gonna get me out of the house. No matter. No way, I mean this was it.

NL: Why didn't you want to go to school?

⁸But the modern Antwerp community dates back to the independence of Belgium, it was in 1831 or '32: There were Jews in Belgium in Roman times, and there was a continuous Jewish presence in Antwerp for several centuries prior to the Belgian Revolution of 1830, when Jews were granted civil rights.

⁹The bombing of Warsaw and so forth: On September 17, 1939, according to the Hitler-Stalin pact, Russia invaded eastern Poland. At the same time, Warsaw had not yet surrendered to the Germans, and was still being bombarded.

JL: Because the headline on the newspaper said, "*L'ours est déchaîné*." Which means, which translated is, "The USSR is unleashed." This is when Russia, but *l'ours* also means, it's spelled differently, "the bear."

NL: The bear.

JL: So I was convinced there was a loose bear in town...

NL: Oh, oh...

JL: ...and no way was I gonna tangle with this thing.

NL: How did your parents persuade you to...

JL: They laughed. They finally showed me that *l'URSS* is, you know, *l'Union de la Republique Soviétique Socialiste*. I remember being absolutely terri-, I was *not* gonna go out and get mauled by a bear. I mean, no way was that gonna happen to me.

NL: Was there any discussion in school as far as you can remember?

JL: Not that I can remember.

NL: Not too much.

JL: There was, no, there was a lot of discussion about *aliyah*¹⁰ about going to Tel Aviv and building the port and unloading the, I can remember not wanting to go to gym and my Hebrew teacher saying to me, "You know, if you are going to go to unload the boats at the dock, you'd better go to gym and be big and strong, because what we need there are people who are gonna be big and strong." So I went to gym. I haven't liked gym since either, but it worked on a little boy.

NL: Were you aware of some Jews going to Palestine at the time?

JL: Only this man I mentioned before, Mr. Baygan on business.

NL: Yeah.

JL: I didn't know of anybody making *aliyah*.

NL: Or families going elsewhere...

JL: No.

NL: To Italy possibly?

JL: No.

NL: France?

JL: No.

NL: No.

JL: See the community, the part of the community I was with was very cohesive and they all stayed there.

NL: They all stayed.

JL: The first sign I realized that there was something wrong was in 1940, when my father, my father had in previous summers, had every summer as far back as I can remember, rented a summer place where we would spend the summer.

NL: In Belgium?

¹⁰*Aliyah*: immigration to Palestine.

JL: In Belgium. And we usually went to the one or two or three places, Heiday [phonetic], and Knokke, and Zuka [phonetic], which was, Heiday was in the country, and Knokke and Zuka are on the sea shore. And this time he rented a villa in a place called La Panne [De Panne], which is on the Belgian side of the border of Dunkirk. And he also took us out of school--took me out of school--my brothers were too young--a month or two early. And, you know, I said, "Why can't I finish school?" I enjoyed school. I didn't, wanted to go more than ever. Cause you know at end of school year, exercises, and I was missing, I was really very angry. My father explained that he thought there might be a war and that the Belgians would hold out. In World War I the Belgians had held a salient in that area with King Albert, who was king of the Belgians at the time. And my father, I guess, really believed that somehow the Belgian army would hold back the Nazis and we would be safe. I can remember, you know, we lived in this villa and my father had bought 100 kilo bags of potatoes and things like, and we were gonna stay there...

NL: The whole family would stay there?

JL: Yes.

NL: It's L-E-P-A-N?

JL: No, L-A, capital P-A-N-N-E, which became sort of a joke, because *en panne* means, this is French slang for "broken down" *Ma voiture est en panne*, you know, "My car had a break-down." So there were all kinds of puns and...

NL: This...

JL: Excuse me. That's, you know, I began to realize that there were something wrong. Things weren't quite right. Although we did go back to Antwerp for the, not commencement, but the exercises...

NL: Closing exercises.

JL: Closing exercises. I remember being, I wasn't on the stage because I hadn't been in school, and I was really an angry little boy about that. I felt I'd been cheated.

NL: How long did you stay in the city when you returned?

JL: Just for a day or two.

NL: Ah, and then you went back to La Panne.

JL: We went back to La Panne.

NL: Were there many Jews as far as you knew?

JL: In La Panne, I don't remember.

NL: Mmm hmm. What did you do there? How did you occupy yourself?

JL: Well, you know, I was a little boy. We'd go to the beach and play on the beach and play on the sand and make mud pies, I guess, and things like that. And I read. I was always an avid reader. I would read anything and everything I could get my hands on. It didn't matter what it was. It was...

NL: You didn't have any trouble spending your time.

JL: I don't remember having any problems with that.

NL: And did Father, was Father able to maintain his work [unclear]?

JL: Father [unclear], no, Father stayed in Antwerp and would come in for the weekends.

NL: I see.

JL: So...

NL: And that went on for...

JL: That went on, I would say, for about two months.

NL: Mmm hmm.

JL: And then on May, the weekend of May 10, 1940,¹¹ I don't remember what day of the week it was, but we could find out. My mother went to Antwerp to spend a weekend with my father. Instead of him coming up, she went in and they would spend the weekend together. And that was the day that the war broke out. And I can remember this, being in the house and hearing all kinds of terrible noises and sirens...

NL: You were still in La Panne?

JL: I was in La Panne, with my brothers and governess, and hearing all kinds of terrible, scary noises, seeing flashes of light and the sirens and waking up and asking the governess, who was always known as "Mademoiselle," what was going on. And she made us, she knew what was going on, but she didn't want to frighten us. And she said that well, that, I knew that the French were at war with the Germans, that the, perhaps it was a French ship and it had been hit by shells or something and that the group making signals, whatever, some kind of cock and bull story, she said. And I sort of believed it, but I knew...

NL: It was serious.

JL: I could tell that, there's something which I've since labeled the smell of fear. You can feel it, and I could tell there was something very very wrong. It wasn't just...

NL: Were you worried about your parents?

JL: I worried about, I don't remember but I can remember that, you know, my governess was, Mademoiselle was very good, and she was a very nice person as I remember her. She was a, we used to go for walks together and have long philosophical discussions about religion.

NL: Really?

JL: Even though she was Catholic, but she was very good.

NL: She was [unclear].

JL: She taught me a lot of things about the world around us, and she was--anyhow, she may also have been an ex-Nazi. [laughs]

NL: [laughs]

JL: There've been a number of them in my life. I know that when my parents finally got--you know it had normally been a two hour or a three hour trip took like a whole day to get out of Antwerp, you know, I can remember my mother hysterically holding us and then I found out that the war had been declared. Of course, I believed what my father said. I believed that, you know, the Belgian army, I had two cousins who were in the army,

¹¹May 10, 1940: German invasion of Belgium.

and I remember how brave and strong they looked. And they would come in for a weekend and I would help pull off their knee high boots. And I would polish their boots for them. This was really great. The Belgian army. The Belgians were going to hold out, and we'll show those Nazis a thing or two. Well, I guess we didn't.

NL: When did your parents return to La Panne?

JL: It must have been May 11th, That's the latest...

NL: Ah, they came back very quickly.

JL: They came back, it was that day, O.K.? May 10th, or maybe early morning on the 11th. They somehow made it back. O.K., from there on in, I think within a day or so, it became very clear to my father and to anybody else who cared to look that the Belgians were not going to hold out. The brave Belgian army was not going to hold back the *Blitzkrieg* and we were in for a lot of trouble. And we elected to leave. And I remember packing up and getting on a train and we were going to go to France. And apparently, I was told later that night, my father's family was in the United States. His two older brothers were in the United States and he had a sister in the United Kingdom. So, it was all my mother's family. We were going to meet. There was a plan, a contingency plan had been made that we would meet somewhere in France. I forget where the place was supposed to be, where we would all try to get to in case of war.

NL: I see.

JL: And it's odd, because that, I did not learn that until I was an adult, because in 19, I guess it was '52, I guess it was '52, there was one of the perennial crises between the United States and the Soviet Union. My father, I was at college at the time in Providence, and my father wrote me a letter saying that if anything happens, here is an address--he was in California--try and get there. This is what we are doing.

NL: Mmm. Still conditioned to think about a retreat.

JL: Right. As far [laughs] as possible.

NL: Mmm hmm.

JL: So I can remember that.

NL: Did you get to France then?

JL: Yeah, we got to France by train, and I remember this was a horrendous train trip. There were stops and we were in this, the French trains have these compartments and in this compartment was a man who came in with a limp, and claimed he had a wooden leg. He'd been hurt in World War I or something. And my younger brother kept bumping into him. And he was, he got more upset over this little kid than, than he should have been. And I, I, think he was suspicious, to make a long story--as clear as I can remember--short, he was a German spy.

NL: Ohhh.

JL: He was caught, taken out, and shot.

NL: On the train?

JL: He wasn't shot on the train.

NL: I mean, taken out.

JL: He was taken off the train...

NL: I see.

JL: ...and they caught him. He apparently had a radio transmitter in his so-called wooden leg.

NL: In his wooden leg. Oh my.

JL: So, then I realized that this was not a child's game. Things were pretty serious. And, uh...

NL: How long did your trip take, do you think, actually?

JL: Days.

NL: Days.

JL: Days. I remember being in Lyon,¹² which is still north of Paris, and I think we met in Paris. I seem to remember meeting relatives in Paris. I remember being in Paris. I also have very, very vivid memories of having diarrhea through the entire trip, which I'm sure was...

NL: Nerves.

JL: Anxiety, everybody being, feeling sick and food being around [laughs] [unclear]. Somewhere we had bartered for some food in France, and we'd gotten some bread and butter. The French use salted butter, and at my home we'd only had unsalted butter. And when I tasted it I remember making a face or something and being told, "Be glad that you have something to eat." I don't remember much. I remember being in Paris. I remember we, seeing the Eiffel Tower. I remember being taken to a physician for some reason, I don't know why. The reason I remember that is because he was a real old fashioned physician. He didn't listen to my chest with his stethoscope, but he put his handkerchief over my chest and put his ear on the handkerchief, listening directly. [Phone ringing; pause] It was in Paris.

NL: In Paris, yes.

JL: And then we had, somewhere around Paris we had teamed up with, let's see, with my uncle Jack and his wife Bertha and their two children, Rachel and Caroline. And then my Aunt Rosa and her husband David and his two children, Benny and my cousin Jack, who is about two years older. He was always known as the *grande Jacques*, either the large or the big Jacques, and I was the *petit Jacques*, and I sort of worshiped the ground he walked on and hated him at the same time. It was an interesting relationship. We teamed up, and they had cars, little Minervas, I think, which is Belgian made cars.

NL: They wanted to get out of Paris?

JL: They had gotten out, yeah, we did, we had met. This was, I think we met somewhere outside of Paris as I remember. I'm not clear on exactly where it was.

NL: Yeah.

JL: We...

¹²Lyon, which is still north of Paris: perhaps he means Rouen; Lyon is far to the south of Paris.

NL: But they were already leaving.

JL: And there was also my Aunt Malvine, who was my mother's youngest sister, who was pregnant, and whose husband was in the Belgian army and we didn't know where he was. If he was alive or what. And there were maybe a few other people in that group. We went in this caravan of two or three cars through France and one place I remember we stayed at for a short while was a place called Saint Palais sur Mer. We had rented this very large, it was obviously on the sea, a very large villa and we stayed there for a while. And we were, we, when it looked like the French might hold out, when it became clear that the French would no longer, I remember the day that Belgium capitulated. That the week before, *Life* magazine had a cover story of, a cover photograph of the King of the Belgians, Leopold III, and his picture was proudly hung in the room we all, you know, the dining room we had.

NL: How long did you stay there, do you know?

JL: I don't remember how long. It couldn't have been very long.

NL: Couldn't have been long.

JL: And...

NL: The adults seemed apprehensive?

JL: Yes, well, but when Belgium capitulated, I remember his picture was ripped off and torn apart and "*Le sale cochon*" [the dirty pig], you know, had given up, which turns out it was the only thing he really could do. And I also remember being in a small town in France and my two brothers were quite sick and we didn't know what was wrong. And so we looked for the doctor, and it turns out that the, this was after the capitulation of Belgium, the doctor, the physician in town, was also the mayor. And he found we were Belgians, we had two sick kids, and he said, "As mayor I cannot come to you traitorous Belgians. But after 5:00 I'm not the mayor any more."

NL: He's the doctor.

JL: He's the doctor. So he did come and, to add insult to injury, what do you suppose my brothers had? Nothing better than German measles.

NL: Oh my.

JL: Which was just a wonderful disease to have.

NL: They were tots.

JL: Yeah, they were, they were tots. Let's see, I was eight, I guess...

Tape one, side two:

NL: Tape one, side two, continuing our interview with Dr. Lipetz. Leon was five.

JL: Leon was five, and Eric must have been three-and-a-half. So we, we kept going. I remember going through towns whose names I just cannot remember am acquainted at this [unclear] like Bergerac and Ergerac [phonetic] and places like that.

NL: You were still in two or three cars?

JL: Yes.

NL: And all of the relatives were still intact?

JL: So far.

NL: Yes.

JL: Somewhere on that trip a decision was made that my cousin Benny, who is, Jacques' older brother, my Uncle David and Rosa's son, would, would try to leave, leave us and go to England, because they were afraid that he, he was I guess just seventeen or eighteen and the fear was that he would probably be forced into the army, one side or another, what have you, and I remember the tremendous...

NL: Trauma?

JL: Trauma of his leaving, and the fear we would never see him again. And then I realized then that things were [weeping] very terribly wrong. That somehow the world I'd knew wasn't, just the one I liked. It's not what I'd been promised. Anyway, he left for Belgium¹³ amid much crying and wailing and when will we ever see him again. And I remember the other thing I remember [unclear] tremendous contagion of hysteria, because when I, his mother got hysterical, and of course everybody followed including kids. We didn't really know. I remember not knowing why we were crying, why we were upset completely, but you know, people went to England all the time. What was the big deal? Of course we feared that he might never get that far. He did.

NL: He was planning to join the group...

JL: No, he was planning on getting to London and seeing what would happen.

NL: But how, how would he...

JL: I don't know.

NL: You don't know. There must've been some plan.

JL: There must have been some plan or...

NL: To get a boat somewhere.

JL: And he did. He did make it. He spent the war years in England and then he came back to the States afterwards.

NL: And how many of the group were left then still in France? Still a large group.

JL: It was still a large party.

¹³Left for Belgium; he means England.

NL: And did the illness of your brothers hold the group up?

JL: No. We kept on going.

NL: You kept on going.

JL: We kept on. There was no choice. The Germans were too close behind.

NL: And you were going which direction?

JL: We were going south toward Marseille. The plan, as I understand it, was to go to Marseille and we were hoping that my uncle Jack, who was in the Belgian army and his brother Emmanuel, or Marnie, who also was in the army, would come, and we would all meet somehow in Marseille. And every day, when we finally got to Marseille we went to this large villa where all the family stayed. And every day people went there, I remember to the Canadi^{re}, which was the, it's like the boardwalk I guess, in Marseille, and looking for news [unclear] people all over there talking and reading and trying to figure out. And it was in Marseille that I first, you know, got some first hand lessons about prejudice and, uh [unclear].

NL: Antisemitism specifically?

JL: Uh, well, I think there was some antisemitism. I think it would be more anti-Belgian.

NL: I see.

JL: I remember being called *treniaf*. [*treniaf* or *trenief* - Yiddish for not kosher] I went to school there because we speak French slightly differently in Belgium. We don't say *soixant-dix* for the number seventy. We say *septante*, and for the number ninety say *nanante*. In France it's *soixante-dix*, which is sixty and ten, and ninety becomes *quatre-vingt dix*.¹⁴ And I could never understand why they didn't, why they had seventy this crazy thing.

NL: And that kind of differentiated, marked...

JL: That differentiated me from the other children and I al-, I remember the po-, I don't remember where there was specifically, well there were some anti-, I remember some, I seem to remember somebody saying *saljuif*, dirty Jew.

NL: Dirty Jew.

JL: I remember being made aware of the fact that I was a refugee and I was different and that things were very difficult.

NL: How was the teacher?

JL: I don't remember.

NL: You don't remember.

JL: I don't remember. I remember having a very hard time in school, not liking it. Not wanting to go.

NL: Were you with any of your cousins?

JL: My cousin went to school with me, yes.

NL: With you.

¹⁴*Quarte-vingt dix*: that is four twenties and ten.

JL: But he was a grade or two higher.
NL: You walked to school...
JL: We walked to school.
NL: Or did you have to be escorted?
JL: We walked to school.
NL: You walked to school.
JL: We walked. We walked to school. It was a pretty long walk.
NL: And, you know what, how father was able to manage economically?
JL: No.
NL: Used up his savings, possibly.
JL: I have no idea. All I know is that there was all kinds of different kinds of money there. American dollars, French francs, Belgian francs, Swiss francs, you name it. There were also some jewels and some...
NL: Gold?
JL: Gold or diamond bars I remember, some precious metal. I don't know how we survived. I remember that it was very hard and we were not saving, but we were not [unclear] in August. It was very hot.
NL: Were you ever hungry?
JL: I don't remember being hungry, but I do remember [pause, weeping] one incident [unclear] somewhere in the flight we were, we had stopped the cars to get food or water or gas, I don't, we stopped in this small town for awhile and we were in this, I remember it as a parking lot. I don't know if there was a parking lot in those days, but whatever it was there were other cars there. And I remember there being a crust of bread on the ground and I was a little boy, I started playing soccer with it, football we called it. And my cousin Rachel started telling me not to do this because someday I would not have bread. And she was right. [weeping] To this day I can't waste bread. I find it very difficult to throw out bread, even if it's moldy. The other thing I can never forget is looking at other cars with my cousin and only seeing one car that was absolutely marvelous. And I asked what kind of car it was; it was an Oldsmobile.
NL: So huge [chuckles].
JL: And it's odd that today I own an Oldsmobile.
NL: Was it the bigness? The luxury?
JL: The luxury of it.
NL: Yeah.
JL: I seem to remember it being absolutely beautiful inside.
NL: Sleek.
JL: Yeah.
NL: Uh huh.
JL: It was also American. Everything American was very well-made. So the idea was we were in Marseille, and the idea was we were going to apply for transit visas

through Spain, to Portugal, and from Lisbon take a boat to the United States. And, I can remember, I don't know all the details other than that it was very difficult. And we had to apply here and we had to apply there, and there were these mysterious papers called affidavits which I had no idea what they were, but they were very, very, very important.

NL: You remember the word.

JL: I remember the word. Because I thought it had something to do with my Uncle David, it's an affidavit!

NL: Oh, [laughs].

JL: It had something to do with him! But I wasn't clear what it was. I also thought that *davening*¹⁵ was named after him, because he was very religious. And I thought because David *davened* every day that it was named after him. I've learned differently since.

NL: [Chuckling]

JL: Uh, may he rest in peace. Uh, and I can remember, you know, things being real tough, and we had this large, each family had a room and we had a, we used the kitchen communally and [unclear] and I remember at one point I could get, I don't know what had happened, but some particularly bad piece of news had come through and my uncles were throwing their arms up in the air and shrieking out "*Was will sein mit uns.*" ["What will be with us."] And this created...

NL: Mmm hmm. And you knew what that meant.

JL: Oh I understood Yiddish, because my parents didn't want us to, so obviously I picked it up very fast. And I remember absolute hysteria. Nobody could calm anybody else down. It was, the kids, all of us, it was one of the most horrifying things I can remember.

NL: This was '42 I wonder?

JL: This was already '42.

NL: Could it have been, em...

JL: Early '42. Late '41 or early '42.

NL: Early '42. Cause...

JL: No, wait a minute, no wait a minute...

NL: If it was late...

JL: '41, it was '41 still.

NL: '41.

JL: The war broke out in 1940 in Belgium and America didn't get into the war until December '42.¹⁶

NL: It could have been the invasion of Russia. The Germans...

JL: I don't know what it was. No, that came...

NL: No.

¹⁵*Daven*: Yiddish to pray.

¹⁶December '42: he means December '41.

JL: No, that could have been. I'm not, no, no that happened when we were in the Philippines. I don't know. I think it was just...

NL: Some bad war news maybe.

JL: Absolute panic. I don't know what it was, but it was this horrible thing. Well, finally what happened was, it became clear that we should get to Lisbon, we could get passage because as I said, my, my father had two brothers in this country and my mother had a brother who was in this country. He'd married an American wife, and he, this was, going back, before the whole mess started I can remember my uncle Sam and aunt Dora--and they had two little girls--leaving Belgium and going back to the States because my aunt Dora was born in America and she was an American citizen and apparently American citizens were told to get out, so she, she...

NL: She left.

JL: She left, but I wonder, you know why they were going to the United States, and what was wrong with being here, and so forth. Well, they went to the States. So we had the proper affidavits, I guess, or whatever it took to get to the States. The problem was to get to Lisbon. Now at that time we were in so-called Vichy France. And, you know, apparently the French Pétain government had not become virulently antisemitic yet, so it seems as far as I know there were no problems. Obvious problems. The problem, the hangup came that my father would not be given a transit visa for Spain, because Franco's government had heard that no men under 40 years of age, above 17, between 17 and 40, could pass through Spain because they were afraid they would go to join the British in Gibraltar.

NL: Uh huh.

JL: Fat chance. My father, may he rest in peace, going Gibraltar was about as probable as sprouting wings, uh, but this was the official excuse. So, Mother and my two brothers and I took a train from Marseille and made very tearful goodbyes, wondering when we would ever see these people again. And we had enough food to last us for five days, and we thought that food would be very scarce, if available at all, in Spain. And we went through the crossing point at a place called Port-Bou. P-O-R-T dash, B-O-U-E [Port-Bou as per atlas]. It literally means Port of Mud. And I can remember we went through Spanish customs. We were taken aside and we were interviewed by this woman for some reason. And there was a huge portrait of Franco on the wall. I looked at him, the little brat came out again, and I said, "*C'est lui le roi des Espagnols?*"--"Is he the king of Spain?" And the woman said to her, furious, she said, "You should teach your child we don't have a king here, we have a..." whatever. My mother was fit for me to be taken out and shot at this point. [laughing]

NL: [laughing]

JL: You know, [unclear], how would I know? I mean, he was obviously, it was bad enough the French didn't have a king, but at least the Spanish could have one. We made it through Spain, mostly on, I guess you call it in this country, gingerbread, *pain*

d'épice. And whatever we could get. We stayed in, we spent one night in Barcelona and one night in Madrid and I remember being shocked by the utter poverty and dirt of Spain. It was pathetic. Though we were treated nicely. It was pathetic. I could see even as a child the poverty and you know, they had just recovered from the civil war, which was over a year or two ago, burned out buildings and things like that. And it took, I think it took, I think it was probably shorter. I mean, I can't imagine taking five days to cross Spain by train, but see at least it seems like it was five years or something, going through Spain. It was, not knowing the language and you know...

NL: And being separated...

JL: My mother had never traveled with two kids alone and with three small children, not knowing whether we'd see anybody else again. And we got to the border to Portugal, and there was, of course, the fear, you know, that the Portuguese might change their minds or the Spaniards might change. We finally got to Lisboa, uh, Lisbon, and stayed at a *pensione*. My mother and my two brothers and I, we stayed at a boarding house waiting for my father to come and join us and we would then take the boat to America. And again, you know, we were, there was a large community of Belgians and other Europeans who had fled to Lisbon and every day there was a promenade along the port, along the Tagus River. I remember walking there and meeting other people and talking and asking, "Do you...

NL: Mother...

JL: Have, do you know anything, have you heard from so and so, and, you know, and people would carry their little *carnets*, their little books, with names and addresses and wondering and going to the post office every day because the only way you could get mail was through, what they call in Europe *poste restante*. There was a system in the city where you could write to somebody in care of such and such a post office. And then you come and ask, "Is there any mail for me, *poste restante*." And they just give to you; it was a great thing.

NL: Did mother hear from father that way?

JL: Well, let me tell you. That's an interesting story. Finally my father decided the only way he was going to get through, there's no point petitioning the Spanish authority, was to go to Morocco and from Morocco go to Lisbon. And there apparently was a boat going from, through Tangiers, and from Tangiers to Lisbon. So somehow my father got boat passage from Marseille to Morocco, which was not terribly difficult. And he got to Morocco and he asked for a Portuguese visa which they gave him. And he tried to book on this boat. And he kept going, and the boat was postponed, the boat was postponed. Finally he went to the Portuguese consul and the Portuguese consul said, "Look Mr. Lipetz. I'm gonna have to tell you, that there is no such boat. And there never will be one again."

NL: Oh my. Oh my.

JL: Ah, and he didn't know what to do, and he explained his story and, my father, to his dying day believed this man might have been a *marrano*.¹⁷

NL: He knew your father was Jewish?

JL: So he told my father, he says, "You know, I can't do anything for you, but you know, God forbid anything happen to your kids, very sick or something, I'd have to as an act of mercy give you a visa on an airplane." There is a plane that leaves. So my father understood what he meant, and he wrote to my mother, said, "Send a telegram saying "Kids are desperately sick. We need you."

NL: Mmm hmm.

JL: My mother was a very superstitious woman. She wouldn't do it [laughs].

NL: Oh my dear.

JL: She was afraid that...

NL: It would happen.

JL: If you say something like that, *allevey*, it should happen. And then she would, and to her dying day, whenever any of us got sick, fortunately nobody got seriously sick, she was always afraid it was just a curse coming back.

NL: Yeah.

JL: She was a simple woman that way.

NL: So she wouldn't send such a letter.

JL: Finally my father had the [unclear]. He kept writing her stronger and stronger letters, finally I think he said, "Do it if you ever want to see me again."

NL: Huuhhh! Dear.

JL: So she said that was one of the hardest things she ever had to do in her life.

NL: Imagine.

JL: So she sent the telegram, and sure enough, two days later, we got a telegram saying arriving on flight whatever it was on those days. I remember being very jealous because my father was flying in an airplane. That was a real neat thing. I was a kid.

NL: Sure.

JL: And, I remember he came, and I almost didn't recognize him because he'd grown a mustache. And asking about Morocco and so forth. We were in Lisbon for I guess a very short time, because in January '41 we embarked on the S.S. Siboney.

NL: How do you spell it?

JL: S-I-B-O-N-E-Y. Which was a tiny tub which used to travel between Florida and Cuba, and had been [unclear]. At that time the Americans were sending anything they could over, or supposedly, I don't know. [unclear] and so forth I wonder what was going on, but anyway. We got on this leaky tub.

NL: This was not for the Atlantic!

JL: For the Atlantic.

¹⁷*Marrano*: a descendant of those Jews who remained in Spain and Portugal after the edicts of expulsion, who converted to Christianity but secretly practiced Judaism.

NL: Was it?

JL: We crossed the Atlantic in the worst January on record for that time.

NL: Oh.

JL: We'd been reported sunk twice. I was seasick from the time we left the mouth of the Tagus River from the time we, we, we were to the time we were stopped in Bermuda by the British and searched by the British Navy.

NL: How many people were on board?

JL: On board I have no idea. All I know is I was sick. I was so sick. I thought I was, that was it. I just, why were they doing this to me? And my brothers were sick and my mother was sick and the one thing I remember, the one thing my mother could eat was [unclear] to get me, cream cheese...

NL: [laughs]

JL: But not just any cream cheese. It had to be Philadelphia cream cheese.

NL: [laughs] Oh my word. That's really...

JL: And that is when I first heard the name Philadelphia.

NL: Philadelphia.

JL: And here I am living here. Sort of interesting coincidence I guess.

NL: Do you have any idea how long this took?

JL: I think the boat took us nine or eleven days. It took a long time. It was a small boat. It was not made for that kind of..

NL: No, not made for the Atlantic.

JL: Not for a January crossing. And I remember we landed in New York. I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty. And we landed in New York, I guess it was in early February, 1941. And we stayed with various uncles. And I thought we were, it became clear we were not going to stay there. We were not allowed to stay.

NL: [unclear].

JL: Because our quota number had not come up. And my father, being a law abiding citizen, decided he would go to the Philippines where my uncle had a business. He had business there for many years. And we stayed in the States for one month and I remember meeting my American relatives for the first time. I met my uncle Elijah and aunt Ruth, may they rest in peace. And my cousin Esther, who unfortunately got killed in an auto accident some time later. And two cousins, Leo and Ramón who I thought was just marvelous. They went to the Bronx High School of Science. They were very bright. And we lived there in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers apartment complex in the Bronx. It's still standing there, on [unclear] Avenue. Though I think it's changed. It was ethnically very Jewish at that time. And it was a wonderful place, this was, and a wonderful America it was. And everybody in New York is Jewish...

NL: [laughs]

JL: We went for *spatzeirs* [strolls] in the park and my uncle would meet various people and talk Yiddish to them, or Russian. And I figured, well we must have met

everybody in New York at this point that were Spaniards, all over and everybody spoke Yiddish, so everybody must've been Jewish. And it didn't occur to me that they might not be. Anyway, we left and we booked passage, I guess it was at the end of March, was end of March, or beginning April, on a Norwegian steamer, the Ivarant, I-V-A-R-A-N-T. My parents, my two brothers, and I, and we sailed from New York through the Panama Canal, which was very exciting. And then up to San Diego and Los Angeles where we met another Lipetz who came down from Vancouver to San Francisco, he was a [unclear] cousin Joe, my father's cousin, Joseph Lipetz, who was in the salmon fishing business in Vancouver, British Columbia. And then we set sail from San Francisco for the Philippines in a Norwegian flag ship, which was not a passenger ship. It was one of those steamers. It has, you know, few cabins. And there were a few other passengers, I don't remember them, across the Pacific, with dire warning that, you know, we were fair game for the Japanese or Germans, no not Japanese, German submarines.

NL: German submarines.

JL: And it was the one thing I remember. Anyway we had a Pacific crossing. I remember not being sick, and my father explaining, you know, that this was called the Pacific Ocean and Pacific means calm, and you're not gonna get sick, and don't worry about it. And he was right. Whether it really was a calm crossing or whether he convinced me in other ways, yet but I remember the trip as being relatively uneventful, except for the one time--the captain had a swimming pool constructed on deck.

NL: Mmmm.

JL: He just put some crates together and he...

NL: Oh.

JL: He put some tarps in front of the water. He said, "You're all gonna learn how to swim, because if we get torpedoed, you need to know how to swim." And I wasn't about to learn how. I was scared to death. So the captain was a big man. I don't know how big but he was a *big* man. And he grabbed me, put a life belt, a life jacket around me and threw me into the water, and said, "You're going to learn how to swim." And I guess he was right, because...

NL: You must have been...

JL: I was terrified. I was terri-, I hated it. I remember hitting him with my little fists and he was laughing at me. He thought it was very funny.

NL: [chuckling] Oh gosh.

JL: I don't remember his name, but he was a very nice man.

NL: You learned to swim?

JL: I learned to swim. I learned to stay afloat. To this day I cannot dive into water. If I go in I go in on my own power. So we landed in Manila. I guess it was May or June of '41, and my father, we found an apartment after a little while and we stayed there and I started going to school. Where, my brothers and I went to a school and my youngest brother Eric came back. He said he couldn't understand the song we sang in the morning.

So we sang it and we were singing, "Good Morning to You. Good Morning to You. We greet you with bright Chinese faces." ["shiny" faces]

NL: [laughs] Chinese.

JL: [laughs] I remember struggling with English, that it was, I realized it was an impossible language. There was no way I would ever learn it.

NL: And not Spanish?

JL: I still feel that way. It was English. It had been an American colony long enough that English was the major language. And then my aunt and uncle left, and my mother was furious that they left us. Here we were in this horrible place. It was very hot. My mother had a very hard time. The tropics are difficult to live in.

NL: These were the people who [unclear]...

JL: Not as bad as Philadelphia in the summer, really not as bad. These were people who owned the...

NL: Who owned business there?

JL: Business there.

NL: Where did they go to?

JL: Back in the States.

NL: Ah hah.

JL: But my uncle went back and forth, you know, once a year, twice a year, whatever it was. He was one of the first people to take the China Clipper across.

NL: Is that right?

JL: It's when it took four days to fly across the Pacific.

NL: A real pioneer.

JL: A real pioneer. And, so this was at May '41, and in December '41 the Japanese declared war and very shortly thereafter we were under Japanese occupation. Manila was declared an open city. And there was no fighting. One day the Japanese were there, and that was that. Uh...

NL: How did your life change?

JL: Well, first of all there were soldiers in the streets with guns. They were very nice to children, but they were kind of brutal, to each other as well as to other people. I mean, in the Japanese army non-commissioned officers have to be saluted by privates and so forth. [unclear] didn't salute somebody else properly, you'd get beaten up. And we were not put into, we were [unclear] internment camp for a short while. We were released because we were Belgian subjects and technically not at war with Japan. But I remember we were released before my father. My father had to be, they kept him longer for some reason. My mother went to visit him. And when we would pass by, the Japanese sentries in various places in [unclear] concentration and when we passed by a sentry there was a certain protocol as to how deep you had to bow and for how long you had to maintain your bow while passing. And my mother would not bow deep enough or long enough or something and when the Japanese [unclear] he just slapped her across the face. And there

were incidents like this. By and large since it was the beginning of the war. The Japanese were not unfriendly. I can even remember that the Japanese commander or assistant, he was a bigshot. The Colonel, the Colonel Koduki, was instrumental in helping us get out of the concentration camp. And my parents invited him to lunch or tea or something he was really [unclear].

NL: How long were you in the camp?

JL: Not very long.

NL: A few weeks?

JL: Few weeks. And uh...

NL: You were with mother...

JL: And father, and...

NL: In the same...

JL: Place.

NL: In place.

JL: Yeah. But I remember that, some of that is very vague...

NL: Yeah. But you don't remember any particularly cruel treatment.

JL: No, no I don't.

NL: Mmm hmm. And you...

JL: I do remember cruel treatment later.

NL: Later.

JL: Not at this, at this point, no.

NL: And when you were released, you went back to the...

JL: To the apartment.

NL: Apartment.

JL: And so that kind of brutality is, was you saw, but it was not a brutality aimed at anybody. It was just their way of life.

NL: Their code.

JL: Their code of ethics. I remember there in the apartment house next door they caught a young Filipino young man stealing and they [unclear] and they tied him up to a telephone pole, and in public view without a trial beat him to death. I readily saw a person, I saw a person beaten till he was dead. And that was, that was their [unclear]. He was caught red handed. There was no need for a trial, and the punishment for stealing through military uh, was death. And they beat him to death. That's a pretty horrible thing [unclear]. Uh...

NL: Did father work?

JL: Father had a business with animals there. Exactly what he did or how he did it was very mysterious. He never would talk about it.

NL: But he would manage to earn a living.

JL: He managed to earn a living. I don't know how. And he would never tell us. Even afterwards. My brothers would ask him. He was always very vague about this, how he did it.

NL: Some things are private.

JL: Some things are private. And after the Japanese took over, yeah, after the Japanese took over I think, I started, or maybe just before, yeah before they took over I discovered that there was, or that my parents discovered there was a synagogue in Manila. And we were enrolled in Hebrew school and Sunday school and all the good things there. And I was shocked to find out that (a) they didn't speak, they didn't do things in Hebrew there because [unclear] Hebrew because they were all German Jews. And they were Ashkenaz, and I had learned Sephardic. And I couldn't understand what they were talking about. They couldn't pronounce their *b'rachas*¹⁸ properly. And they also, for some reason they never learned how to write Hebrew in lower case. All they could do there was do everything in capital letters. [unclear] I remember being shocked by that because by that time I'd had two years of Hebrew and it was very intensive, half the day.

NL: Still very fresh for you.

JL: So it was still very fresh for me. [unclear] a rabbi and it was very, it was almost 80-90% German Jews. And they were more German than they were Jews. I mean they kept telling me how wonderful Germany was and I would go with my friends and they would all talk German. And the rabbi would give sermons in German. How that stuck in their craw I don't know. But he was very German.

¹⁸*B'rachas*: blessings.

Tape two, side one:

NL: Tape two, side one, continuing our interview with Dr. Lipetz. So, you were meeting German Jews at the synagogue in Manila.

JL: At the synagogue in Manila, and becoming quite active. I remember we went on a Sunday School picnic. I remember going to *Shabbas* services on a Friday night. I remember that the cantor's name, because we got to know him very well, was Joseph Cysner, C-Y-S-N-E-R. I wonder what happened to him. He was a young man. And then when the war broke out [unclear] and life came to a relatively, relatively quickly to some kind of a normal or, not a, normal's not the right word, a...

NL: Equilibrium.

JL: Equilibrium of some sort.

NL: Yes.

JL: And I remember still, I remember still going to synagogue and I can remember a number of incidents--I'll tell you two--one of which was, somebody was being followed. One of the members of the synagogue was being followed by the Japanese secret police for some reason. I don't know if they had reason to or not. I imagine they thought there was. And we were in this Friday evening services and we were in the synagogue, which was a Moorish style building. It looked like somebody's idea of what a synagogue must have looked like in ancient Israel. It was yellow. And we were in the sanctuary and this Japanese man comes in, and obviously, you know, he stood out pretty quickly. And he was very nice about it. He walked in and he saw everybody else was wearing a *yarmulka* or *kippah* and he went over and got one...

NL: He put one on!

JL: And he put one on and he sat unobtrusively in the back and got up and he sat down as the rest of us did. And he [unclear], the story was he was following somebody. Whether it was that or whether it was curiosity, I don't know. A lot of the Japanese expressed, the more educated ones, a lot of interest in what was going on, and who we were and so forth.

NL: Did you pick up some Japanese?

JL: Yes. Well, let me tell you about that. We were enrolled in school and the only school we could be enrolled in for whatever reason was a private school, which was run by the Christian brothers, the same people who run LaSalle College here.

NL: Ah hah.

JL: And it was called LaSalle.

NL: Interesting.

JL: [unclear] and we, the Japanese authorities decreed that we had to learn Japanese. So [speaking Japanese]. I learned to read and write some Japanese, not a whole lot, but enough to get by.

NL: Amazing.

JL: And we also had to learn Tagala, because it was the, which is the native language for, one of the languages in the Philippines. There are something like six thousand languages. There's a lot of islands. The Philippine archipelago has more islands in it than any other archipelago in the world [unclear]. Anyway Tagala I never mastered except a few words which I will not repeat. But Japanese I got some hang of which I've forgotten most of.

NL: Who were the other children in the school?

JL: Mostly Filipino. As a matter of fact, one of the people I went to school with was the late President Aquino.¹⁹ Her husband was a classmate of mine, and a few of the other names that you see most I remember were in my class.

NL: Were there any other European children?

JL: A few of the German Jews were there.

NL: German Jewish.

JL: And we were, this is where I first really encountered, firsthand anti-Semitism. I remember being beaten up on more than one occasion.

NL: On the part of native Filipinos?

JL: Native, but these were educated. But these people came from wealthy families. I mean this was a private school.

NL: [unclear].

JL: Yeah. Being being beaten up for having done something which I couldn't quite understand but it something with crucifying somebody named Jesus. And I didn't know what crucifixion was, and I certainly didn't know who Jesus was. But I had done it, and I don't remember ever having done it. And you know, why didn't I convert, and what was wrong with me. And I remember a lot of, I would *hate* to go to school. I was beaten up regularly...

NL: Oh my.

JL: For some, we were forced to take Cate-, to learn to study Catechism, or to sit in the class. We didn't have to study. We didn't, the Jewish students didn't have to learn the Catechism, but we had to sit in the class and be exposed to it.

NL: Didn't the Japanese intervene...

JL: No.

NL: ...and want you to learn their religious philosophy?

JL: Well, but I will, but we had to learn, no, as far as religion was concerned, the Japanese were very tolerant or not interested, I don't know.

NL: This was a tuition institution.

¹⁹The late President Aquino. Her husband was a classmate of mine: What he probably means is that he went to school with Benigno Aquino, a well-known activist who was assassinated by Ferdinand Marcos. Aquino's wife, Corazon, became President after the overthrow of Marcos

JL: It was an expensive school too. It was one of the better private schools in, well the Christian brothers run a, always did run a very good educational sort of thing. And my fa-, my parents put a high price on education.

NL: Your brothers went to the school?

JL: And, my bro-, my young-, Leon went, Eric was too young. And then I also met several times a week, because he lived nearby, with the cantor, Joseph Cysner, where I would study Hebrew and *Chumash* with him. And it was clear the *Chumash* and I'll never forget, we even did a little bit of Rashi,²⁰ because I was getting bored with *Chumash*, and he said, "O.K. Let me show you what comes next." And I can even tell you what in Rashi we studied. I remember that that distinctly.

NL: My word.

JL: It was the passage in Genesis, in *B'reshit*, where the brothers decided they're gonna get rid of Joseph and they throw him in the well. And in the *Chumash* it says that the well was empty and there was nothing in the well. And Rashi asked the question, "Why is it written that the well is empty and there is nothing in it?" If it's empty, obviously there was nothing in it. And Rashi said, "This is to indicate that not only was there no water which you might expect in a well, but there were no poisonous animals, spiders or whatever in there that would disturb Joseph." And I remember being struck by this. God, this is incredible stuff.

NL: This was God's providential hand, of course.

JL: Yes, but also I thought this was wonderful, that you could not just study *Chumash*, but you could study *Chumash* about *Chumash*, and you could go on and build, I think this was very, very interesting. I was really turned on to a lot of that. It was...

NL: Oh, that's interesting. You were how, what, eleven or so?

JL: I was about eleven, eleven, twelve. But you add-, you mention the word intervention, did the Japanese ever intervene, well, this is one of the stories I guess which, you know, out of every horrible moment in history there are some moments of humor, even though it's black humor but it's humor. We lived on a street in Manila for a while. It's a very nice street, Ateli Mavin [phonetic], and my brother, who, my youngest brother Eric who at that time must have been going on five, six, had a scooter. And this scooter was constructed out of a roller skate and two boards. And he loved to skate up and down the street on this scooter. And this scooter was a very noisy contraption. But further down the street was a German family, but a German German family, and they used to fly the swastika. They were a very pro-Nazi, there were a lot of Nazis there too.

NL: I see.

JL: It was a wide German German colony. And one day, one afternoon they, Eric was riding his scooter and making noise, and the Germans were trying to take their siesta, so they came out, and they knocked my brother off his scooter and took the scooter away. Now my brother was in tears. And he's walking down the street crying his little

²⁰Rashi: foremost medieval commentator of the Bible.

heart out. And the apartment house next to ours had become a Japanese military billet. And the Japanese soldiers were asking what was wrong. Why was he crying? They were *very* kind to children, very kind. They had a real love for children. I'll tell you another story about that too. Anyway he, Eric somehow in a mixture of English and French and God knows what, told the soldiers what was going on. And the soldiers got really annoyed. So, it happened that one of the soldiers was a non-commissioned officer who called out his troops, four or five men, with rifles and fixed bayonets.

NL: Oh my.

JL: They marched...

NL: [laughing]

JL: ...to this person's house, knocked on the door, and essentially said, "You have this kid's scooter?" And the Germans tried all kinds of, "I'm a Nazi..." and [unclear] . "Give the kid his scooter!" So they gave Eric the scooter...

NL: Oh my.

JL: And wait, this gets better, and then they go out and they stand in the street there with their guns with fixed bayonets, and these are big guns, big bayonets, and when you're a little kid they're even bigger, and they said to Eric, "*Ride* up and down on the street!"

NL: [laughing] Oh that's a choice story. There was one very happy little boy in Manila.

JL: Yes. And the name of the, the name we still remember, the name of the Japanese non-commissioned officer was Corporal Moona.

NL: How would you spell that?

JL: I would guess it would be M-O-O-N-A. He was Eric's friend. And there was never any trouble from that quarter again.

NL: Oh my. This, excuse me, I must ask this, did the German Germans know that you were Jewish?

JL: Oh yes. But they tried very hard apparently to instigate the Japanese against the Jews.

NL: Yes.

JL: And the Japanese would have none of it. They had no use for the Germans either. The Japanese just didn't like white people. They didn't care what your religion was. It was skin color that mattered.

NL: We understand that in Shanghai too the Germans tried to get them to introduce the yellow star and beyond that to the gassings and they, nothing like that ever happened.

JL: It was unknown. I did not ever detect any kind of anti-Semitism from them. I mean, anti-white, yes. Anti-European, but not anti-Jewish. And there were, you never even thought it. That's, oh let me tell you another story. Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur,

and I don't remember which, but it was one of the high holidays, 1942, maybe '43, no it was '42, uh, [begins weeping] This is gonna be a hard one.

NL: Do you want to stop for a moment [?]

JL: [unclear]. It was during service. I mean the place was packed, as synagogues often are on high holidays, and we were all facing the *bimah*,²¹ of course, and this was the point where the Torah was taken out of the ark, and the cantor holds the Torah in his arms and he turns to face the congregation. At this point I was facing the back wall. And he had a very good voice, and his voice began to crack and we wondered what was going on. And we turned around to look. The Japanese had brought the civilian Jewish internees from Sanatomas [phonetic] camp. Under armed guard brought them to the synagogue for services. Here were these people, gaunt, hungry, their clothes were degenerate--conditions were not great in the camps--they were not terrible yet, but they were not great--to join us for a service.

NL: This is a really quite remarkable phenomenon. To have released the prisoners who, that...

JL: We are talking about a large, fairly large number of people, you know, 50 or more.

NL: These were, eh...

JL: Americans...

NL: Americans...

JL: British, Dutch...

NL: Prisoners of war, Jewish prisoners.

JL: Not prisoners of war, they were civilian internees. Not soldiers. They were civilians.

NL: And on what basis were they interned?

JL: All, all...

NL: At war...

JL: All nationals of countries at war with Japan were interned.

NL: At war with Japan. Were you able to, were your parents able to socialize with these people?

JL: I don't remember.

NL: You don't remember.

JL: I don't remember anything other than that incident.

NL: Were there any children among them?

JL: I don't think so. I don't remember.

NL: But they looked emaciated.

JL: They looked in very sad shape. Although at that time things weren't that bad there yet. You need to remember that the Japanese at first did not treat civilians

²¹*Bimah*: reading stand for the Torah.

internees any differently than they did their own soldiers. But they didn't treat their own soldiers that well. You know, their standards of care and compassion were very different.

NL: But their treatment of prisoners of war was pretty ghastly.

JL: It was pretty ghastly, but again it's ghastly to our eyes. In their eyes they were not really that much worse than the way they treated their own prisoners. Their standards were very different. There was a whole ethical *Weltanschauung*²² was different, or was. I suspect right now it's not, the Japanese have come a long way in the last 40 years.

NL: So these internees were allowed to stay for the service?

JL: They were allowed to stay for the services. And I thought that was a...

NL: Mmm hmm.

JL: When you asked, "Were they like the Germans?" And there was a, there was a very large, you know, one of our neighbors in the apartment house was a German, he was a real, German, he was not a Nazi he was a Baron somebody or other, the only member of nobility I ever had the grace to meet. He was very anti-Nazi we found out later. You know, he was heartbroken, he was that, he was from one of these old German families and he thought Hitler was some punk upstart and what was he doing with German *kultur* and so forth. He was a wonderful man. Count Gronke, Kurt Gronke, G-R-O-N-K-E.

NL: Haven't thought about him for a while [chuckles].

JL: He was a single man. He was an older man. He had a Great Dane, who I loved to, I could ride on his back.

NL: [laughs]

JL: And he had air conditioning.

NL: Air conditioning!

JL: And on occasion I would be invited even to stand in the air conditioning.

NL: My word, what a treat! [chuckles]

JL: He was also a philatelist, he was a stamp collector, and he found out I was a stamp collector. He bought me a membership in the Philippine Stamp Club.

NL: Wow. Wow.

JL: He knew we were Jewish. There was no question about it.

NL: No.

JL: It was always "Good evening, Herr Gronke." It was "Herr Gronke," it wasn't "Baron." I found out later he was a baron.

NL: What was he doing in the Philippines, I wonder?

JL: In business. He was in some kind of business.

NL: Ah.

JL: There were a lot of Europeans trading and Manila was a good place to trade with China, with Japan, with all the countries that people would travel back and forth. I guess his company was headquartered in the Philippines. He might have been with a firm like, you know, Siemens or s-, I don't know who he was with.

²²*Weltanschauung*: German world view.

NL: Yes.

JL: Herr Gronke. So, you know, he was really, I was not aware of the horror of the Germans and the things they had done until after World War II.

NL: Till after the war was over.

JL: Till after the war was over. And only one thing...

NL: Sure, sure, dear.

JL: One of the things I remember what really got me going was the book that [unclear], *Blessed is the Match*.

NL: Oh, Marie Syrkin.

JL: Yes. It was one of the first Holocaust...

NL: One of the very early books of Jewish...

JL: ...books I read. I remember. It was 1946.

NL: ...resistance. Yes, yes.

JL: And, well, we can get to that later, [unclear] was going on in Europe. But in the Philippines, there was no, other than the Filipino Catholics, who were very anti-Semitic, and partly because, you know, the teachings of the Church at that time was that Jews did this terrible thing and I, I didn't know what I had done, but it must be pretty horrible to get beaten up regularly. Although I had Christian friends, I had Catholic friends and my parents had Catholic friends, who were, some of them were very, very nice, very kind and very helpful people, you know, who really helped us out. But there was this strong anti-Semitic thing.

NL: How long did you stay at the school, Jacques?

JL: We stayed in that school until the bombings began, and I guess the bombings began in '44 or '45 and then when Manila was being bombed on a regular interval, it became dangerous to travel, because...

NL: So you were taken out of school?

JL: Taken out of school and stayed home.

NL: Were there any other experiences that you had in '43 that you would want to tell us about?

JL: Well, there were a couple of, there were two amusing incidents with the English language, one of which was when the, before the war, I was signed up to go to a school, English speaking school, and I was given some kind of an I.Q. test or something. I remember coming home and saying to my mother that I thought I did something terrible on the test. And she said, "What's wrong?" And I said, "Well, I don't know, English is a funny language." Anyway, it turns out that there was a question, "Can a duck ride a horse?" Well, I did not know what a d-u-c-k was. I had no idea what this was. So I looked up the word, and I said, this must be the English way of spelling d-u-c, which is "duke" in French. And of course, that's what dukes do. They get on their horses and they ride around. So I said yes.

NL: [chuckling]

JL: So probably somewhere there is a record of me as being an absolute imbecile, because I think ducks ride horses.

NL: Oh my.

JL: I remember that one. The other one was, uh, in Manila right after the war started, right, Manila is on the bay, Manila Bay, and around the bay there is a very beautiful drive, which was then called Julie Boulevard. I don't know what it's called now. And there was a little café they built in it, they called the Aristocrat. And they served, it was great, and they had a juke box. And the juke box had songs like, eh, "Hotapola" on the something, something, something or other, I don't remember them. It was Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Sheen, these other great songs of the day, "Mares Eat Oats" and things like that. And the Japanese Navy, of course, in Manila this was a natural harbor. I was there walking and the Japanese, maybe he was an admiral [unclear].

NL: Lots of braid.

JL: Lots of gold and so forth. He said to me in English, "Do you want some ice cream?" And I said, "Sure." So he bought ice cream and he was telling me about his children in Japan. And he kept saying, "Would you like to pray with me?" He really meant "play."

NL: Oh, he couldn't pronounce...

JL: I thought he wanted to *daven*! So I did not understand that. Anyway, that was, my experiences at the beginning were, but at the end, uh, there are lots of other stories.

NL: Was your apartment damaged during the bombing?

JL: Well, the first apartment we were in we were asked to leave by the Japanese. And we moved two or three times. Each time the Japanese would requisition housing we moved further and further away from the center of the city, which was, divine providence, because as you know, Manila was destroyed except for one or two small areas, and we happened to be in one of them.

NL: Mmm.

JL: And one neighbor...

NL: There were lots of casualties? Civilian casualties?

JL: Well, I'll tell you that story too. We realized that the war was coming to, was winding down or winding up or whatever, that the Japanese had lost. And it got to be kind of hairy. The bombings were going on every day. And we lived with two other families, non-Jewish, no, one was Jewish and one was not, in this very large house, which had been built by the Spaniards, which had walls about a yard thick, to keep the house cool. The idea is that with a very thick wall, the house remains cool and it really worked. And the house was subdivided into three apartments. And the house next door was requisitioned by the Japanese and there was billeted troops there. And we were, this time we were getting scared because what would these troops do to us? And I had one encounter with a drunken Japanese soldier who had his hands around my throat, but he was just drunk. He was not, he was just drunk. Fortunately I could mutter enough Japanese and his friends, you know,

come on, you know, leave the kid alone, but it was kind of scary, you see, he was a big guy. I didn't know what drunk meant, really, I had never seen anybody drunk before, and this guy smelled kind of funny, and his Japanese wasn't very good either. [laughs] He was slurring it.

NL: [laughs]

JL: But, then, and things had gotten very bad. The Japanese troops no longer had rifles. They had wooden guns. They were drilling with wooden guns and that was very bad. One night the, we heard lots of movement next door and we were quite concerned. Trucks pulled up and they took the soldiers away and they were never seen again. And soon after that the city fell. And I remember, you know, we were wondering what was happening. And we got, we got, we could not, all the radios had been confiscated by the Japanese and then returned, but fixed so you could only listen to their stations. And I remember one night, my father, we were listening to radio Manila, which was the voice of the Japanese controlled government, and they were just playing music. And we knew that, that, you know, MacArthur had landed in Leyte, and [unclear] leaflets had been dropped and things like that. And one, my father gets a phone call, and this man identifies himself and he says, "Our friends are here. I cannot tell you any more." And of course we knew what this meant, and the next thing we knew, the radio just went off the air. And we couldn't, there was still electricity, there was still water, so of course we immediately filled up everything we could with water. Because the first thing to go would be water. And my father, providentially, when the war broke out, you know, [unclear] he could get his hands on. We had canned goods. And, bless the American canning industry. We had canned goods that had been three years old at the end of the war, when we bought them, I don't know how long they were in cans before that, but they were still...

NL: Still...

JL: They were still good. Carnation milk was one of the things I remember.

NL: [chuckles]

JL: And...

NL: How long were you in that state?

JL: Well, about three days, two or three days, and then one day I was looking down the road and I see some friends of ours coming, looking absolutely bedraggled, you know, dirty, and their clothes were ripped and they looked as if they'd been dragged through the woods. They had escaped from the fighting in Manila, and our home became a hostel...

NL: I see.

JL: For almost two weeks, where people, oh, half the Jewish community came through.

NL: Stragglers.

JL: Straggling through, who had escaped with their lives, and telling all kinds of horrible things. But the end was horrible. It was, the city was fought over brick by brick.

NL: Is that so?

JL: Although there was one story that came out of there. I don't know if the story is true or not, but it's a good story yet. The Germans, the Nazi Germans, took refuge in the German embassy. And when things got too hot there they decided to go across the street to another building which seemed safe and they took out this huge German swastika flag and tried to cross the street with it and the Japanese just mowed them down. They had no use for any of them.

NL: Mmm. Interesting.

JL: And then in '45 we were finally liberated, and I remember seeing the first [weeping] the story is [pauses] what kind of thing [unclear]. The first American soldier with a *mezuzah* around his neck. They had given all the Jewish soldiers little kits. I still have the prayer book from that kit which was given by the Jewish war board or [unclear]. Included in it was a *mezuzah* which they wore around their neck. And I remember seeing the first Jewish soldier. And shortly thereafter, it must have been shortly thereafter, because this happened in March, I think, was *Pesach*. And there were two Jewish chaplains, rabbis, attached to the, it was the first cavalry division I guess, or whoever else was there, one of whom I believe his name was Rabbi Gordon. I don't know his first name. I don't know if he is the famous Rabbi Gordon who one reads about, or somebody else, I don't know. I would love to find out who the rabbis were. And...

NL: I guess the chaplain service...

JL: Could, probably could tell me.

NL: Could tell you, yes.

JL: And they came to our home, and they visited all the Jews, and they brought us things and so forth, and that, that Passover, they had a *Seder*, on the race track in Manila.

NL: On the race track.

JL: The race track. It was the largest auditorium. It wasn't covered, but it was, you know...

NL: Open, large.

JL: Open, for the American army, and all the Jewish...

NL: Oh my.

JL: ...civilians that they could muster. And they sent jeeps out for us. And gave us matzoh, and [weeping] had a *Seder*.

NL: Oh, what a momentous experience that must have been. True liberation. Um, did you hear anything at all about the Jews who were in Shanghai? I mean, you lived so, Japanese or [unclear].

JL: A lot of the Jews who were in Manila, the Germans had come through Shanghai.

NL: Had come through.

JL: And so they had come through Nagasaki, in Japan too.

NL: Mmm hmm.

JL: And, the ones who, a lot of them had come to Manila thinking it'd be safer than being in Shanghai. It turned out, I don't think it made much, a whole lot of difference. There was no one, I have not heard any horror stories. I had, as I said, I had not heard any horrible anti-Semitic, uh, holocaust, uh, mass destruction and things like that till we came back in this country.

NL: Do you think your parents knew what was happening in Europe?

JL: I suspect they did. Well, I don't know.

NL: They may not have.

JL: They may not have. I mean, I knew, they knew that terrible things were happening. How terri-, I don't think anybody knew how terrible they were until, when?

NL: After liberation.

JL: Well, they knew before then. When, when, uh, there was a lot of intelligence out before that. I mean...

NL: Some people of course knew.

JL: Right, but the most, you wouldn't accept.

NL: It was so unthinkable. So how long, then, did your family stay in Manila after...

JL: We stayed in Manila for about three, four months after liberation. We sailed from Manila just before VE day. I celebrated VE day on board a ship between Leyte and Samar [phonetic], two islands.

NL: You were on your way to the States?

JL: On my way to the States.

NL: Now, did father by then have a visa number?

JL: No.

NL: No.

JL: We came to this country and then we, by then we were more a little more politically astute at that time, and we kept getting one extension after another. And finally in 19-, see we got back here, let's see the war was over in '45, right? We got back in '45. It took five years before we were accepted with a visa.

NL: Mmm.

JL: Permanent visa. We had to leave the country, go to Canada, stay overnight, and come back. So we were being...

NL: Technical sillinesses.

JL: Technical silliness. And having to come back, and then in 19-, this was in 1948 or '49 that happened, because I became a citizen the same year I graduated college, it was 1954.

NL: So you went to college here in the States?

JL: Here in the States. And, in '54 I became a citizen.

NL: And did your folks hear from any of your relatives in Europe during the war?

JL: Well, we came back...

NL: Telling you...

JL: Did you see the play on "*A Shayna Maidel*"?

NL: No.

JL: Well, in there there was a scene which is absolutely so accurate and so heart rending, I just fell apart.

NL: You tell me about it.

JL: Uh, where the old, the father, meets somebody who'd just come back and they both pull out little notebooks and say, "Shlebovitz and Shlimowitz and this one, and that one," and the answer's always, "Dead. Dead. Dead. Murdered." And I remember you know, when we came back. We had no idea where my father's parents were. We knew they had been alive when we left Belgium, but that was five years ago. And that, I remember the newspapers publishing lists every day of people who had been found in concentration camps. My father would spend hours reading through them, looking for names, and we never found one. I suspect my grandparents were murdered.

NL: [unclear].

JL: I'm sure they were, [unclear]. And, you know, we heard stories about people whose relatives, not relatives, but friends, distant relatives who stayed behind and who survived and who didn't, and some of the family went back to Belgium and some even came back, back, back and forth and so forth and so on. And then I began to get an understanding about the absolute horror of what had happened. Now I had seen the horror of war. But it wasn't personal.

NL: You weren't hurt...

JL: I was not...

NL: Personally.

JL: I wasn't, well, we were, we had, I suffered from malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies and all this other wonderful stuff, but, it was never personal. This was war. This was what happens in war. It's a terrible thing.

NL: And your family was intact.

JL: Right. But the idea that, you know, yes I'd been beaten...

[Tape ends abruptly.]
