



Morris's identification photo. Amsterdam (Netherlands), 1944.

BIOGRAPHY:

Morris Schnitzer was born in 1922 in the city of Bochum, located in western Germany near the Dutch border. His parents, Hermann and Rosa, immigrated to Germany from Eastern Europe and owned a chain of retail stores. Morris and his two brothers, Eddi and Benno, were cared for by their maternal grandmother, Baba Shoshi, who took their religious education seriously. Morris was the only Jewish student in his class. He excelled in school and developed a lifelong passion for education. In 1933, Morris witnessed the Nazi Party come to power in Germany and experienced the increasingly severe measures put in place against German Jews in the following years. During Kristallnacht, Morris's father was arrested and sent to a concentration camp; upon his return, he told Morris about the horrors he had witnessed there and said, "Whatever you do, never enter a concentration camp." With this warning in mind, sixteen-year-old Morris left Germany on a Kindertransport to the Netherlands, where he was still living when the Germans invaded in 1940. During the next four years, Morris repeatedly evaded capture – often using false identities – on a journey that took him through Belgium, France and to Switzerland, always trying to stay one step ahead of the Nazis and their collaborators. After being liberated in Belgium in 1944, Morris was hired by the American army to work as an interpreter. After he left the army, Morris lived in the Netherlands before joining his brother Eddi in Canada in 1947, with hopes of resuming his education.

"And there I was one evening at the end of December 1942, a free man in Brussels. A German Jew. Via the Netherlands. Via Switzerland. Via France. I was free in Brussels! I didn't know anyone. I had never lived in Belgium. A war was on. What was I supposed to do now?"

Morris Schnitzer

Morris Schnitzer is a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to Canada in 1947 and settled in Quebec. You can learn about his experiences by reading his memoir, *Escape from the Edge*. Below is some background that will help you understand Morris's story.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Morris's family lived in Germany, a country located in Central Europe that is bordered by several countries including Poland, Austria and the Netherlands. The Jewish population of Germany was approximately 500,000, which was less than 1 per cent of the country's total population. When Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in 1933, they gradually implemented many anti-Jewish measures that reflected their antisemitic ideology. In general, the German population supported these measures or did not speak out against them. Due to this rising discrimination, many Jews tried to leave Germany by obtaining visas to immigrate to other countries. Kristallnacht – the violent attack on German Jews and their property in late 1938 – was a turning point that convinced many people that they had no future in Germany. Leaving Germany was difficult because the German government restricted the amount of money that Jews could take with them, and few countries wanted to accept Jewish refugees. Nevertheless, more than half of the Jewish population managed to leave Germany before the start of World War II in September 1939. Approximately ten thousand Jewish youth left Germany on a Kindertransport (children's transport) organized by groups in England and other countries to bring young Jews out of Germany. For Jews who arrived in the Netherlands, the relief was short-lived, as the Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940 and installed a German occupation government. In 1942, mass arrests and deportations began: Jews were arrested and held in a transit and internment camp, and then sent to Nazi camps where most were killed. Some Jews escaped to neighbouring countries, such as Belgium and France, which were also occupied by the Germans, where they tried to survive by hiding or staying on the run until the end of the war. Between 131,000 and 180,000 German Jews were killed during the Holocaust, including Morris's parents and his brother Benno.

