

>> Diamantstein: They had one cow, and they had a fellow that had a huge work bench; made all their own tools. And they cultivated this whole side of the mountain, made step cultivations in it. And they lived there. So we told these people what our predicament was. They just couldn't understand it. They said, "What do they have against you? What did you do to them?" And we said, "We didn't do anything to them." They says, "Then why do they want" -- "Because we are Jews." They said, "What's that?" they said. So we explained it to them, and they said, "Well, why would they want to kill you?" They said, "It doesn't make sense." I said, "I know it doesn't make sense, but it's the way it is." And they said, "Well, you can stay here." So we told them, I said, "Before you, you, you let us stay here, you need to know one thing." He says, "There has been an edict published that if they find us here," he says, "they will not only kill us. They will kill you, so please," I says, "don't take us in unless you know what you're doing because you are endangering your lives." And believe it or not, for an hour they argued, not who is not going to stay but who is -- whom we are going to stay. They say, "No, let them stay with us." "No, let them stay with us."

So finally we decided we stay in a hayloft because we didn't know yet what these 200 Germans were going to do there. What would they do? It didn't make sense. And so we said, "Let's wait it out." I still remember that night Maurice and Adolph was strumming their instruments. We sit there. They fed us. They were, they were just incredibly nice. One of them told us he was in Greece. He fought in Greece, and he said, he said, "I was next to a guy that was manning a machine gun," he says, "and he was going with that machine gun for hours," he says, "and I don't know how many Greeks he killed," he says, "and I couldn't understand it." He said -- he, too -- he said, "Why was he

killing those Greeks? They didn't do anything to us." He said, "I can understand if you take my daughter away, or if you do anything to any of my family, I'll kill you," he says, "but these people didn't do anything to us." And it was a strong way of reasoning, humanitarian reasoning within all Italians in that sense -- or not all, but most.

So anyway, the next day, we found out that that train of Germans had no business here. It was a mistake. They were to go to Ascea, which is near Naples, near the front. The Italians knew that, knew that, and they misled them. The Italian railroad people said, "Oh, yeah, you need to go there." These were reinforcements for the Germans, but since the Germans didn't know one place from the other, they just send them to a dead end, you know. So within another day, they left again, okay. So the -- so we came -- went back home, but the debate went on, what to do, you know, because we knew that eventually -- I must say, I was very pessimistic.

You see, we were all disillusioned because all -- our feeling was, seeing so few Germans, I said, "Two hundred took Vicenza." I said, "It wouldn't have been anything if the Allied troops would land near the Brenner Pass and stop the flow of Germans and occupy all this area." It would be easily done with 5,000 or 10,000 well-equipped troops, and we were constantly waiting for this to happen. Why? We said, "It doesn't make any sense to fight Italy inch by inch up the boot," which is what they did, and it was absurd, and others, experts will tell you today, that would have been the thing to do. They could have occupied Genoa and could have had the Germans locked in down below. You know, it was the easy thing to do. Actually, I understand there was a request or plan, but it wasn't executed because they said, "We have to save everything for the landing in France," so they didn't want to divert the forces. So this never happened, and we kept hoping that -- this was our only hope of salvation because if the Germans would retreat, then we knew we wouldn't stand a chance.

And in effect, they were nightmarish days. Our next-door neighbors, it so happens, were very strong Fascists, and they believed in the Germans. When those 200 Germans came, they went with flowers to greet them. So I'm not saying -- it's not a hundred percent. There were some very bad people, as we saw, and they had Germans, when, when -- at that time, they stayed, they stayed an extra night, several of the officers, with this family, and I could hear them during the night, and I had this nightmare. Every night I would wake up, thinking the next day, they'll surround the house, and we've had it. But they didn't, and even those people didn't say.

Now, between September and the end of October, nothing happened. So -- except anguish and all that. Everybody had a different idea what to do, but nobody knew quite which way to go because we really didn't have anywhere to go. So -- and I said, "well, the only other chance we have, go south, you know, as fast as we can get, and maybe we can work our way through the other side as the Allies come up." Well, nothing happened. Unfortunately, by the end of October, two terrible things happened. Number one, we were told that the German Gestapo had gotten a hold of a new list of all the people around, and number two, an edict was in the neo-Fascist papers, which were the strong Allies of Germany, what was left of the Fascists in Italy. They were bad now. They recruited a lot of young kids that were happy having a machine gun in their hand. And this -- these two things made it imperative, for our survival, to leave. The, the -- we knew now that we have had it. And I want to say, in September that year, it was at Yom Kippur. We had -- I never forget that. At the house of the Riesenfelds, we all met together, and end of September, October, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and everybody there, and they all prayed and so forth. It was the saddest moment because we knew, you know, what we, what we had to expect. And again, you know, everybody -- it's the agony of not knowing which way to go. Right there, we were safe. Right there, we were, but we all knew it wasn't going to work in the long

run, also from past experiences in other parts of Europe, which we were very well informed about. So anyway, I still remember that. It was a very, very touching experiences, and I said to myself, what are we doing here? You know, if there is a God, he's certainly not listening to us.

So when we knew this, we knew that the Germans had a list, and we knew there was an edict published in the paper saying that all Jews -- that time, it included the Italian, too; Italian Jews were relatively a minority -- that all Jews are enemies of the state and have to be arrested. So we had a special meeting, all of us, and I remember that I was strictly in favor -- I said, "We must go." I said, "We stay any longer here, we won't make it. What we hoped for hasn't happened, and by now it won't happen. Winter is approaching." So everybody said, "Yes, you're right." They says not only to me, to each other, that we have to go. One of the others said, "Well, maybe nothing will happen." And the poor Stapholtzes [indistinct] said "where do we go?" you know. They -- "well," I said, "you have to try." He says, "We don't speak the language. We don't do anything." He says, "where do we go?" I said, "I can't tell you. I don't know where we are going to go."

well, in the end, we made the decision within our family that we were going to try to make it to Milano, where we lived many years and had many friends, dear friends who we could count on. we'll try to make it. They said, "well, Verona is the headquarters of Rommel. We have to go through Verona to get to Milano." I said, "well, we have no choice." So Father went to the city hall. He said, "We need some papers." And the mayor said, "Here are the Italian identity cards. Do with them what you want." Blanks, he gave us to fill out. So we -- Father took those, and we all -- we put a family name, an Italian name in, and so we had papers. But it wasn't enough because whenever the neo-Fascists would stop you, they would also ask you for your food rationing cards, and we didn't have those to go with -- we tried. We couldn't get those. They were issued by the

government, and they were not available to us, and they usually would ask for both to match, you know. But at any rate, we decided we have to try. We have no other choice.

So that night of the -- the end of October, the first of November, whichever it was, we decided to split up. The reasoning was, maybe we won't all make it, but let's not get us all together. So that night, my mother and my -- my mother, Maurice, and I -- I don't remember which we went first. I think we went first or they went first. I don't remember distinctly. We took the train. We got our things together, as much as we could take. We didn't care. We had machines by now and all kinds of stuff, but the hell with that, pardon the expression. We went to the train, hoping there, too, if that -- there wasn't time to tell you about some episodes with this helper to the marshal that was -- in fact, the night before -- now I remember. That, that is also where [indistinct]. The night before, he came, the commander of the Italian *Carabinieri*, he came to us, and he said, "This afternoon," he said, "two men of the Gestapo came to me from Vicenza," he said. "They know who you are and where you are, and they are coming tomorrow to arrest you." He said, "Do what you think what you have to do."

And immediately, Maurice and I went to all the rest of the people and told them, "By tomorrow, you have to be gone." Klein had an additional problem, the artist, because his wife was pregnant, already in her fourth or fifth month. I don't know what it was. He didn't know what to do. He stayed. Riesenfeld said -- people rationalized. You know, this was the moment of no return. Mr. Riesenfeld said, "Oh, I'm a good technician. I'm a watchmaker. I might be able to survive it," you know. I mean, you rationalize. The Rimalovas said, husband, a little bit, in my eyes, elderly at the time; he had gray hair and so forth. He said, "You're right. We have to go." And I said, "Well, why don't you do what we do?" And the Goldsteins said, "You're right. We have to go." The Weisses and the sister and daughter said, "We have to go." The Landmanns said, "We might be able to

survive because my wife is German." I mean, you grope on a star you know, when you are that desperate. They were a fairly large family, and they just didn't feeling like doing -- leaving.

So anyway, we made our plan, and I remember Goldstein saying we are going to leave roughly the same way we were. But nobody was going together with anybody. We didn't want to endanger other people. We left that night, and the train was okay. Nobody stopped us about the tickets, and we got on the train, and, of course, when we arrived in Verona, it was dreadful. The train emptied itself, and only Germans went onboard. And all those Germans around us, and poor Mama was so naïve, she couldn't react -- help reacting when they were saying something, and I told Mother in Italian, "Don't do that. They don't need to know that you know German," you know. She worried me about it. Mama, Mama was a very sweet person, but also very naïve. So -- and then it was a bit -- and part of the nightmare was, it was the headquarter of Rommel's, and you didn't see any Italians around. The railroad station was damaged by Allied bombing, but the trains were running okay, but there were nothing but Germans inside anywhere, SS and the others, and my heart was going a hundred miles an hour. If anyone stops us, what's going to happen to us? Again, like I said, the luck we had to have saved our life. We had to do what we did because those that didn't didn't survive. So we knew we had no choice. That still didn't make it pleasant or comforting to be in that situation.

We arrived in Milano at the Central Station. It's a beautiful place. It's still there today. And we couldn't leave the station. There was a curfew, okay. Somebody had just -- some of the Italian underground had just blown up some railroad tracks, and they were looking for who was doing that. So we had to go in the underground tunnel, which was a shelter like an air-raid shelter. And there were hundreds of people on both sides, and I walked up and down, and all of a sudden, I see Mr. Goldstein. So we walked together. He said, "I don't like the atmosphere here." I said, "Neither do I." He said, "We are not staying. We are

going on with the next train to a place near the Swiss border, and we are going to try to make our way." And I said, "Good luck." I said, "We have other plans. We are split up. We have to see what we can do." He said, "Good luck." Later I found out that some Italian neo-Fascist asked for his paper and discovered him and wanted to take him away, and he had saved seven or eight gold pieces that I don't know since when he had. He said, "This is all I have. Take them." He said, "Let us go," and they did because he made it to Switzerland with his wife and the two children. I didn't know about that until actually -- I don't know if it was already after the war that I found out about that because we didn't have any way of having contact. We, we had to -- I mean, it was very, very frightening because while we were there, the Gestapo was going back and forth, looking for these people, and they were shining with this flashlight in our faces. We didn't know what they were looking for, really. This is what we found out later, what I am telling you about the bombing. We didn't know that. Only we knew that was a curfew, and they would shine this light and look at us, and every moment we thought, Now, we've had it, you know.

And the next morning, curfew was over, and we start walking out the place. And as usually, as it always worked that way, I was carrying the suitcase with our supply that was full of cigarettes and some clothing over it. The cigarettes served a good purpose for bribing because cigarettes were hard to come by, and we had a good connection from the town. We also smoked, but that was not that important. We wouldn't need a suitcase full of cigarettes, but we decided it might come in handy. So there was a German and an Italian when I came across with the suitcase, and he said, "Open up the suitcase." And I said, Oh, my God, but there were clothes over it. I opened up the suitcase. He said, "What do you have in there?" You could see the clothes, and I still remember what I said: "*Una pistola.*" I said, "I have a gun in there." So -- and the guy said -- the German said, "What's he saying?" He said, "He has a gun in

there.” And they started laughing, and I started laughing and closed the suitcase. And he said, “Okay, go on,” you know. Of course, my heart was going a hundred miles an hour. I don’t know how I thought of it. I says, “what are you asking? Of course, I have a gun in there.” And he looked at me, and he started laughing, you know, and that saved us through that one.

Those cigarettes came very handy. We went to stay with -- not with. A family gave us their apartment. In those days, the Allies were bombing Milan daily, and they were trying to break their morale or whatever they were trying to do. There were usually -- just bombs were falling randomly all over the city, many of them in the center of town. And these friends of ours had a place in the country, and they were in the country, and they said, “You can have our apartment and stay there.” Except the concierge -- every Italian house that has apartments has a concierge, a person in charge of the apartment. Well, the first thing he does, he asks for your papers. So we gave him our identity cards. And after a few days, he said, “You know, that’s not enough. You need more papers.” She was probably suspicious about something. And we said, “Yes later.” I said, “Meanwhile,” I said, “here, we want you to have these five packs of cigarettes.” “Oh, thank you,” and we kept on doing that.

well, eventually, we were going to run out of cigarettes, you know, and we made some contact with the -- at that point, I shouldn’t say with Father -- made some contact with the Italian underground. I didn’t tell you, we tried to start a bit of an underground movement in Arsiero, which took shape a little later; you know, partisans that went up to the mountains and started to organize against the Germans. There was one little episode I have to tell you from Arsiero. One day, Maurice and I went to -- this woman was trying to teach us something, and she was a designer. She designed clothes in Zagreb, and she was teaching -- Father was always wanting us to learn new things, and she lived in what you would say in the country within this town. And Maurice and I walked on the road, and opposite from us

comes a German patrol; not a patrol, a vehicle with a machine gun on top. At that point, they were picking up not only Jews but Italian deserters who had all left, disbanded, and tried to get home, many camouflaged in civilian clothes and whatnot, and they were stopping people and so forth. And that they came right towards us with the machine gun on top, and Maurice and I said, "We've had it," and I said, "Well, not yet." And he said, "You are right." I said, "What do we do?" I said, "Well, I think the only we can do, let's keep talking as if nothing, as if nothing happened." I said, "It's our only chance because if we react in any way, we've had it," you know. I said -- he said, "You're right." He said, "Let's do that." So we walked by them, and they looked straight at us, and the machine gun was about 10 feet from me. It's a just a story, but it's real, and when it's real, I'm telling you, you don't want to have that experience. And my heart must have been going a hundred miles an hour. And they looked at us, and, of course, we could hear what they were saying. He said, "Hey, how about those two guys? Shouldn't we check them?" you know. And we were -- fortunately, we were dressed in, well, fairly nice clothes. We didn't look like some, you know, like runaways of anywhere -- any kind. And one of them said, one of them said to the other, "Nah," he said -- I said -- he said, "Let it go. They don't look like -- anything like that." They said, "They look like just regular citizens, and let's not bother with them." And then they went by, and we could see them. That was a terrible moment.

So everybody that survived the Holocaust has a story like that to tell because, as I said earlier, the odds what they were, you just had to have, besides doing things, you had to have luck. Many people tried to do what we did. Most of them did not make it, and we knew right then that our chance was not better than a thousand to one to make it, all except my brother Adolph, who is a born optimist, and he believed everything was -- he always said, "If a bomb falls, it will fall left and right, but it

won't hit me," which was a good attitude. It was very helpful. I wish I could have been like him in those days.

So anyway, we went, and we got to there. There we reunited with Father and Adolph. You won't believe what Father -- my father not only was sharp, but he had more nerve than he had, really, brains, I'd say. During the night when they got in and there was a curfew, Father said, "Let's go upstairs and see what's going on." Father went upstairs, and he saw this café, and there were bunches of German officers. So he went in and says, "*Guten Tag*" in German, and they said, "Hey," they said, "you speak German?" And he said, "Yeah, I do." They said, "Hey, we need somebody here that speaks. Why don't you come and join us?" So Father, "Well, I don't know." They says, "Come on. Let's have some drinks." So they had beer and all that, and Father was just like nothing. Didn't bother him at all. I don't -- didn't bother him. But, see, the idea was always, at that point, to do the most incredible things because those were the only things that really worked. If you tried to run, if you show you're afraid, you were done with. But Father did that very thing. That blew my top when I heard what he did.

So once in Milano, Father made some contacts with the Italian underground, and initially, I guess, the idea was that maybe we could participate, maybe there was a way that we could be active in the underground. And the one -- the head person at that was a lawyer. His name was Mr. Maccia that, after the war, received the Victoria Cross for the things he did to save human lives. But they didn't want us. Maccia said, "We don't want Jews." He says, "You are trouble." He said, "We have enough trouble without you." He said, "On top of everything, you are Jews," he says, "and you are nothing but trouble for us. We have to worry twice as much." So nothing happened in that direction, but Father says we can't stay. Daily they were raiding people -- they needed people to work in Germany, and they didn't make any exceptions for Italians. They would just seal off a street, pick up all the able-bodied people, and send them off to Germany.

This happened daily. And as a matter of fact, when we had a meeting, either with Maccia or anybody else, believe it or not, we met in front of the Gestapo's headquarters, which I felt really weird about because I said, "He's crazy." when Maccia said we have to meet there, I said, "why there? We see the Gestapo going in and out." He said, "It's the safest place because nobody would ever think that anybody would come that close," you know. And we had scary moments. At one time, I was near the Piazza del Duomo, and a German patrol came, and they stuck that in front of me, and they all jumped out, and they went elsewhere, but I didn't know that, you know. We all had moments like that.

But we stayed there until -- we were now -- we were all relatively -- I mean, we were not safe, but we were in Milano. We had friends and some Italian families that we knew from before, and they were just absolutely marvelous. And they all knew that they were endangering themselves as well as -- our situation was. And finally, Maccia said, "You know, look," he said, "I can get you to Switzerland," he says. We all knew already from others even that means a 50-50 chance, a good -- because we considered that a good chance to make it. He said, "You go over the mountains, and once you're in Switzerland, they're going to tell you you can't stay. Resist that." And the Swiss had a law that only people that -- political prisoners in danger of their life would be accepted. And that was very vague, law-wise, the Swiss being very law-abiding, and many of them leaning -- to -- nearly towards the Nazis; of course, not all of them, but many did, and the commander could say you are not in any danger of life, and they would just turn them back. Others made it. We heard of a friend of ours. She had a restaurant, a Hungarian restaurant. The news was brought back by somebody who was with us -- who was with her later that made it that she went to the Swiss, and she said, "I'm going to cut my way in if you don't let me in because I'll never make it back through the mountains," and they told her, "well, you have two choices. You

either do that, or we'll take you back to the border," where, of course, the Germans would take her. She never made it, and many other people didn't make it. Again, that element of luck had to be there to survive. Most of them didn't, unfortunately.

At this point, we -- that -- well, anyway, we stayed in Milano. Towards the end of the month, he said, "I have it all organized for you to go to Switzerland." So I said, "What do we do?" He said, "I'll tell you what to do." He said, "You all take what you need that's practical to be in the countryside, and you take the train of the Stazione Nord," the North Station, "and you go to Como," he said. "It's not safe, but it's the best way, the only way. When you are in Como, I'm going to meet you there and take you to a café, and there's going to be a car. This automobile is going to take you to the other side of the Lake Como, and from there, there are some guides that work with the underground, and they will take you to Switzerland." And this was the -- well, it's very easy to remember because it was the 24th of December when we got to Como, the day before Christmas. So we did as he said.

We arrived in Como, and he took us to this café. He said -- he immediately came into the station when he saw us and says, "Do not stay in the station." He said, "It's a very dangerous place. The Gestapo raids it constantly, so get out of here. You see that little café around the corner? I meet you there." "Fine." We go to the café, and we waited, and hours and hours went by. Finally we said, "What's happening?" He says, "Well, there's been a problem." He said, after a while, he said, "I don't want -- I didn't want you to take a boat to cross the lake because they check people on the boat," he said, "but I'm afraid there is no choice." And he said, "Now it's too late." I said -- we said, "But finally tell us what happened with plan A. We were supposed to -- where is the automobile?" He said, "Well, unfortunately" -- he told us that a little later. He says, "What happened was, the Germans had ambushed the car, and there was a shoot-out. These were underground people. One was killed, and

the others escaped into the hills.” And the German, not being [indistinct] of the place, couldn’t get them. So the automobile was lost, a life was lost, and there was no way for us to follow the plan.

So he -- back -- back and forth, he said, “Look, there’s no way for you to go back to Milano. It’s hopeless.” We had given up the place and everything. And my brother and I, we had rucksacks with all our stuff, so he said, “well, I don’t see any other choice. I have a villa on the right side of the lake in this little town. It’s where my wife is. We found out later his wife is Jewish. He wasn’t Jewish, but his wife was. And he said, he says, “Unfortunately, you have to stay there because -- till after Christmas because the guides will not go to risk their life on Christmas Day. They want to spend Christmas with their families.” So the guides are mainly people who used to live from contraband on the border, you know, but they turned to be, again, lifesavers in more than one way. We stayed in his place. We had another harrowing experience because he said, “Don’t all board together. You go one at a time like if you were not a group together like a family and so forth.” So we spread ourselves, we took the boat, and we landed in the place, and we walk up the steep hill -- I did this over a few years ago -- to his house.

The moment we entered his house, there was a little girl about eight years old. She opened the door, and she saw us walk in, and we had these epaulets on this wind jackets, and she was convinced we were German soldiers, and she started screaming to high heaven, and everybody was afraid, and they had to actually take her in a room and gag her because it would have been the end of us. And we found out later, her father was a major of the Italian army, and he had organized a group of partisans to fight the Germans. And when he -- there was, I don’t know, a 50,000-lira price on his head, and there were pictures of him, of this man, all over town where he lived, not far from there. And the Germans, the Gestapo SS, found out where he was, and they came

into this villa and they -- he -- they proceeded to arrest him. He was there with his adjutant, and they were in the kitchen when the two of the Gestapo came to arrest him. They said, "You're under arrest" for so-and-so, and of course, he knew that that would be the end of him. And so he grabbed the door behind him. There was a back door, and he opened it, and his adjutant put himself in front of him, and the Germans shot him and killed this person. By the time they started following him, this guy knew the little roads in this little village. The Germans didn't, and he got away, and they couldn't find him.

But the girl was standing on top of the stairs, and she saw this man being killed in her house. So when she saw us coming, you know, she thought, This is it. So it was a terrible -- we didn't know at all why she would be screaming. We had no idea what was going on. They were brown jackets that we just had bought to be practical to go in the mountains, you know, and stuff like that. It was a terrible moment.

well, when that subsided -- fortunately, nothing did happen -- we stayed over Christmas, and we always did the things we were not supposed to do. He said don't take a boat. He said, "There's no other way. You have to take a boat. There's no way I can get you across the lake from where the mountain starts that you go over." So the next -- again, he says, "You go one at a time. Each one buys one ticket, and then you go." He says, "When you get to the other side," he says, "there will be two men. They will wait for you, and you just follow them, okay? They will stay with you until you are in Switzerland. Then, they come back." And there was a charge there; it wasn't much. It was like a thousand lira, which wasn't that much then per person or so. He said, "we need that money because we buy insurance out for them. So if any of them gets killed, the family wouldn't be left without means," you know. So this man Maccia brought some black soldiers into Switzerland. That's why the British gave him this -- I mean, he was just incredible, how many lives he saved. And he -- like they would only travel by night, of course, and since

there are no black people in Italy, they couldn't -- so at night, when they couldn't be seen that well, that were escaped from prison camps, you know. So we -- I mean, a lot of this we found out later, but we met this Italian. He was staying there over Christmas as we were. And besides him, there was another woman about 35 or 40, a Jewish woman who was in the same spot we were. She also ended up at his house, at Maccia's house, his wife, Maccia's wife, and two children who eventually became lawyers.

But we stayed in their house over Christmas, and it worked out all right, and the next day, the day after Christmas, we did as he said. We crossed the -- by boat, and of course, our heart was pounding. It was six in the morning. We took the first boat that arrived, and, again, the chances, whatever they were, we knew we had no choice, and again, we were lucky. We landed on the other end, and as soon as we landed, I guess they knew what to look for. These two people came, and they said, "You just go one by one," he says, "not together, and just follow this one guy," he says, "and I'll join you later. I'll stay behind." And so we just walked behind. It was a very -- it was a small village, and he took us right up the mountain on the trail, and the other one joined us a little bit later. And this -- these guides, they took us up the mountain.

That was a long trek. We had to go up over the mountain and down on the Swiss side, on the other side of the Alps. And it took us 28 hours, and at one time, when we were almost at the crest, we saw -- he said, "where the lights are you see, that's a German post, border post, and they're looking for people." So I don't know why at one point he said, "Maybe you should take your shoes off," he said, "because even the shoes, they crack twigs easier and so on. Well, after a while -- after a while -- after many hours, this was cold, you know. And this was around January, and the Alps was icy cold, and my mother was a bit heavysset person, and she had a hard time, and this other woman had a terrible hard time. She was also a little bit heavysset. At one point, he

says, "We have one more hill to climb," and we looked up, and the hill was like that. And this woman said, "I can't make it anymore." She said, "I'm staying here if I have to die." So one of the guides says, "Well, I'll take you," and he put her on his back and carried her. Carried my mother for a little ways, too, the other one, and it was just unreal, you know.

Besides that episode that we saw the lights on, we could hear voices, we were so close. Actually, we found out afterwards that he didn't take us the way he was supposed to because he found out -- one of them would always go ahead and come, and he found out there was a German patrol on the trail. We would need to do that, but there was a German patrol on the trail. He didn't -- they didn't tell us that, so we had to take a detour, and we had to go up, straight up the mountain instead.

Well, finally, the next morning, sometimes about 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning, we're going downhill now, and he took the [indistinct] about and there was a stone under it, and it had a cross on it, and he said, "That's the border. Now you are in Switzerland." Well, you know, the Swiss symbol is a cross of their flag, and that's, that's their emblem. So he said, "You are now in Switzerland, and we are leaving." And we felt so lost. What are we going -- we are suddenly in the wilderness. He said, "You just keep going downhill. Somebody will find you." He says, "Don't worry about it." And, of course, we were exhausted, and especially Mother and this woman. The woman complained a lot, and Mother was pretty good. She didn't complain much.

So we went down the hill. We didn't know where we were. At a certain point, I said, "I wonder if we are not back in Italy," because we didn't know what we were doing, you know, really, going left, right, and went down. So all of a sudden comes a soldier, and I thought I'd die. He looked like a German. He had a helmet on and comes with the gun and faces us, and he said, "Everybody stand still. Nobody move." And so I said, Oh, my God, it's a German. So we said -- "Well," I said, "aren't we in

Switzerland?" I said, "where -- who are you? what do you want from us?" And then he said he was a Swiss soldier. So I said -- so he said, "well," he said, "you are transpassing the border. You are not here legally. Do you have any papers to justify your presence?" "No, we don't." He said, "well, you will have to go back." I said, "We're not going back." I said, "You'll have to kill us." He said, "Okay, come with me. I'll take you to the border commander."

Now, we, we -- that, we knew, was more or less -- that happened to everybody. The next thing was to be faced what we know that many people died in those mountains, the reason being that it all depended on the local commander. Now, if you had money in Switzerland, it was no problem. You know, rich people that had money deposited it in Switzerland, and they would be accepted right away. With other people, it depended on the political leaning. At that point, I found at later more in Switzerland, many of them were leaning towards Germany, towards the Nazis, so if you hit one of those, you were in big trouble. This commander came. Well, the first thing, they fed us hot chocolate. They were very nice, bread and butter, and it was -- it sounded real great, and then the commander said, "I have bad news." I said, "What's the bad news?" He said, "well" -- well, at first he questioned us. "Do you have any money or any real estate or anything else?" We said, "No, we don't have anything." He said, "Well, I'm sorry." He says, "You can't stay," he said. "You must go back." I said, "We cannot go back. we will never find our way. It's just walking into sure death." He said -- I said -- not I; one of -- probably Father did. He said, "Don't we have right to asylum?" He said, "Our life is in danger." He said, "I don't see anybody after you," he said. "You can go back where you came from." He told us that, and we said, "No." And all of us said, "Look," I said, "if that's the way" -- he said, "Okay, I'll take you tomorrow to the border post and return you to the Germans." You can imagine how we felt. Then we played on the fact -- we said, "We are actually Polish citizens." I says,

"Isn't there any provision for that?" He said, "well," he said, "let me call Lugano and see what they say." He says, "I don't think so, but." well, about -- finally after about three or four hours' stay there, he came back. He says, "Temporarily, you can stay," you know. And that, again, of course, saved our lives at that point because there was no way back for us.

And the next day they took us to a collection camp where they showered us and they fed us and slept on the floor. There was nothing, nothing too, too terribly unpleasant. The food, I guess, to go around was not enough. I remember we had to -- I took a job all day long emptying and refilling straw mattresses, and for that, I got a nice piece of bread, which I said I'm going to save, but I wasn't able to. So we stayed there in this distribution camp, you know. There was -- the commander was a, was a terrible person. He made us very miserable. Of course, we were happy that we were there, but he didn't cease to tell us how happy we ought to be there, and he drilled us, and he kept saying the cross has to be on the left side when you fold the blanket, you know, and really harassed us. And the food was slightly inadequate. We, we -- well, we survived it.

We were eventually then sent to a camp in a hotel in Lucerne that was changed from a hotel, and things were a lot better there. And from there we were -- and from there, we were then redistributed. My parents got to stay there just to take care of the things in the camp, and us youngsters were sent to labor camps. And the first one I was sent to -- we were sent to, Adolph, I don't think had to go to that camp because he still had a knee problem, and he got out of it. But we were sent, Maurice and I were sent to a working camp near the German border up in the mountains, and we had to carry water. They were building a road there, and that was a very unpleasant thing. Also because the commander strongly sympathized with the Germans, there was no help. I remember when the Allied landed that we -- throughout the -- in France, they said this will be

the beginning of the end. He said they will probably throw them back in the ocean, you know. He wanted to believe that.

And through various adventures and misadventures in Switzerland, eventually we -- eventually we -- the war ended. When the war ended, I was in a camp in Lugano, near Lugano. I was in a number of places too long now to talk about, but when I was there, I was anxious to go back to Italy. I still remember when the day came, on the 7th of May, 1945, that the war was finally over, I couldn't wait till everything was over, and I told my parents, "I want to go back to Italy." And they said, "You're crazy. Why don't you wait till we all go together?" I said, "I don't want to wait. There's no more war, and Milano's in turmoil. It's just being liberated, and I want to be there." I also had a girlfriend there I was anxious to see, so I said, "I'm going."

So I went back alone the way we came, over the mountains, but I didn't feel that my life was in danger, which it wasn't. Neither the Swiss nor the Italians now would do any harm to me, and I went. I had a real funny episode because the -- I went up the mountain. I knew the direction I had to follow to end up in Italy, and an Italian patrol stopped me. And they said, "well, you have to go to the place, and then you go on from there." And one of the patrol people was a friend -- happened to be a friend of mine from Milano, real good friend. He was part of a group of people, and he -- and I told him, "Look," I said, "I want to talk to you a moment, Vincenzo (phonetic)." I said, "I have a golden watch that somebody gave me to take to somebody. They may take it away from me. Would you take it?" So he didn't, and he gave it back to me. When we, when we were in Milano then, when he was off duty, I went to see him.

There were -- and then, of course, we started our life anew. Adolph actually -- when he came back -- we didn't come back -- he also -- he was much more serious with a girlfriend he had. That was in Arsiero, in the little town where we were. Well, he fell desperately in love, and much -- we made fun of him in a

way because I was a real romantic, you know, and he was the one, he was always looking for a girl. He was a bit older, and I said, "How can you do that if you're not in love with her?" And he said, "It's not an absolute [indistinct]." And I said, "well, I thought it ought to be," and we had all these long discussions.

>> Interviewer: Leo, tell us how you got to the United States and to South Carolina.

>> Diamantstein: Okay. All right. After we, we, we -- gradually we resettled in Italy. We started our lives, new lives there. I continued my studies privately, and I worked very hard on culture, history, and language. Those were my loves, but I did other things to make a living. I want to add, I now do -- I teach, you know, evening courses in culture and language, mostly Italian and German, at Furman University in Greenville, and I love it. I love it. I love the students, I love the exchange, and I love to talk about the things that I really -- are very dear to me because that's my number-one subject -- subjects.

Anyway, we, we came there. Father established a business, and we did fairly well. We all did. We all pitched in. And things eventually went quite well. And what actually happened, what brought me to the United States is this: We were not -- we didn't have to emigrate. We were happy in Italy. We were happy with the Italians and still, again, as I told you, have many friends. But my sister's husband was -- his parents were in the United States, so he went to the United States, and my sister decided to follow him, and she started writing us letters, we should move to the United States, too, that we don't know what the future might bring, and this and the other, and I was very -- I was torn. I didn't know which way to go, and finally, I decided to, to follow suit, and Adolph, too, and Adolph, of course -- at that time, he married the girl that he met and had met during the war, and they were happily married, and Maurice married a girl, a young woman that he met in the camp in

Switzerland. She, Helen, is a survivor of the Holocaust. She was from France, and she had come in, and she has a story just like mine to tell. She survives by a miracle. Unfortunately, her brother and her father were taken by the Nazis. Her and her mother got away through, again, through some hair-raising experiences. They met there, and Maurice and her got married.

And so for a while, we lived in this town, and then we moved to Vicenza, to the city, capital city of the area, and that's the home of Palladio, a well-known architect of that -- Monticello was built after him. Anyway, from there, my sister talked us into it, okay? And I said, "well, maybe she has a good point. Let's see what it's like, you know." So Maurice went first, actually, and Helen, and then I -- Adolph and I went, and his wife, and we, we arrived in New York, and I really was bewildered by the city, and I found it fascinating. I lived there for eight months, and I really didn't like to live there. I mean, I know it's an old cliché, but I didn't like the pace, you know, the subway, the rush hour. You know, we lived in Brighton Beach, and I had to commute back and forth. One time there was such a big to-do getting in and out of the subway that I lost a sleeve to a jacket and something. It was just more than I was used to. I grew up in a big city, Milano, about a million and a half, but nothing like New York, and I just couldn't get used to the, to the way of life in New York.

So I went back. I went back in April of the following year. I went back. Father still had his business and all that. I went back to Vicenza and stayed there, and frankly, I was very doubtful that I would come back. But in the following two years, I married too. I found somebody, a young woman whose father was a superintendent of internal revenue, a very, very marvelous person, a lawyer and a linguist from Hungary originally, her father and mother. We became friends, and we got married, and then I decided maybe it's a better idea that I should go and go back. Maybe I -- my thought was, it's such a big country. I heard so much about the United States. I studied about the

United States. I said, "New York is just one place." I said, "I was wrong. I shouldn't have judged everything by my experiences there." But mind you, they were not all bad, but I just didn't enjoy living there. There was this routine, you know. I used to go every week to the library and pack books, and I enjoyed reading and all that, but it's just -- the whole life and pace, it didn't suit me.

So I went back, and Dory, my wife, couldn't come with me because I -- we had to come on a quota system, and the quota system was the country you were born, not what your nationality is, and I was born in Germany. That was all in my favor because the German quota at that time was quite open because one of the priorities was that you had never collaborated with the Nazis to, to, to come, and that was easy for us. So under that quota, I came. It was not hard to get the papers. And, well, of course, I'm being retro [indistinct] because the second time, I was just reentering, you know. I had first papers, but I didn't have citizenship two years later.

So at that time, on the ship -- I went back on a ship -- I met some people from Denver, Colorado, and what they told me was so great that after a week in New York, I went to Denver, and nine months later, my wife was allowed to join me, and she came, and we have a daughter who was born in Denver in Colorado, and, and we had a -- and we established our live there and really enjoyed it, and we stayed in Denver quite a few years. In '67, we moved to South Carolina. Adolph was in a business, and he wanted me to be in it with him, and I did some teaching and some -- showing slides and so forth, but we, we had a business, and that terminated about six, seven years ago, and since then, I have been working as interpreter and translator and teaching these evening classes at Furman University, and I love it and enjoy it dearly, and I love -- and I really like the South. I, I got to like it, and I got to like -- I even like the climate, in spite of the heat and all that, and I enjoy -- my wife always reproaches me because I said -- she didn't want to move, and I

said, "We are going to be near the ocean." well, she grew up in Fiume, which is in Yugoslavia now, Rijeka, by the Adriatic, and she missed the ocean. And she reproaches me, "Where is the ocean?" "Well," I said, "it's four hours away, but it's still nearer, much nearer than Denver, you know." And we visited San Francisco, and I thought that was a lovely place. I loved it and other parts of the country, and we have been living here ever since. We enjoyed our life here.

>> Interviewer: Leo, from the experience that you've had with the Holocaust, what would you like children, your students, and other people to know about what happened?

>> Diamantstein: I'd like them to know about my story. When I did this in much shorter version for a high school in Greenville, one of the girls, if you don't mind my saying, a black girl, lovely girl -- I asked them, "Do you have any questions?" Of course, it was a much more condensed version. And this girl said, "This all happened so long ago. why do we have to know?" She says, "Well, who cares today?" And I looked at her, and I said, "You know why you have to know? You have to know this happened there. It can happen anywhere. We want to make sure that it never happens here. I don't want it to happen anywhere, but you are growing up here. Just remember, stand, stand up for your rights, for your human rights." I said, "It's very important because you never know what might happen, and the only reason you should know this story is that one reason, because you have no idea what, what strikes, what kind of people might be in power and what they might do to you. So from early on, know what your rights are and stand up for them." That's what I told her, you know, and I think it's important.

>> Interviewer: Thank you, Leo.

>> Diamantstein: Good. Okay.

>> Male speaker: Great.

>> Diamantstein: well, he motioned the time to me.

>> Interviewer: Yes, I could see he was -- so something was going on over my shoulder.

>> Diamantstein: Well, but I'm glad you did. At least I'm not caught in the middle of a sentence. And I'm glad you asked that last question because it's very true. You know, I was very concerned about it. I have done it since in a number of schools and places, and, and, and I think it is important, you know.

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