

Francine Taylor

00:00:44

>> Interviewer: Would you please begin by telling me your name and where you were born and when you were born?

>> Taylor: Okay. My name is Francine Taylor, and I was born on July 14, 1928, in Karczew, Poland. That's a little -- that's a suburb right outside of Warsaw, 30 minutes by train.

>> Interviewer: And what was your Polish name?

>> Taylor: My Polish name was Frajda.

>> Interviewer: And your maiden name?

>> Taylor: Ajzensztark.

>> Interviewer: And what does that mean?

>> Taylor: *Eisen* means "iron." *Stark* means "strong," and it means in German, actually, "strong as iron."

>> Interviewer: Had your family been in that community for many years or generations?

>> Taylor: Yes, yes. My mother's maiden name was Königsberg, which is named after the city of Königsberg in Germany also, but they were, as far as I can remember and told, they've been there for many generation in that vicinity of right around Warsaw.

>> Interviewer: Do you remember anything of that community, of that town?

>> Taylor: Well, yes, because -- well, first, my family immigrated to Paris, France, and I was only two years old, in 1930. But it just so happened that in 1938, my mother, my sister, and I went back for three months' vacation there. So I was already, what, 10 years old? And so I remember everything quite well, even though when I first came to France, I couldn't speak Polish, but when I returned and was there for a whole

three months, I, I -- I speak Yiddish, but I learned Polish also. It was a very lovely little place. Actually, I was born in Karczew. That's where my father comes from, and my mother comes from a little town that touches Karczew named Otwock. And that was a resort town. It was very beautiful. Otwock was sort of a, a rich little town where wealthy people came and spent their vacations, so the Jewish community there was a little bit wealthier than in Karczew, and Karczew was a real *shtetl* like, where the Jews were poorer and lived among themselves, like in a ghetto. And my family was very observant, very orthodox, typical Jewish family with the sheitels, and the women did seem to do all the work, and the men were studying the Talmud all day long. And it was a very colorful summer. Yes, I remember it very, very well.

>> Interviewer: Do you remember any of the political activity that might have been going on in 1938? I know you were only a little girl.

>> Taylor: Right. I don't think there were any political activities that I can remember. They were too busy -- the Poles, the Gentile Polish population was very anti-Semitic. Now, I remember that very well, and they were too busy, the Jews, staying away from the Poles and not getting in their way. In fact, I remember one incident where my uncle -- I had an uncle in those days who was about 23, 24 years old; lived with my grandmother on my mother's side. And one of his friends who was Polish, not Jewish, had gone out on the town that weekend and drank a lot, so he came back with a gun and proceeded -- we were visiting there. He was going to kill us all. *Zyds*, he called us, you know, because we were Jews. And my uncle actually -- who was out on the town, too -- his Jewish boys came in and saw him through the window, and he had to overpower him and knock him down, or he would have killed us all.

>> Interviewer: Do you remember any other incidents, any things that happened in the streets or --

>> Taylor: No, that's the only anti-Semitic incident that I remember. I remember there was some kind of a Christian holiday -- I don't know what it was -- and there was a procession, and the Poles were carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary, and she was electrical in some way. I don't know just how, you know. She operated with a battery, but she had tears coming out her eyes, and the tears were made out of precious stones. I don't know how that worked, I mean, but I'll always remember that. And because of the religious holiday, because of this procession, all the Jews went -- sort of went into hiding. They say stay out of the streets because that's usually when the Poles like to beat up a few Jews. I remember that. But other than that, you know, we went to visit our grandparents and the cousins and all that, and we actually, you know -- we were children. We had a good time, but Jews lived among Jews and did not really mix with Christians at all.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell me why your father and your mother chose to leave the town in the first place and go to France?

>> Taylor: Well, then, a little later on, my father had a little shop in Warsaw itself, and he, I understand, was doing all right. I mean, he was making a living, but anti-Semitism was very, very, strong. And men from France came to recruit labor -- That's what my father told us -- in Poland, and he was -- so he was talking at the main square in Warsaw, saying, "Come to France. There is plenty of work. No, no discrimination, no prejudice, plenty of work." So my father talked it over with my mother. He says, "Let's leave this country," you know. "It sounds so good." And all he had to do was ask for political asylum. As a Jew, he could get it. I understand that France does that quite easily. So he came, and when he arrived in France, he was told -- my father was a tailor -- that as a tailor, there was no work for him. There was work for him in the coal mines, and he wouldn't give -- they wouldn't give him a work permit as a tailor, only as a coal miner.

So, of course, my mother wouldn't let him work in the coal mines, so -- but they remained in Paris without a work permit, and he found work. They lived in a little, like, fourth-class hotel room, terrible place, and he went looking for work, and he found work, but since he didn't have a work permit, like, anything that would pay, for instance, a dollar an hour, he had to work for 25 cents an hour. But he stayed. He remained. He didn't want to go back to Poland.

>> Interviewer: Did any of his family members come with him?

>> Taylor: Yeah -- well, not with him, but then a little later, when he finally received a work permit -- I don't know just what the procedure was, you know, if he had to stay in France so many years; I know they were there quite some time -- then he brought a younger brother from Poland and his family. And then my mother had a brother who was supposed to be drafted in the Polish army, so he fled Poland at the age of 17, and he came to France and asked for political asylum. As a Jew, you could get it. All they would say is that, you know, they were so anti-Semitic that they didn't want to serve. So he came also. And so my mother had -- then she brought a younger sister, also, and she introduced her to a young Jewish man in Belgium, and she married. And she's still alive. She stayed in Brussels, Belgium. But, see, my mother came from a family of four -- I mean, eight. Four of them emigrated, and four of them stayed in Poland. And my father, the same way; he came from a family of six. Two of them stayed in Poland; four of the emigrated.

>> Interviewer: Did you go back again besides the trip in 1938?

>> Taylor: No, no. I could have gone back after the war, but there was nothing to go back to. We -- between my father and my mother, we had 56 people, including our grandparents, who got shot by the Germans in Poland. And that's close family -- I mean, uncles, aunts, grandparents, and first cousins -- so we didn't want to go back. There was too many sad memories, I mean, tragic memories, really, yes.

>> Interviewer: Well, tell me about France in the '30s as you were growing up in France and your experience as a Jewish child.

>> Taylor: All right. Well, we lived in a neighborhood that was 50% Jewish and 50% French middle class, and my parents, of course, couldn't speak French when they arrived, and so until we started school -- of course, we picked up French immediately, but we spoke Yiddish in our house. And we didn't encounter really much anti-Semitism, only made fun of our name, Ajzensztark, because the French could not pronounce it. They said that was a name to break your teeth on, so "*casser les dents*," as they say. And that's really the only -- as children, that's, that's the only anti-Semitism that we encountered, and it was nice. We lived right in the heart of the city, and the schools were good, and we -- my father, finally, as I said, once he got a work permit and got work and then little by little, he moved out -- we moved out of this terrible hotel and got a little apartment. It was quite nice, on the boulevard. And he became a clothes designer in later years. Didn't enjoy too much because the war came, but the life was nice. I went to public schools, to all-girls school, and my sister too. We walked to school. It was like a 10-minutes' walk from where we lived.

>> Interviewer: And your mother was at home?

>> Taylor: My mother was at home. She helped my father. When he was a tailor, she did all the finishing by hand, and then when he became a clothes designer -- he worked at home, my father did -- then she did, also, all the finishing, the hand-finishing with him. So she stayed home, but, as I say, she was not employed, but she worked because she helped him.

>> Interviewer: Were you still an observant family in terms of religious practice?

>> Taylor: No, not really, I'll tell you, because my mother and my father came from a very strict religious orthodox family, and they were, I will say, almost like the revolutionary of their

time. They were pretty much against orthodoxy, you know, as they -- like they grew up in. In my mother's days, I mean, had she remained in Poland and married, they would have shaved her head and put a sheitel on her head. She thought that was horrible. And of course, the men didn't shave, and my father didn't like that, and he didn't like the attire, you know, the black silk coat and all that. But we -- so I wouldn't say we were observant, but we were very Jewish oriented, you know, as far as observing all the holidays and all the customs and the language and reading and writing. My father taught us. But we really didn't go to *shule* that much. They didn't have the time; I'll be honest with you. They couldn't observe Saturday. It wasn't possible for them, you know, I mean, Shabbat, but they did the best they could. I mean, we were still brought up pretty much, you know -- very much the Jewish way, I'll say. Yes, very much so.

>> Interviewer: And as time passed and we get into, say, 1938-39, when did things start to change?

>> Taylor: Well, things didn't start to change until the war broke out, and we were always corresponding with the family in Poland, and all at once, we couldn't. Of course, France was invaded very quickly. They lost the war. We were in Paris. I remember looking -- pulling the shades down and looking through the blinds and seeing the German army walk into Paris, and the streets were deserted. There was not a single soul in the street.

>> Interviewer: Do you remember any discussion in your family about leaving France to go anywhere else?

>> Taylor: Not at the time. Not at the time. We were getting letters from Poland. They were censored then by the German government, you know, and they were saying, "We're doing well. We have everything." You know, they sounded real good, but they were always talking about lemons, about having all these lemons, and finally -- we couldn't understand why they would say that.

Finally one day, my father caught on, and he said, "I presume," he says, "that there is writing between the lines dipped in lemon juice." And he put a -- was it a -- a regular match, you know, and the smoke of the match brought out writing between the lines.

>> Interviewer: And what did it say?

>> Taylor: And it said that, "We are starving to death. We expect to be killed any time. The Germans are just horrible, and every day brings a day of terror." And that was the last letter we received, and that was the end. But we did not know what was going on at the time. We did not know until we -- my father, we found out, after the war, was in the French underground, but we didn't know it at the time, and he would always talk to us. He would say, "Oh, things will be all right. Things will be all right. Let's just be patient. We will win the war. We will win the war." And he never spoke to us about leaving Paris. Then the one day we had to go pick up the Jewish yellow star to sew on our garment, that's when my father sat us down and he says, "You know," he says, "I cannot leave this city." He still didn't tell us why. He says, "But if anything happens, if the Germans sometimes decide to maybe come and get all the Jews," he says, he says, "then we each have to run for our life." He says, "If you become -- if one of us becomes separated from the other," he says, "don't try to save" -- like, don't try to save your mother or don't try to save your sister. Just, just run for your life. But -- so we didn't know whether he knew anything or he didn't. He never said.

>> Interviewer: Were you still going to school at that point after the Occupation?

>> Taylor: At that point, yeah, at that point. We stayed in Paris until, I think, 1942, 1942 or close, yes, because one day, I became ill, and the doctor said I had spots on my lungs and if I wasn't sent into the country for good, good food and fresh air, I would develop tuberculosis. So we knew of a little,

little boarding place. It was an old couple that took three or four children in at the time, and it was a small village by Le Mans, about 200 kilometers from Paris.

>> Interviewer: Which way?

>> Taylor: Going towards south. You've heard of the Le Mans races?

>> Interviewer: Yeah.

>> Taylor: Right. Forty kilometers from Le Mans. And so they send me there, and this was the beginning of the summer -- school had just let out -- to stay for the summer. And in the meantime, all hell broke loose.

>> Interviewer: Could I back you up just a little bit?

>> Taylor: Sure.

>> Interviewer: Could you tell me what, what went on between the time you saw the German soldiers marching into Paris and the time you went into the country, those two years?

>> Taylor: Well, we went on to school. Then, they put out a curfew -- well, first, first, it was pretty, pretty normal for -- we went on to school. Everything was pretty normal. We found out later, they were so busy with the Polish Jews, you know, and the other Jews that they left Jews in France alone for a while, maybe for a good year or so. I'm just guessing, you know. Then, we had to go get our Star, Star of David, and then, a cur -- for the Jews, there was a curfew at 8:00 at night. Anybody caught with a Jewish star at 8:00 -- after 8:00 would be punished. So we had to be home, everybody, by 8:00 at night.

Then, Jews would, Jews would disappear, you know, but we didn't know what happened to them. We didn't know if they fled because I don't know if you remember the history of France. The Germans only marched in so far into France, and there was Occupied France and so-called Free France under the puppet government,

collaborating government in Free France, and it stayed free, so-called, for a good while, and Jews would escape to Free France. So we didn't know what happened to those Jews.

And one day, also, before I went away, there was a knock on the door at 5:00 in the morning, and my mother asked who it was, and they told her a telegram was to be delivered. So she opened the door, and it was the French police and the Nazis. Instead of a telegram, they came to do a search in the house, and they stayed all day, searched the house, and even on one, all the thread, the bobbins of thread, looking inside. We didn't know what they were looking for. Of course, we found out later that my father had been denounced as a -- being in the French underground, and they were looking for evidence, but they found none. So they stayed all day, and they left. And that's when my father's friends told him, "You should leave Paris. They'll come back. They're watching you." But he refused. Of course, we didn't know why, but that's why he refused. He was in the French underground. And so this actually was the life that went on in Paris until I left.

>> Interviewer: Was there food? Was food plentiful?

>> Taylor: No, no. Food -- they took all the food. The Germans took all the food out of the country. Like, to get just -- we couldn't find any potatoes, for instance, and rutabaga was -- if you want to get a couple of pounds of rutabaga, you had to get up in the morning at 4:00 and stay in line till 8:00 or 9:00, you know, until the store opened. And there was a black market -- there always is -- where you could buy some food. But we had a ration card. Of course, the Jews had "Jew" stamped on their ration card, and the French law is that after the age of 15, it is a law you have to have an identification card, so all the cards were stamped also "Jew." So bread, everything was rationed, you know. We weren't starving, but we didn't have much. People would go out in the country a lot of times on

bicycles to see if they could gather eggs or chicken or something like that. But we didn't have much to eat, no.

>> Interviewer: Was there a Nazi influence in the school that you attended after the Occupation?

>> Taylor: Not really. We didn't, we didn't stay that long, really, after the Occupation, you know, not really. I was still in grammar school, so, you know, I was a child. And, no, it just went on pretty normal until they clamped down on the city, as I said, and that didn't last very long, and that's when I was sent out to the country.

>> Interviewer: Was your sister sent also, or just you?

>> Taylor: No, no. My sister went on to school because she's almost five years older than I am.

>> Interviewer: I see.

>> Taylor: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: And so you went to the country.

>> Taylor: So I went to the country, and I was supposed to spend the summer there and then come back. I was a couple, couple months short of my 14th birthday, and one day, I received -- we had no telephones in the houses. I received a, a -- like a message from the post office that I have a phone collect -- I guess you call it collect -- I had a phone call from Paris, that I need to go to the post office to get -- this party was trying to get me, so I went to -- it was a small village, where I was. I went to the post office, and it was a cousin of mine calling me from Paris. She, she was a Gentile, and her husband was my father's first cousin. She was married to my father's first cousin who had been deported to a concentration camp already, but not as a Jew; for hard labor, because they hadn't gathered the Jews yet in France.

>> Interviewer: Now, when he was deported for hard labor, did she know that, or did he just disappear?

>> Taylor: No, no, she knew that. They were getting the young, strong men. They were just getting -- you know, picking them for hard labor. They needed, needed labor, and that wasn't just the Jews. That was everybody, the French too. So she calls me, and I thought she was -- that was the day of my 14th birthday. It was on the 14th of July, which is also French Independence Day. And I thought she called -- she was calling me to wish me a happy birthday. And I was so happy. The people I was staying with had fixed a cake for me, and I started, you know, being very excited. She says, "Be quiet." She says, "Be quiet. I'm not calling you for your birthday." She said, "Your father was taken." And she says, "Your mother and sister are in hiding, and I'm sending you 3,500 francs," which was quite a lot of money there, "in the mail." She says, "You should get it tomorrow. It's going," like, "express mail, and also an address in Dax," which is the southern part of France. And she says, "From there," she says, "you will get into Free France, and then you are to find your mother and sister around Toulouse." It's also in the southern part of France. And she says, "Because," she says, "the Germans have picked up all the Jews in Paris. They have rounded up all the Jews." She said, "women, men, children," she said.

>> Interviewer: And this was July 14, 1942?

>> Taylor: It was July 14th. I'm pretty sure it was '42, yes, uh-huh, yeah, yeah. I know it was my birthday. I mean, yeah, it was '42. So of course -- and she says, she says, "I can't talk anymore," she says, "because I hope I'm not followed." So she says, "Tomorrow, when you get the money, just, just do this. Follow my instructions." So when I came back to the place where I was staying, there were, I think, five more children beside myself. They all started, you know, wishing me -- singing "Happy Birthday," and the cake was there as a surprise, and I started

crying. And they all thought I was crying because of joy, because it was such a wonderful surprise, and I was crying because I had no mother, no father, and I had nobody left, and here I was, on my own, and I could not, you know, communicate with them. All I knew is that I was supposed to meet them, so.

>> Interviewer: Do you know where your father was sent? Did you know at that time, or when did you find out?

>> Taylor: We -- I found out after -- much later when I finally was able to get to my mother and sister that my -- what happened is, the Germans, while I was on vacation and before they took all the women and children, they -- my father, when he finished work around 5:00 or so, always went downstairs, went to the closest café, had a little drink, and discussed politics -- that was his routine -- with some men. So around 5:00 or so, there was a knock on the door, and my mother says when she opened the door, there was these two big men in civilian clothes, and she knew right away they were SS, even though they spoke very good French. But for some reason, you could recognize them, and they asked for my father. Well, he wasn't home, and they said, "well, where is he?" She says, "I don't know. What is it?" So they said, "well, nothing important. We'll come back," very polite, and they left, and she said she watched through the window. They took off in a big, black car, and so she knew they were looking for him.

So she went downstairs, and she said -- she started walking to warn my father and stopped every few steps, and she said she couldn't see anybody following her. And when she arrived at this little café where my father always stopped, he was standing on the corner of that street with two men. So she approached him and didn't even have time to say his name. That car pulled up behind her. The two men got out and picked him up and took him. And they put him in, they put him in a jail called Drancy, my sister told me, and he wrote a little card from there.

>> Interviewer: This was in Paris?

>> Taylor: That was right outside of Paris, Drancy. That's where they put all the transit people. Actually, before they took all the women and children, when they picked up just political men, you know, for -- like, he was considered as a political because he was in the French underground. That's where they put him. So he wrote a little card, and he said in the little card that he didn't want my mother to come because he knew she would fall, you know, fall apart. So he asked my sister to come and bring him some -- no, at first he -- that was the first day. He asked her to come and visit, and he said, "And do come because I'll only be here five days, and I'm allowed one card." So my sister went, and that's when he told her, he says, "You know," he says, "this is it." He says, he says, "I don't expect the women and children to be, you know, safe but just a few days, so," he says, "bring me some soap and shaving cream," and he says, "and flee." He says, "Flee Paris." And he told her who to contact in the French underground. And he says, "If, for any reason, you become separated," he says, he says, "just flee for your own life." He says, "It won't help you to try to save each other's life," he says, "because this is it."

So my sister came back, and she gathered some soap and shaving cream, and she said when she came back, she never saw him anymore. They had already shipped him out. He didn't stay the five days, and they sent him to Birkenau. Of course, we didn't know then. We found out after the war. The Germans had left some books with everybody's name, and his name was on there and when he was shipped out and where.

>> Interviewer: When did you find out what happened to him at Birkenau?

>> Taylor: We really didn't. After the war, when the war was over, a couple of people came back that were deported. One person said they saw him. He only lasted two days. They said he didn't want to live. He said that he just went to the gas chamber after two days, and then, of course, they didn't see

him, you know, being cremated, but -- so my mother was always hoping, well, he will come back, he will come back, but then, after the last person came back from the concentration camp and then they went -- the government started looking through all the books, his name was found, and it was -- that was -- oh, it already was in the late '40s, maybe right around 1950 that we found out.

>> Interviewer: And how old was he when he was taken?

>> Taylor: Forty-four.

>> Interviewer: So tell me about your trip from Le Mans to your mother in the Toulouse area.

>> Taylor: All right. So, so anyway, the next morning -- I had a bicycle, a small suitcase full of summer clothes, and I received the money, which, in those days, was quite a bit of money. And I went to Tours to catch the train. Tours is not too far from Le Mans.

>> Interviewer: Did you have an opportunity to say goodbye, or did you --

>> Taylor: Yeah, oh, yes, yes. I told them -- of course, they knew I was a Jewish child. These people were not Jewish, but they knew I was a Jewish child, and, of course, finally, when I stopped my crying, I told them what happened. They all -- everybody cried, and I told them I had to go, that I had this address in Dax, to cross the line. So Le Mans did not have a direct train, and Tours is not far from Le Mans, so they advised that I take my bike and go to Tours and get a direct train from Tours to Dax. Dax was a small resort town right on the border that separated Occupied France and Free France. So I did that, and when I arrived in Tours to buy a ticket, the station -- and found out when my train was leaving, that was like late afternoon. I didn't have a train till the next morning. And the station was crawling with Germans. I mean, just -- it was a strategic point of some kind. There were a lot of Germans at

that -- and I became afraid because my only ID card, which I didn't have because I wasn't 15, was my ration card, and my ration card had a stamp, "Jew," on it. So I couldn't show it, you know. If somebody, they would ask -- they were asking for IDs because by that time, you know, like I said, all the -- they were looking for Jews trying to escape into Free France.

So I became afraid, and I decided, well, I'm -- I had money -- I'll go to a hotel and spend the night. So I went to a hotel, and they gave me a card to fill out, and so I filled out my name and everything, and at the end, it says age and identification number. Well, I didn't have an identification card, of course, but I didn't need one, so I tell the lady, I said -- but I did look older than my age. I was about 14. I -- maybe I looked like a 16 year old. So I tell the lady, "I don't have an ID card." She says, "Why not?" I said, "Well, I'm not old enough." So she says, "You're not old enough?" She says, "Well, what are you doing in a hotel at your age? How old are you?" I said, "Fourteen." She said, "What are you doing, you know, spending the night?" And I said, "Well." She says, "Are you Jewish?" Well, I said, "Oh, no, no. I'm not Jewish." Of course, I was very lucky. We were all quite light and blue eyes in my family. At that time, the Germans were all looking for dark, dark people. That changed. They realized that plenty of Jews weren't that dark. But that happened. I said, "Oh, no, no. I'm not Jewish." So she said, "Well, what are you doing in a hotel?" So she says, "Oh, you ran away from home. I know." So she says, "I'm going to call the police." And she tried to grab me, so I became very afraid, of course, and I grabbed my bike, and I ran out, and I ran back to the station, and I spent all night in the ladies' room -- in the bathroom, you know, until the next morning.

Next morning, I bought a ticket; put my bicycle in the last wagon, like luggage, you know. In those days, they had a compartment where eight people sat together, four on one side and four on the other. And I got on the train, very happy.

Didn't have a pocketbook with me. Everything was in my pocket. I'll tell you why I say that. And we were on the train maybe 15 minutes. The train stops in the middle of nowhere. So one lady says, or one man says, "I wonder why we're stopping here?" Somebody answers, "You know, they do that all the time since the Jews are fleeing Occupied France to go into Free France." She says, "The Germans stop the train in the middle of the country, and they look for Jews." So here I was, thinking, If you tell them you don't have an ID card, I knew that, you know, they'll automatically -- especially if you look older than 15, they'll say, well, she's Jewish or he's Jewish. And you couldn't show them my ration card because it had "Jew" on it. So they came, two German soldiers came into our compartment, asked for everybody's ID. Everybody showed them the ID, and came my turn, and I took the man's arm that was sitting right by me and I said, "*Je suis avec monsieur.*" "I am with this gentleman." It worked. Just, it worked.

They passed on, but I had some explaining to do to the gentleman. Of course, I wasn't going to tell him I was Jewish because, of course, you never knew. I mean, he might help you, and he may not. So he looks at me, and I said, "well," I say, "you know," I said, "I lost my pocketbook." See, I didn't have a pocketbook with me. And I say, "You know how these Germans are," I said. "If you tell them that you don't have any ID, you know, they automatically take you for Jews." He says, "You're right. You're right." He says, "You better get off the next step and go to the gendarmerie," which is like the police station, "and tell them your story and," he said, "so they would make you some kind of a temporary piece of paper," he says, "because," he says, "you won't be so lucky the next time. They do this all the time." So next little town, I got off, took my bicycle off the luggage, and then proceeded to ride my bike from around Tours to Dax, which is like 2/3 -- if you look on the map, like 2/3 of the length of France. It's, like, close to a thousand kilometers. And I did it.

>> Interviewer: And how did you live on that bicycle trip?

>> Taylor: Well, I had money, you know. I had money, and I would not stop in hotels. I stopped and slept in -- what do you call, *grange*, where they store the hay in the farms, you know. I stopped and slept there, and --

>> Interviewer: Did people sell you food?

>> Taylor: Yes. Well, I -- see, I had my ration card, so I just gave them the stamps out of my ration card.

>> Interviewer: And the stamps were not marked?

>> Taylor: Huh?

>> Interviewer: The stamps didn't indicate that you were Jewish.

>> Taylor: No, the stamps were not marked, no, no. Just the card, and a lot of the time -- see, people would buy false -- I mean, stamps, you know, that were not -- in other words, like false money, you know. So a lot of the time, they would ask you for the cover, but every time they asked me for the cover, I said -- I would say, "I lost it," because I always stopped in little dinky, you know, country places where -- so they'd say, "Well, okay." You know, they were not very particular as long as you give them the stamps, so I was lucky that way. It was a long, long journey, and it took me probably close to a month to get there.

>> Interviewer: Did you encounter any Germans along the way after you got off the train?

>> Taylor: Yes, yes, but I didn't look suspicious. I was just, you know, riding, you know, a bicycle with a little, tiny, little suitcase. So that part was pretty peaceful. As I say, I slept, you know, and I had money, so that part was pretty peaceful until I arrived in Dax. Well, when I arrived in Dax, it was crawling with Germans.

>> Interviewer: Now, Dax is in what part of France?

>> Taylor: It's in the southern part of France. It's -- like I said, it's a little resort town close to the Atlantic, on that side, and close to the Pyrenees, close to Spain also.

>> Interviewer: I see.

>> Taylor: And that was crawling with Germans because the Jews were coming to that little town, a lot of them, to go across -- to find themselves across the border into Free France. So I had this address, but, of course, I didn't know the town. So I said, well, maybe I should -- there were no taxis because there was no gas in the country. The Germans took all the gasoline out, so the transportation was horse and buggies, so you hired a horse and a buggy.

So I arrived to the little train station where all the horse and buggies were in line there, and there comes out of the train station a family from Paris that I went to school with the oldest girl; a mother, father, five children. The oldest of the five children was my age. Of course, we were very happy to see each other. "What are you doing here?" "What are you doing here?" We were all doing the same thing. So they said, "Where are you going?" They had an address, too, but they didn't know where it was, not knowing the town. So they said, "Well, let's all get in the same" -- when I say buggy, they were big, big buggies. So we called one, and we showed them where we were going, and he said, "Well," he says, "it's on the way." He says, he says, but to me, "If you didn't have your bike, I would take you," he said, "but your bike, I can't take all that and a bike too." So we kissed, you know, and we said so long, hoping to see you soon, and I went to the buggy right behind me where two nuns were sitting. And he said, okay, he would take us together, you know, the three of us and my bicycle, and as their buggy took off ahead of me and -- it was stopped immediately by German soldiers and took the whole family. And, of course, they didn't stop us. So that was an unbelievable escape for me.

So I arrived to this address that I had, and this lady happened to be a lady who owned a little business, and she was just doing this -- she was not making any money -- just to help Jewish people.

>> Interviewer: And she was not Jewish.

>> Taylor: She was not Jewish, no. And I was pretty dirty by that time. I hadn't had a bath all that time, so the first thing she did was let me shower and rest and, and she -- and let me spend the night there, and she said the next day, these two young men would come and took me -- and would take me across the border. Well, sure enough, the next morning, two young men came. They were not much older than I was, maybe 15 or 16. They were little peasant boys, and they knew -- also not Jewish. They knew -- and you paid -- I paid them, but not much. It was more like a little, you know, like you would give a boy some money to go out on the town on Saturday night. So they took me, and we walked across fields and across rivers, and then we slept in the barnyard -- what do you call that?

>> Interviewer: A barn?

>> Taylor: A barn, and then the next morning at 5:00, they said -- we were on a small country road, and they said, "Here you are. You are in Free France." I didn't have much money left, anyway, you know, but -- so I --

>> Interviewer: Did you know then where you were in Free France?

>> Taylor: No, no.

>> Interviewer: You were just out in the country.

>> Taylor: Yeah, but they told me, they said, "Just follow that road until you arrive in Pau, P-A-U, which was a good-sized city.

>> Interviewer: And at this point, you were on foot. You didn't have your bicycle anymore.

>> Taylor: Huh?

>> Interviewer: You did not have --

>> Taylor: No, I still had my bike.

>> Interviewer: You still had your bicycle.

>> Taylor: No, I still had my bicycle. No, I kept my bicycle. At this point, I still had it and my little suitcase with clothes. And they said that when you -- so he said -- they said, "You follow the sign. When you arrive in Pau, you can call your family. You won't be very far from Toulouse." And I had an address in Toulouse, and my family was -- my mother and sister were supposed to be in Graulhet, which is a suburb of Toulouse. So I was very happy. Got on my bike and was riding on this little country road, and every so often, I noticed signs with trees, cut trees across -- on one side of the road, saying, "*Attention, attention! Achtung, achtung!*" If you cross that point, you will be shot on sight. And then there was a lone German soldier standing guard in a little guard house. And this went on for quite, quite a couple of miles -- I mean, quite a little while, and then I realized that the other side was Free France. I was still in Occupied France. So I don't think that they did that -- well, I'm sure they didn't do it on purpose. I think they were just, you know, like kids, and they thought -- whatever, they made a mistake because there was no reason for them, you know, to lead me on wrong.

So I knew I had to -- the other side was woods, so I knew I had to get on the other side, so I rode for a little while and realized that these guard houses were pretty far apart. So I grabbed my bike at one point and I said, I have to run across these cut trees and get on the other side, and I did. And in the process of doing that, all I remember was shots, and that's all I remember. And before, I thought -- well, I suppose several hours passed by. It was dark, and some man -- somebody. I didn't know it was a man at the time. I was laying on my face, and

somebody was just like touching my shoulder and shaking my shoulder a little bit, saying, "Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. You're in Free France. You're in Free France." And I looked up. There was this peasant, old peasant, and he said, "Don't be afraid, but don't make any noise." He says, "Are you Jewish?" I said, "Yeah." So he said, "well," he said, "you're in Free France." He says, "You got shot at." He says, "I heard the Germans," he says, "but I couldn't come and get you until it got dark." He says, "This happens every day." He says, "Come."

So I didn't have -- I still had my bicycle, but I had lost my clothes, the suitcase, I guess, when I went across. So he said, "Come," and he took me to the house. And I had blood all over my face, and what had happened, the fall on my face knocked me out and got all my teeth loose, and I was bleeding from all my gums, you know, and the dried blood -- because like I said, several hours had gone by, and they had shot at me and tore my whole blouse from a bullet but never entered. It ricocheted, and I had a big, big, like, you know, a big scratch on my back, and that's how I fell. So he gave me, you know, some water and told me to wash up. It was in the middle of the night, and then his wife came down and she says to him, "You got, you got -- you brought me a Jew in here?" She says, "You know what's going to happen." He said, "Be quiet. Be quiet. Can't you see she's just a child?" "How old are you?" "Fourteen." She says -- but she says, "You know that they come, they come across the line, the Germans, and they look for the Jews. They know that there are some hiding here, and if they find her here, they're going to kill us all." And they had several children sleeping upstairs.

So anyway, he begged, and she let him give me bread and cheese and some fruit and some clothes because my clothes -- some peasants clothes that he gave me, that they gave me. It was a handkerchief with the food, and they sent me on my way. So I -- they told me, you know, to sleep in some barn, not on their ground. The ground -- she wouldn't let me. He wanted to, but she

wouldn't let me. She was afraid. So I went on with my bicycle, and --

>> Interviewer: Did they point you in the direction for Toulouse?

>> Taylor: Yes, yes, yes. I went on to Pau and then on to Toulouse, and it was not all that safe even in Free France back then because there were no Germans at the time, but the gendarmes -- they had a certain amount of collaborators, you know, with the Germans -- were picking up Jews and putting them into camps in -- if they had no -- if they had an address where they could stay, it's different, but somebody like me, see, they put them into camps and kept them there because they knew that eventually, the Germans would come further down and get the rest of the Jews.

>> Interviewer: Now, this would have been around the middle of August of '42?

>> Taylor: It was later. I think it was -- because -- it was about September.

>> Interviewer: September?

>> Taylor: Yeah, about September. So, so I went -- so I was between -- so I arrived in Toulouse where I had an address too. I had several addresses, and when I arrived in Toulouse at this address, my mother and my sister had come through there a couple months before, and the people -- who weren't Jewish too -- told me that they hope my mother didn't commit suicide because she was so besides herself that she abandoned me, even though she didn't, really, you know. They had to flee Paris with the help of this cousin, by the way. She helped them get to the train station and -- because they said that she figured I hadn't shown up for so long that I was dead. And so I stayed there for a night, and they fed me, and they put me on the train to go to Graulhet -- well, not really a train. It was a bus. There was no

train. On a big, like a Greyhound bus. And so I arrived in Graulhet, and --

>> Interviewer: And Graulhet was a small town?

>> Taylor: Yeah. It was a town of 10,000, a population of 10,000. What had happened -- see, a lot of the Jews had fled Belgium because the Germans had invaded Belgium and all of Occupied France to the south of France, and a lot of Belgian Jews had settled in Graulhet because they had the *tannerie*. That's where they treated the raw leather, and a lot of these Jewish people from Belgium knew that trade and they knew this little town. So they could, they could get work there with permission. The Jews were -- also had to register as Jews there, even in Free France. But they could get work, so we had cousins there from Belgium who had fled Belgium, so that's how we -- my mother and my sister went to this little town. And so when I arrived with my bicycle like two months later and my mother saw me -- and she had lost like 30 pounds, and she fainted. And she said that she had become so depressed, you know, that everybody was so fearful for her life that, you know, because she felt like I didn't survive and that was her fault. And of course, she felt it was her fault that my father was taken, too, so husband first and child after would have been too much for her. So I, I made it. That was the first -- my first experience during the Occupation.

>> Interviewer: And then did you stay in Graulhet with your mother and sister for a little while?

>> Taylor: We stayed for a little while. We -- us, as women, we couldn't work. We didn't have to -- well, there was no work, but as Jews, for some reason, we didn't -- the men could work, but the women couldn't. Well, I guess the men could work because they had this specialty that they could do, but the women couldn't, and there -- after 14, the age of 14, there was no school. I would have had to be sent to a boarding school, and my mother didn't have any money to send me to a boarding school, so

my sister, who was five years older and had gone to a very good -- I guess you call it a commercial school? She had learned to be a stenographer in Paris.

So she -- we knew, in that little town -- we knew this non-Jewish man, very influential. He owned the newspaper of the town, and he was also -- he had access to, to, to city -- to city hall and to the official stamp, you know, so first he said to her, "why don't you go back to Paris under a false name? I'll make you a false identification paper, a fake name," but that person exists, you know, because, see, the Germans got wise. They knew that Jewish people were getting false identification cards, so what they did, if they made a control, you know, and they said, "Show me your papers," if they suspected you might be Jewish, they would look up in the archives if you were really registered there. And if it was false false and you weren't registered there, if it was just something out of the blue sky, they would still take you. But if you were registered there, then you existed. So what -- this man was very clever. He would pick names from like 2,000 kilometers away, not from that same town where it was so easy for the Germans to find out because you might meet that person. That person really existed. So what he did -- he was also in the underground, and he was helping Jewish people.

So he made her a false identification card of a person that existed in Lille, which was like the other part of France, and he told her to go back to Paris and get a job and work because we had no money, you know, and maybe help us. So she did. She went back to Paris and got a job and worked as a Christian and got a little room at, like, at the YWCA, you know. Of course, she was -- I was about 14, so she was 19 years old. And still, I couldn't go to school, so --

>> Interviewer: Now, did you and your mother stay in Graulhet?

>> Taylor: We stayed in Graulhet, yes, because there's -- my mother had a strong accent anyway when she spoke French. She had

a Polish accent, so you couldn't make her any false ID, you know. I was too young, you see, so we stayed there a good little while. We had no money left at all. And in the meantime, the Germans would cross the border into Free France, and every night, they would pick up one or two Jewish families because -- they were not supposed to take the Jews, but they would disappear. So this same Monsieur Lautard who made that identification card for my sister said, "You know," he said -- he called -- there were about 20, 25 Jewish families, and he sort of took them all under his wing, and he called a meeting at his house, and he says, "You know," he says, "if you don't leave this town," he says, "you will all be picked up. So," he says, "we're going to have to make some kind of arrangement." Oh, yeah, other things have happened in between. You know, so much has happened, it's hard for me to try to keep everything, you know, following everything.

My mother, since I couldn't go to school while she was there, she had a brother who had served in the French Foreign Legion because -- this brother who had asked for political asylum wanted to serve in the French army when the war broke out between France and Germany, but since he had become a man without a country -- he lost his nationality, right, his Polish nationality, when he deserted. He had become what they called *apatride*. The French would not let him serve in the French army, but they said if you want to serve France, then volunteer in the French Foreign Legion. So he volunteered in the French Foreign Legion, and he did the whole North African -- from -- in Sidi [indistinct] you know. What is it, Rommel, the Desert Fox, that they were fighting? So he did all that campaign and then he got out of the French Foreign Legion and came to Marseilles. He didn't want, of course -- he was butcher. He had a little butcher shop in Paris that the Germans did not take from him because he went away in the army, so he closed up his shop, you know, and it just stayed closed. So he came back to Marseilles,

and my mother sent me to Marseilles to him so I could go to school.

>> Interviewer: Now, this was what, October, November of '42?

>> Taylor: No, this was later than that because I stayed -- I had been in Graulhet several months. I would say, maybe, maybe six months. I'm just -- yeah.

>> Interviewer: So spring of 1943, maybe?

>> Taylor: Yeah, yeah. So he had a hotel room, and he had a job. You know, not a very good job, but -- in a butcher's shop, but anyway, she thought that would be best for me. Well, come to find out the concierge, which is, you know, the keeper of the building of the hotel, would not let me stay with him because that was rented for one person, and she just wouldn't let me stay with him. So what I did, I went to school every day, and every night, I would do my homework on a bench on the boulevard, and I would -- we would wait till she turned her light out and go to bed, and then he would smuggle me into his bedroom. Sometimes we were lucky; it was 10:00. Sometimes it was 2:00 in the morning. So that's how I spent my time with him for a while, but it was not possible. I mean, I could not live like that. I just would drag myself to school sometimes with two or three hours' sleep, very little food.

>> Interviewer: And Marseilles was in Free France at that point?

>> Taylor: Marseilles was in Free France, yes. So my mother heard that under 16, the Red Cross was sending children to the United States. They were able to get the Jewish children under 16 to be sent to the United States from Free France, so she asked me to come back, and she was going to send me to the United States. Well, of course, I would never think of leaving her. I started crying. I said wherever she goes, I'll go. She said, "You remember what your father said?" But that did not count. So I refused to go to the United States. So I stayed with my mother a little bit in Graulhet. In the meantime, our Belgian

-- the Germans picked up all the Belgian Jews that had fled Belgium. There were about six families. Also, our Belgian cousins were picked up to be deported to concentration camp.

>> Interviewer: Did you see them again?

>> Taylor: No, no. That was three brothers who were about my mother's age, their wives. One had a son and a daughter, and one had two sons who -- when the Germans came, those two sons were not home. They came during -- they came in the morning, early, and they didn't take my mother or me. They were just looking for Belgian Jews. I guess they had a system, you know. And the two sons were not home. One was 18, and one was 19. One was spending the night with the son of a French family, a non-Jewish family that was employing them, those leather goods, and one had gone out -- he had a little garden in the fields. We knew where they were. So of course, the Germans didn't say, you know, that they were taking these people, sending them to a concentration camp. They were sending them to interrogate them about Belgium. But we knew, of course. So we --

>> Interviewer: How did you know?

>> Taylor: Well, because we had already fled, you know, Paris, and my father had told us all this, and then we had gotten all these letters from Poland. I mean, we really didn't know they were burning Jews. No, still didn't know they were actually burning Jews in concentration camps, but we knew they were doing away with them, you know. They were mistreating them, working them to death. I mean, that much, you know, we knew. So my sister went to the field. Oh, I forgot to tell you, my sister had come back from Paris, come back from Paris because with her work, she could not support herself. She just did not make enough money, you know, to pay for everything, so she had written, and she said that she just -- we -- my mother even had to send her food that we didn't even have, you know, once in a while. So she says, "Maybe I could come back and hide there," you know. And so my sister had come back, had just come back --

because we had had this meeting with this man. He was going to help us anyway. She says, "And maybe we'll do -- whatever he decides to do that we should do, we'll do it together."

So she happened to have just been back, and so she fled to the field and told one of the two brothers what had happened. Well, he started crying; wanted to come back home and go with his parents, and she wouldn't let him. She pushed him into an outdoor house, you know, where they have -- and she says, "I'm not going to let you go. I'm not going to let you go. It's just, you know, being killed." And the other boy, the people that he was spending the night with hid him, and then after a few days went by, my sister -- finally, he quieted down, and he stayed in that outhouse, and we would take him food every day and for a few days, you know. And after things looked sort of quiet, the French people who were hiding the other boy took the two boys and sent them off to Savoie. It's in the Alps, and -- to the French underground, and they survived. They stayed in the French underground till the war was over, and they survived.

>> Interviewer: What happened to you and your sister and your mother?

>> Taylor: All right, so this man, Mr. Lautard, called a meeting, and this was the period -- this was this period here. And this is me at 15; my sister. That's Mr. Lautard's daughter, and she was going with him, Maurice. He was a Jewish boy hiding in that little village; from Paris. These two, Henri [phonetic] and Suzanne [phonetic], were also Jewish children. She was my age. He was maybe 16. They, they were deported. So --

>> Interviewer: And this picture was taken, what, 1943?

>> Taylor: This picture was taken in 1943. I didn't get it till last year. This Maurice married her, and I hadn't seen him for 40-some-odd years, and I -- we had a reunion last year when I was in Paris. He, he told me about the picture, and he had one made for me and one for my sister. So I just got it in May.

Actually, not last year, this year, in May. So we -- he called us. He said -- I -- he says, "I will," he says, "go into the town house, get the official stamp out," and he says, "I'm going to buy ID cards, blank ID cards," and this is also the period of -- excuse me -- this is my false identification card, and this is a blank ID card. You buy it like that, then you put your picture on there. And he says, "I'm going to get a list from people who exist, and each one should correspond pretty much to your age." He says, "Looks," he says, "I don't know," because he didn't know those people. He says, "But age-wise, they have to be" -- I wasn't 15 at the time, but they have to be 15 to have an ID card. So he says, "I have to have somebody that's at least 15," and he says, "Then," he says, "you all have to leave and go back into Occupied France." He says, "Free France now is more dangerous than Occupied France because all the Jews that were not taken in Free France were now sitting ducks in Free France." So he says, "Now, as Gentiles, and you go back," he says, "to Occupied France," he says, "you will be much safer." Well, this uncle who was in Marseilles had met a Jewish girl also there hiding --

01:03:31