

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Kurt Thomas
November 9, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Kurt Thomas, conducted by Bonnie Durrance on November 9, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Research Institute's collection of oral testimonies.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

KURT THOMAS

November 9, 1990

Q:All right, we're on. Now, Mr. Thomas, would you tell us your name, and where you were born?

A:Uh, you want my present name, or my former name? How does that work?

Q:Both.

A:I was born in Brno, the capital of Moravia. And my original name, family name, was Ticho...T-I-C-H-O. Which I changed after coming into this country. I was born in 1914 [April 11]. The full name is now "Kurt Thomas." In Brno, as I said; and raised in a little town about 20 miles north of Brno called Boskovice. A city of approximately eight thousand people, where there was a Jewish community dating back into the fifteenth century.

Q:Tell us a little bit about your childhood.

A:About what?

Q>Your childhood.

A:Well, I had a very happy childhood, although I was born before the First World War. I remember...during the war, I must have been a little bit over three years old and my father was in the army, in the Austrian army. And my mother--with my...with her sister, with my aunt--brought me home from the little village from where she came in Slovakia; because her mother-in-law, my grandmother, was sick. She [his grandmother] died. Then her husband, my grandfather, got sick. And then I got sick. And I remember still, very dimly, the day when we came from the railroad station into the apartment. Well, anyhow when I

got sick my mother told the doctor, "Dr. Weiss, this is an infectious diseases, because my mother-in-law passed away. Now the father-in-law is sick. And now the...my child got sick." They finally found out it was typhoid fev...fever. And... uh...I also remember during that sickness that my aunt coaxed me in eating, after the fever was gone. And...uh...she told me over a little chicken, which I liked, in my grandmother's home and they made me some soup. And that was the first meal I ate; and which I heard this story many times later on from my aunt. Well, my..my...uh...childhood was a happy one. From the political point of view, in 1918 Czechoslovakia was founded. Uh...and up to 1920, there was in town a German school which was attended mostly by the children of Jewish parents, and by some non-Jewish children too. The idea was that the Habsburg monarchy, the system, tried to Germanize wherever they could. And for that purpose they used minorities; one of them were the Jewish people. In return, they were getting certain concessions, to which they had to be entitled as full citizens anyways; but it was an abuse which went on through centuries. And I remember in 1920, when the German school was closed. And my father was raised in the German language only; although he spoke Czech. He was ready to move to Vienna, but he changed his mind; and I...all my schooling was Czech, with the exception of...uh...being tutored privately with a few other Jewish children by the former principal of the German school, Mr. Joseph [Meyer (ph)]. I went to elementary school. I went to gymnasium. And then I got a job in a ready-to-wear manufacturing place; where I worked until 1936, when I had to join the army. Our lives there in Boskovice were beautiful. We had a lot of...uh...opportunities and exploit...exploited them a lot...while, while uh... Sporting opportunities--like skiing, skating, hiking, swimming. The little town is located in...in a very scenic section of Moravia. It was called "the Moravian Swiss."

Q: Was there a strong religious feeling in your life?

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A: Well, there were a few very religious people. We, personally, were irreligious. As a matter of fact, my father was an atheist, and so am I. My grandfather was religious. His wife, my grandmother--is paternal--was not; but she kept a kosher house because of his sake. And when she passed away, my mother kept a kosher house for his sake--for Grandfather's sake--until he passed away. He did not live with us, but he ate with us at noontime and dinners; while the breakfast was sent to him in his apartment from our house every morning. Uh...as soon as Grandfather died, my sister and I said to my mother, "Let's stop with that kosher deal, because we...we don't believe in it. And we eat...eat everything anyways." And that was...that was the end of the kosher housekeeping. I think he died in '32 or '33. Uh, we...we were a group of Jewish youngsters who had a good time. Uh...Although we were friendly with the non-Jewish people. As a matter of fact, I had a few very good friends among them from school and so forth. But there was a certain social...uh...barrier between the two religions. And as children, I remember, we had even wars between the Jews and the Christians, where we were throwing at...at each other stones. And a half an hour later, we played soccer together. It was just all on friendly, very friendly terms. And I think that the population there, with the exceptions of course, accepted us as full-fledged citizens. And the country was at that time democratic under the...the system. Uh...The president was Tomáš Masaryk, a humanitarian, uh...liberal politician. And we had...we had a real...very nice life. Until, of course, the occupation of the country came. I joined the army 1936. The...in October, I believe, of 1938, I was still in the army. The Sudetenland, which were the border regions occupied primarily by German-speaking people, were ceded to Germany. And in...and I was discharged on February the 28th, in 1939.

Q: Can you describe some of the changes, and how the changes began to take place?

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A: Well, that comes from...that comes only on after the...the, the...uh...country was partly truncated, and later on occupied entirely. Then the changes came about. I was discharged, as I said, at the end of February '39. And on March the 15th, the German army marched in and...uh....occupied the...the... the remains of Bohemia and Moravia. I lived in Moravia; while Slovakia, which was another state of the former Czechoslovakia Republic, was at that time already independent--or declared their independence. Uh...and that what was left was called the "Protektorat" [**NB:** Protectorate]. The situation right away changed. Of course, we were already in...in a state of flux. For instance, we had an affidavit to go to the United States from an uncle--from my mother's brother who lived in Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania. And he sent us an affidavit for my sister, my two cousins, [Otto and Edith (ph)], and for myself. But unfortunately, there was a quota. And there were, I believe, 1400 some admissions, or 1375 admissions, out of Czechoslovakia into the United States per year. And that quota was highly over...over subscribed. We had another opportunity to leave, at that time, for Palestine--or to England, where we even could enter without a visa at the time. And that take...took quite awhile. I would say, for at least a year and half. But we didn't want to leave without anything. And we also didn't believe that times will be as bad as they actually later on proved to be. And...uh...so we lived now under these new circumstances. As soon as the German moved in...Germans moved in, and the...the Gestapo and the SS took charge of the Jewish people. First of all, I had to go to Prague to register. Uh...in the...in a building which was left by the Petschek,¹ which is a banking family in...in Prague. In the Petschek Palace,² I had to register. It took, I believe, two days. And then I came

¹ The family Petschek--consisting of Otto Petschek, his brothers, and their families--became highly successful as bankers and industrialists under the Masaryk government.

² He appears to have confused two buildings. The Petschek family bank building--the one to which he is probably referring here--was used as Gestapo headquarters during the Nazi occupation

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back home. And...uh...the restrictions which were imposed on us were gradually increased. For instance, I had to leave my job where I worked, again in the same plant as when I went into the army. My boss was a Jewish man. He got in a uh...what the Germans called "Treuhand" [**Trans:** "trustee" or "caretaker"]--a...a German person who actually took over the management of the plant--and he had very...he had no rights anymore then at all. And I got dismissed. I got a job in a textile plant which was owned by friends of my parents, Mr. Richard [Fischer (ph)], in a little village close to Boskovice. And I commuted daily into that plant, and worked there until that plant was taken over by the Germans and I again lost my job. By the way, during the time I worked in [Hartog (ph)] for Mr. [Fischer (ph)], there was another lady--a young girl at that time, she was about 19 or 20 at the most--who went from Brno, capital of Moravia, sent by her parents also into this little village; because they felt that she might be more secure there than in Brno. And that's how I met her. She lives now in Washington, D.C. Survived the war, of course. I believe she was sent to Sweden during the war. Now, when I lost the job at [Fischer's (ph)], I approached a gentile man whose name was [an k Stan k (ph)], who was in the ready-to-wear business, manufacturing in Boskovice. And he said, "Why not? I had a Jewish fellow before you. His name is Benno [Langer (ph)]." I knew him. He went to Palestine illegally at that time. "And if you want to come in the morning, you can start next week. I am expecting a contract from the government for, I believe, 3,000 uh...coats for the army. And a similar amount of jackets and pants, I think." And he told me, "I hate to tell you that, but you will have to come a little bit early in the morning and start the fire in the oven. And you will have to...you will have to...uh...sweep the floor, whatever there will have be done

of Czechoslovakia from 1939 to 1949. It now houses the Czech Ministry of Foreign Trade. The Petschek Palace was an elegant mansion house on Zigmunda Wintra Street, built by Otto Petschek for his wife and four children in the 1920s. In March 1939, it was commandeered by General Faber, the Nazi military governor of Prague, as his official residence.

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manually." I says, "That's fine, Mr. [Stan k (ph)]." As it turned out, he was there before me; and he made the fire and he swept the floor. And around 8:30, 9:00, I went to the post office--he had a post office box--and got the mail. I said to him, "Mr. [Stan k (ph)], if you don't mind, we have a lot of labor here which have no work." Because there was a shortage of textiles to manufacture. And he says, "What do you propose to do?" And I says, "I would write a letter to the Chamber of Commerce in Vienna." And I think I picked another city in Germany. I think Stuttgart. I don't know why. "And tell them that we have the labor force, the qualified labor force." These were all home shops. These were little shops in homes in the surrounding villages, where the farmland wasn't good enough to support the people. So they all were tailors, with very few exceptions. And there was the head of that household, his wife; even the children were sewing and the grandparents were sewing. And they were specializing in different items. There was a family who made only slacks. Another one who made vests. Others made jackets. And others made top coats or rain coats. So he says, "Go ahead." And I wrote that letter; and we got in a very few days, responses from four people. From four businesses in Vienna, and the one I think was from Stuttgart. And we had to...we made up a few samples for them. And he became in time the largest manufacturer in (laughing) Boskovice for these people. Now one of them...one of these businesses from Vienna, the name was [Haudigen Grabel (ph)]. These people I met with. They came to...to us, to see. And then there was another one, and I forgot the name. But the merchandise, which was precut with all the bindings, was come...was coming in big...uh...woven containers. And there were old labels, old metal labels, which read "Sinai and Cohen." So these German people, these Austrian people in Vienna, must have taken over some business from some Jewish people in Vienna and forgot to take off the...the vignettes. Well, anyhow, I became...uh...the head man. Originally, of course, there was only he and myself; and then he took in his nephew. A young fellow. His name is

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[Ladislav Konechni (ph)]. Very nice fellow. And we were really very busy. And I did the best I could for our labor, too, because I paid the highest rates. There were different classes of...grades of.... For instance, for a pair of pants you could pay from, say, 10 crowns a piece to maybe 18 crowns--depending on the grade. I put everything in the highest grade; because I figured, "Let the Germans pay. And that local people, they need the money here." And these people appreciated...appreciated me very much. And many of them knew me from the place where I worked before. And they were bringing us now from their little farms butter, chicken, and even fish from the pond. In one little village, there was a pond. And I...we had so much food, I didn't know if I can bring this to the place where I worked; but I told them where to deposit it with my parents...that we helped other people. Because at that time, the restrictions were already very strict. The Jewish people...first of all, you had cards. You had ration cards. But the Jewish people were allowed to shop only from 3 to 4 in the afternoon, when everything was gone anyways. Yet we had more chicken, fowl and butter and eggs in the house than ever before. Which my mother paid for it as soon as we got it. And this man paid me really a very decent salary. I..I made a lot of money with him--uh, relatively, you know. With what I started, I would say I did at least five times as much than when I started to work for him. And he appreciated me very much, too. Now, these people from Stuttgart, for those we made raincoats. And when we made up the first sample, they wanted to know how much yardage we need per raincoat. I mean, for a set of all sizes. And we wrote them whatever it was. I think the merchandise were...was a little bit wider, whatever; it happened from each...so many raincoats, we had one for ourselves. And this Mr. [Stan k (ph)], he collected the yard goods and took it home, in his house. I have never seen that; but I found out after the war that one day he had trouble. And his cage with the materials was found in his house, and I believe he got arrested. And that was the end of Mr. [Stan k (ph)]. Now where did I stop? Uh, yes. I was working; and later on, then we had to

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wear Jewish stars on the chest of our attire. Around 10 every morning, I went home for a little snack. It wasn't far--maybe a block from his place to my home. And...uh...but coming back to restrictions. For instance, we could not take out more than 500 crowns a week, per family, from our own accounts. We had restrictions for shopping. We had no...no...uh...ration cards for clothing at all; only for food. All the Jewish people who lived outside what at one time was the ghetto part, were moved from their homes into the ghetto. And we, in our house--which was above my father's business--uh, accommodated Mr. and Mrs. [Werner (ph)], whose great niece I knew when she was a little girl coming to Boskovice in summer to visit her grand...grandmother, who was our neighbor. And this lady, who lives today in Switzerland, I visited with her with my wife this last summer. But during the war--I now go far ahead--when the Germans in the camp asked us to send out mail into the neutral countries, so that they would have an alibi that the Jewish people are living in Poland, I wrote to [Mimi (ph)]. And about six weeks later, a courier came from the German army with a bunch of mail, and called out names. By then, I was the only one who was still alive of all those people who wrote into the neutral countries. And she even sent me, I believe, some sardines, which I got also. Uh, yeah. What...I don't know how I came into...into this...into this story. Well, anyhow, the restrictions. The other restriction was we could not leave the house past 8 in the evening, and we could not travel. The life was really miserable and intolerable. And we heard stories that somebody was taken away. The SS came once in awhile to town and took hostages--two, three people. In most cases, Jewish people. My father was arrested; and my mother had the courage to go with him to Brno, into the Gestapo offices. And there the SS man says to her, "Who are you?" She says, "I'm the wife of Mr. Ticho, and I want to be there when he's interviewed." And they let her come in. And they wanted to know from my father whether there are any connections between the gentile people and the Jewish people--uh, politically. But he never

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gave them any information. I know he probably didn't have any, anyways; but he...he wouldn't do that. And after a week of hearings, he was sent back home. Well, now comes March 1942. On March the 10th, I was walking home from this...from the little factory, and on the street I met Dr. Munk. By the way, other restrictions were this: we had to do manual work. Sweep the streets from snow or from debris, whatever there was. Dr. Munk, who was our dentist, had to cut woods in the yard of the...of the city...city council, whatever it was. I was very friendly with Dr. Munk. And as we met, he says to me, "Did you hear?" I says, "What?" He says, "We are being deported." And with that, I left Dr. Munk--which was about half way between my place of..uh...employment and my home--and when I came home, my mother says, "Do you know what happened?" I says, "Yes, Mom. Dr. Munk already told me." And the orders were...that was...I don't know what the 10th was, but it was probably a Monday or a Tuesday. We have to leave within three days, in three equal amounts of people: Friday morning, Saturday morning, and Sunday morning. And we can take with us whatever we can carry. Well, I went back to work and told Mr. [Stan k (ph)]--and accidently, that day the representatives of the owner of [Haudigen Gabel (ph)] were there. And, uh, as I came in...I talked German. Mr. [Stan k (ph)] didn't. And I was translating; and I says, "Mr. [Stan k (ph)], I'm sorry, but I have to give you notice. I'll be here Friday the last day, I think; because on Sunday morning, we are leaving town. We are being deported." And these [Haudigen Gabel (ph)], I told them this thing too. They listened to it in German; and ...uh, they just...I think they resented the fact that they are losing somebody with who they could converse and was an expert in the trade. But otherwise they didn't give a hoot anyways. So that was the story about how it came about that we have be...that we will be deported. I have at home a list of all the Jewish people who got deported within those three days, and there is an addition to how many were arrested before deportation. Among the deportees, the bulk are local Jewish residents; but

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there were many who either came to visit with relatives from other cities, and also a concentration of a few Jewish families from little villages. They were not allowed to stay there any longer. Long before the deportation. There were, if I remember well, 447 [NB: persons]. (Sigh) I think that about eight or ten came back alive after the war. Among them, one family--husband, wife and a little girl.

Q:(Coughing) Excuse me. (Coughing)

A:The family which came back and saved their life....uh...was really coincidental. Mr. [Hanauk (ph)], who owned a hardware store, was by profession a blacksmith. Not a blacksmith, but a smith for locks--a locksmith. And when he came to Terezín, they needed somebody...

Q:(Coughing)

A:They needed somebody who would take care of the waterworks, and he was qualified. That's why he survived with his wife and his daughter in Terezín all those years. And he was among the eight or ten which came back. We were very friendly with...with that family, as a matter of fact. Well, now...we left on the 13th of March. Took with us whatever we could. No, we left on the 15th of March. That was the last transport in the morning; by local train to another little station and from there on the main route into Brno, which is the capital of Moravia. And there we landed in a school called Senefelderschule. My number, which each got on a big cardboard, the transport number was AC and my number was 363. On the 17th of March, we left late at night for Terezín, which is a city in northern Bohemia where the Germans evacuated all the non-Jewish people, used the barracks to house the Jews. That city at that time was already surrounded by fences; and it was a ghetto which

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was served as...which served as a transient station to...to evacuate the people from there again farther east. In Terezín, we were separated by sexes. My mother and my sister was in one barrack, and my father with myself were in another barrack. We didn't stay there too long, because on April 18th...no, on April the 18th, we--I'm sorry, on March the 18th we arrived in Bohušovice, which is the railroad station from where we had to walk to Terezín. And the luggage was brought into...into Terezín.

Q:We have to just.... I'd like to go back.

A:Yes.

Q:To the departure.

A:Yes.

Q:And don't worry about the dates.

A:That's all right.

Q:Don't worry about that. Can you describe your departure? Can you describe the trip to Terezín?

A:(Sigh) The departure from Boskovice?

Q:Yes.

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A: Well, it was a great anxiety among the people. They didn't know what to do, what not to do and...uh.... For...for instance, I had buried in the little yard under a big stone a tin box with some of our jewelry, and also with some of the jewelry which my uncle sent us from Slovakia, in the yard. Yet during the war, before we left, we had to take in into a spare room another fellow which was not Jewish; and he lived in our house. And on that day when we were moving out in the morning to go to the railroad station, each with suitcase or whatever we could drag, he was already stealing from what we left there into his own room. Now speaking of this, when I came back in 1945 I took the...the man who worked for my original boss, and who was the...the...uh...man who handled packages, um. What do you called it? A menial laborer. And I says to him, "Joseph, take a pick and a shovel, and let's go with me into our house where we used to live." And we got into the yard; and I says, "Dig here." And I show him where to dig. And in the window, in that L-shaped home, there was that fellow who still lived there after we left...in 1945. And we found nothing. And he hollers from up there, he says, "I didn't take anything. It must be there." And I says, "If you didn't take it, then it must be here." And I says, "Try farther." And he found that stone, lifted the stone and there was that box, a little bit larger than this and about that tall...that high. The linoleum cover which I put on--it wasn't linoleum, it was an oil cloth--entirely disintegrated. The box disintegrated in that wet, probably acidic soil; but everything else was there in the shape of that box. And I picked the stuff up and this (laughing) guy was looking, and he was probably sorry that he didn't know the thing is there. So that was one of the things, how...how we had to handle ourselves. Uh... I also remember one evening, I was looking out from where our apartment was, from the second floor down on the street; which is actually the first floor in this country. So it wasn't too high from the pavement where people walked. And I noticed two fellows as they were...walked by, and they saw us and they said, "What the Hell. They can't walk out now. But they had enough

of a good time." That was the feeling at least of that...of one part of the population. We also hid my sister's dowry long before that happened, because we were very insecure what might happen or might not happen with people which we knew. Gentile people. And most of it I got back after the war. Uh, other restrictions...just terror and...uh, the...the insecurity. Nobody knew what the next day will bring. As a matter of fact, I remember one very interesting thing. There were some SS men in town; and they were led around by a German fellow who lived in the city and who used to be the policeman for the Jewish community when it existed yet. That was a separate political entity up 'til 1918. His name was [Estelberger (ph)]. And he took these SS men around, and they at that time arrested two people. One fellow who lives now in New York, a survivor--his name is Kurt [Steckemacher (ph)], now Kurt Steel. And the other one did not survive; his name was [Lam (ph)]. And as they passed by my house, I walk out of the house and they see me. And [Estelberger (ph)] knew me. And they ignored me. They could have just taken me along like anybody else. That was the only encounter I had at that time with meeting, physically, an SS man--who passed by while I was locking the house. Right now, I don't remember of any...uh...specifics. Oh, yeah. This Mr. [Hanauk (ph)] was also arrested for a couple of weeks, but what...was let out again. That is the man who later on worked on the waterworks in Terezín. And I...then I remember an industrialist of the same name as mine, Ticho. His name was Paul Ticho; was arrested, brought into the Spielberg,³ which used to be a medieval jail--torture chambers; and I believe he died, either there or in Germany someplace. His son, an ophthalmologist, lives today in Chicago. I'm in touch with him. Dr. Karl Ticho.

³ A fortress-prison located in Brno.

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Q:Let's get back to the trip to Terezín.

A:Alright. We...we slept on straw in the Senefelderschule.

Q:Are you on the train yet?

A:No, no. We are in the school now. And one evening, we got orders to get out. And we went by street car to the railroad station, where we were rushed under police...uh ...uh... supervision into the train with many other people from Brno, or maybe from surrounding towns. And we traveled through the night.

Q:What was it like?

A:It was a crowded train. That's all I remember. And from there I somehow managed to throw out my postcard, which I wrote to my uncle, in some station. I don't know anymore how that happened; but I knew that I acted already actually illegally. But it...it got to the destination, because it got back to me after the war. Then we arrived in Bohušovice, which is the railroad station for Terezín, and from there we were marched into Terezín. And the...our luggage came later by truck, I believe. It was delivered to us.

Q:And then what happened? You don't need to worry about this.

A:No, no. But I have to get my points a little bit. (Checking notes) On October the 1st, another transport under the insignia A/G was assembled in Theresienstadt [**NB:** Terezín]. There were quite a few people from Boskovice. Among them: my parents, my sister and myself.

Uh...We had to walk back to Bohušovice...to Bohušovice...to the railroad station, again with our luggage. We got some food. I think bread, some beet marmalade, and something which was like a soft sausage--like big bologna. And we're put into a regular train--one thousand people--which went through Dresden, _aga_ [Ger: Sagan], Breslau--which is today Wroc_aw--_ód_, and Lublin; and into a railroad station of the little town of Trawniki. We arrived there on the 3rd of April, very early in the morning, and were disembarked. We're told that the luggage will be sent to us; and we were marched to the ghetto of Piaski, P-I-A-S-K-I, which was 14 kilometers from Trawniki. Which is about nine miles. When we got to Piaski, uh...we were told that we will be living here. In Piaski, the Germans established a ghetto, which was that part of Piaski where the original Jewish people were living. There were fences all around, barbed wire and wooden fences. The ghetto was divided into two halves by the main road leading from Lublin into, I believe, Che_m and Zamo___. And we were looking where to go to settle. And we found...finally found.... By the way, I don't know where I was in the interim. My mother and father told me when I came back to them--I must have gone for about half an hour--there was some kind of a meeting, and a German officer told them that everything will be taken care of. We will get straw to sleep on, and fuel and food. And electricity will be installed. Gave us a big spiel, big story. But nothing happened. We finally found an abandoned house without any floors. The floors were used as fuel from people who lived there before. There were holes in the ceiling, in the...in the roof. And we slept on the floor; which were my family and another couple, Mr. and Mrs. Julius [Frisch (ph)] from Boskovice--with who we were also very friendly. (Sigh) My sister got an infection in her eyes, and got blind from that humidity and whatever. The food was almost none; until the Jewish Federation there in Piaski established a kitchen, where we were getting daily uh 1 pot of soup per person and some bread. The situation was absolutely unbelievable. No toilets. No pots, no pans. I mean, nothing. Our luggage never arrived.

They left in Trawniki at the time 50 people-- 50 men, who were supposed to unload the luggage and load it then onto a truck and bring it into the ghetto. The luggage did not come. Whether these 50 people came later or not, I don't remember. You cannot imagine the despair. A week later about, maybe...maybe only 6 days later, there was a what we called a "razzia" [Trans: "roundup"]. Uh...In English, I would call it a surrounding of that...that...uh...little area, and they evacuated at that time only local Jews. The local Jews, they were wearing white armbands with a blue star of David. And there were also some Pomeranian Jews, from Pomerania, from the city of Szczecin [Ger: Stettin]. When we got acquainted with a local family, their name was [Niederberg (ph)]. He manufactured during peace time, I believe, candles and soap. And they told us to move fast into a second floor, into an apartment. Apartment! Was a room deal, steps up; but it was dry. And the...the roof didn't have any holes. To move in fast before somebody else take it, which we did. So we got into the apartment, in which prior to us lived a Dr. [Hanf (ph)], a rabbi from Szczecin. There was nothing in it but some onions left. There was a stove in the forerom, which is actually a partition from the larger room was in the back. In the kitchen there was one bed. In the room in the rear, there were two beds. All with straw mattresses. And on the landing of the steps, when you get up there, there was a bucket which was used as a toilet. If you wanted water, you had to go...we went.... We were in that part of the ghetto which had no water supply. You had to cross the street from this part to the other part; but the ghetto doors were opened every two hours, and closed every two hours. From 8 to 10, you could go into the other part to get water; but at 10 o'clock it was closed until 12. Then you could go again from 12 to 2. And that...that's how it worked. Now there was a...what they called "Ghetto Polizei," which was the ghetto police. These were Jewish people, everything ordered by the Germans. They also nominated a committee of 12 elders. Among them there were two Czech people, a Mr. Kurt [Hirschmann (ph)] and a, uh,

engineer, [Ernst Boehm (ph)], with his wife...who was there with his wife. [Hirschmann (ph)], I believe, ...yeah, he was with his wife there, too. But I bring this up for the reason to understand how the thing operated. The Judenrat was getting orders from the Germans, and they had to comply; and were actually instruments for the Germans. Well, luckily by the end of, uh, April, we heard that they are looking for plenty...for 20 young people who would work on a farm. Ten German, of German nationality, and 10 of Czech. And I got among the 10 of the Czech nationality, and got the job working from 7 in the morning 'til 7 at night on a huge estate in Siedliszczki. Uh...Just a minute. (Checking notes)

Q:You know, it may be best if you go from just what comes to your mind, rather than....

A:Yeah, but I would forget many important things. Now, I believe it was... Yah, I got the job. We went onto this estate every morning; and as we got a little bit smarter, we started to smuggle out things from the ghetto and was peddling them at noon time from one little home to the other in that village, to the local people. We also were lucky that the administrator of the estate--I forgot now his name--was very tolerant and understanding to us, and he let us steal. Virtually, let us steal potatoes and vegetables; and even, if he could, some flour. Whatever it was. We...our...uh...our wages were, at noontime, we got a pot of boiled potatoes with some milk. And every week we were getting two kilograms, which is a little bit over four pounds, of either flour or barley. And he was giving us--against the directions from the Germans--every day, I believe for eight or 10 people, one big loaf of bread. And there we...we worked. I got acquainted through this trading with a farmer whose name I didn't know. Uh, then another incidents come into my mind; and it was on June the 22nd, first anniversary of the Russian-German war, I traded--I don't know anymore what it was--for eight kilogram of flour the day before. And I left it on the farm. And the next morning, I

asked the supervisor--who took us into the fields where we worked on the meadows, barn, whatever--whether he would let me run home--which was three kilometers, maybe two miles--with this flour. Because I was afraid if I go in the evening with the rest, the Germans checked on us what we are having with us. And if you had some contraband, they shot you on the spot. And then told the...the Jewish policeman at the ghetto gates, "There's somebody shot and lying in a ditch over there. Get and buried him." So I didn't want to do that, to bring this home in the evening. And the foreman told me, "There is just now a wagon going through Piaski. Hop on the wagon and come back." Which I did; and when I got to the ghetto gate, I jumped down, brought the flour in. And my mother was on the landing, standing; and she says, "How coming you're coming home? I hope you didn't lose the job." Because that was more or less a sub...subsistence for...for my people, what I brought home. And I says, "No, Mom. I got eight...eight kilo of flour, and I brought it home now." And explained, and kissed her goodbye and left; and run back in...onto the farm. (Sigh) At noontime, or maybe past noontime--no, I think it was right around noontime--somebody discovered people walking through the fields. And we crawled on top of the blacksmith's shop; and we saw a huge transport being walked through the fields, direction Trawniki. By the way, before I left I said to my mother, "If anything goes wrong, you know where to go to hide." We knew already how to get there. "Hide." They didn't. When I came home in the evening, they were gone. My parents and my sister were gone, and so was my winter coat. I had at that time a brand new winter coat, which is the only real valuable thing next to what I had--my suit, slacks, and shoes. That's all I had. One pair of change. Nothing else. Nobody else had more, either. That was the situation. And whatever we smuggled was from people who had something who came there earlier, or whatever. Uh, but from that transport from which we came, they had nothing; although they sold their last shirt just to get...for...for a few potatoes. Well, I came home in the

evening. And in the meantime, between the arrival of the second transport whose insignia was A/L, there arrived my aunt, Rosa. That was my father's sister's widow. A Mrs. Weiner,⁴ who was a widow, with her daughter [Litzi (ph)]; her sister, Mrs. [Frisch (ph)]. Mrs. Weiner was born [Frisch (ph)]; and their niece, Mrs. [Rotter (ph)]. My father's cousin, Benjamin Ticho; and a nephew of Mr. [Frisch (ph)], Fred. And we took them all in, because they had no place where else to go. Now we were 13 people. The [Frisch (ph)] couple slept in the so-called kitchen, on those two beds. My mother and my sister slept in one bed. My father, and I believe his cousin, in the other bed in the back room. And all the rest slept on the floor. With one bucket! Two days later--by the way, the people were dying in the ghetto of starvation and of sicknesses. Uh, and the SS once in awhile came to check; asking how many people died yesterday and how many the week before, and so forth. And the amounts were considerable, but to them it wasn't fast enough. Now, two days later, after this transport left... And prior to that, there were also surround...surroundings of...of local people, of the people in the ghetto by the Germans [NB: razzias]. But my...my parents and my people and all the rest evaded them. But on the 22nd, they didn't...they didn't make it anymore. Two day later, I believe, some 80 people come back from the transport which was taken out on the 22nd. And among there...them, were these four ladies. Mrs. Weiner, Mrs. [Frisch (ph)], and Mrs. [Rotter (ph)]; and [Litzi (ph)] Weiner. They told me that they were taken to Trawniki under horrible conditions. Beaten on the way. And were squeezed into cattle trains; but the train was so crowded that these 80 people couldn't...were not anymore being located...placed in the train. So they were put overnight into some barn; and finally, the third day they came home. Without water, even to get anything to drink. No food. They were in terrible shape. And Mrs. Weiner told me that my father took my winter

⁴ Interviewee has identified this lady in his writings as Sophie Wiener.

coat with him, because he was afraid somebody might steal it before I get back home in the evening, assuming that I will follow them. And then she also told me that Marianne, my sister, said, "I think we are making a terrible mistake by not going into hiding." That was all I knew about my parents. Now, as I'll still continued working on the...on that estate, I got acquainted...not too much, but I knew the man already. And one day I says to him, "Would you uh give me a job on your farm? I don't have to get...to the back ghetto now, because my parents and my sister are gone. And I could sleep in your house." I figured I would be safe there. And he says, "I'll take you in a couple...couple weeks." Couple weeks came. I didn't even ask for a release from that old job; but I simply went into his house. He gave me there...in a very little room, there was a box-like contraption on four legs, with a lid. It was maybe 30 inches wide and maybe six feet long. It was full of straw. And he told me, "You will sleep in this here." And...uh...we worked together. I talked some Polish. I picked it up; because Czech and Polish, they are two Slavic languages, and I picked up a little bit. I moved in with my rucksack, and whatever...the little things I had. And I asked in the evening for some water to wash. From that day on, Mrs. Podsiadli gave me every night a big pot of hot water and a basin, where I washed myself daily. And they were very considerate. They always...in, in the Polish language, you address somebody by the third person--like, "the Mr. should do this"--and I was "the Mr." It is unbelievable how respectful and considerate these people were to me. And I...they didn't owe me anything. But anyhow, I worked with them. On weekends I went back to the ghetto, and I visited with the few people who I knew. Among others, these four ladies; and they told me.... They moved in the meantime from the part of the ghetto where there was no water into the part where there was water, into a home owned by a fellow of the name Goldfarb.

Q:I think this is a good place to stop. We have to change the tape.

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A:I tell you. It's a good place for me too, because I want to rest up a little bit.

Q:Sorry.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

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TAPE #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q:We're on now. You may begin.

A:Uh, I want to come back to transport A/L. In Lublin, they took out all men, up to age 50 or 55. That's why my Aunt Rosa arrived without her son, my cousin Irving, who was a year older than I am. And that's why Mrs. [Rotter (ph)] also arrived without her husband--who was a veterinarian--who was taken out in Lublin together with all the other young men. As a matter of fact, she used to get mail from him once in awhile. He worked for the SS, for their horses, in Lublin. Until somehow either she didn't get any mail anymore, or she left..uh..Piaski. Well (pause--checking notes), ...I want to correct something. The amount of people who came back from Trawniki--and I have this from my old notes--were approximately 500, not 80. I don't know where I got the number, but I just noticed it here.

Q:Let's get back to your experience now. Let's pick it up.

A:Yah. (Pause) Uh, out of the June transport in which my parents were, we got later on word--and that was I think official--that 50 men are working in Che_m on a railroad station. And among them was a friend of mine. His name was Paul [Maurewitz (ph)]. He was looking for his wife, and for my parents and sister. And I...I think I sent him somehow, or tried to send him, some money. Anyhow I...the news was that they arrived in some camp, and were taken out and sent to Che_m to work. And at that time it didn't make any sense to me; but later on, after I went through the additional trouble, I know now what happened. During a

transport which arrived in Sobibór, they took out 80 people. Mostly who were out of the typographical printing trade. Among them, who was the 81st, was a fellow who noticed that all his friends and they arrived from a transport from Holland, are there--these 80...80 people separated. And he asked an SS man whether he couldn't join them; and that SS pushed him in there. This fellow's name is Jules [Skelvis (ph)]. He is the only survivor of this group of 81 people who was for 1 hour in Sobibór. And I understand now that when the transport of June the 22nd arrived, they needed some labor. At the railroad station in Che_m, they took 50 men and that's why they were there. But those 50 men did not know what happened to those who were left in Sobibór; until I talked to Jules [Skelvis (ph)], who is kind of a...I would say a semi-professional historian. And he told me, "I don't know you." And I was in...I knew everybody in the camp. He says, "I was there only for 1 hour." And he explained to me what happened to him. Well, let's continue. During the harvest time, I worked with the hired help of my farmer, Podsiadli. His name was [Watzek (ph)]. He worked for 1 year. That was the contract--for food, lodging and seven sacks of grain. And at one time when we were working together out there, he told me...when I mentioned my parents, he says to me, "You will never see them again." But he could...wouldn't tell me any detail or didn't know any; but I think that he knew something what was going on. But of all, what I can't understand, that we never put together what the actual aim of the system was. We always hoped tomorrow will better than today, but actually it was getting worse tomorrow instead of better. And...uh...that's..

Q:In what way was it getting worse for you?

A:From Boskovice to Brno, from Brno to Terezín, from Terezín to Piaski, from Piaski...uh.... It was always worse. And the end station was actually being annihilated. That was the ...the

end result, and the aim of the Germans what to do with...with us. It was a system which...which was thoroughly thought out, mechanically and psychologically. Well...uh, at the end of October, all permits were taken away from the Jewish people who worked out in the country. And I told my farmer and his wife, I says, "I'm sorry but I will have to leave because they are taking away our permits." And she told me, "The Mr. should stay with us and hide in the barn. And we will kill a...uh...pig; and we will eat all winter pork and cabbage. And in Spring, everything will be quiet down anyways and we will start working together again." I considered it, but I was afraid. And I left in the afternoon; and on the way to the ghetto toward me was coming a Polish man. He was drunk. And he couldn't ride his bike. He used the bike as a support. And as we come close he says to me, "Jew, where are you going to?" I says, "I'm going to the ghetto." And that was in Polish. And he says to me, "[Nie wchodzi do getta. Ti dosz zabi (ph)]." "Don't go into the ghetto. They'll kill you." He must have known something. But anyhow, I went into the ghetto and moved into these four ladies', into that ap...into that place. And a few days later, my farmer came with his two horses. By the way, he was the only individual farmer who had two horses and three cows. He was the richest farmer in that little village. The rest had only one horse, and sometimes a cow. But that was all. He came with his horses, with a sack full of potatoes and some lard. Somehow, I was alerted he was looking for me, and they found me. I came to the fence. He threw that over the wired...barb... barbed wire fence with the horses, and got away so that he wouldn't be caught. That's how loyal that man was to me. I mean, he could have forgotten about me after I walked out of the house; but it was a characteristic of that person. Then there were a few more razzias again. I don't have the English word for it.

Q:"Roundup"?

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A:Roundups. And we always hid. On November the 4th,⁵ in the evening--no, on November the 4th--I went to visit in the other half of the ghetto with some friends. And somehow I missed the closing hour of the two ghetto doors. And it was past 8 o'clock, when they were closed for good until next morning. And they tell me there, "Why don't you stay here? Whether you sleep here on the floor or there, doesn't make any difference." I says, "No, I wanta go into my place." I came to the gate where there was no police on this side of that gate...ghetto gate. There was no police. And it was locked with a long chain. There was some leeway between the two halves. Also in the bottom, the corner was bitten out by dogs, and there was a little...of a ditch-like. And I crawled through. I came across the street, knocked on the gate the...on the other side. And they asked me who I am; and I says, "I live here. I forgot about the time, and I'm late. Let me in." And they let me in. And I came to Mrs. Weiner, to Miss [Frisch (ph)], who were their name was. And at 11 o'clock, there was a knocking on the door. By the way, we slept in clothing with all, whatever, we had in a little satchel or rucksack, whatever it was. At 11 o'clock somebody knocked at the door; and they told us that the last man, who had a permit to work in the...in the country as a saddler on another big estate, was brought in by police. Which was interpreted as a very bad omen. At 1 o'clock at night, we were alerted again to go down into a hiding place. The hiding place dated back long before the first World War, when the local people were sometimes using it to get protection during the times of pogroms. That part of Poland was Russia before 1918. You had to go into the regular basement; and in one room, there was a sand floor. At one of the walls where the sand floor was, there was a box hidden in the sand which was also full with sand. If you lifted that box, there was a shaft. You crawled down and then forward; and now you were beyond another wall into a secret room which

⁵ This is in 1942.

was...which had also sand floor. So that if you walk in there, they wouldn't hear anything. And the last person took that sand box, put it in place; and since the room was half dark anyways, you couldn't see. You couldn't...if there would be traces even, you couldn't see. And that's where we went, some 20, 25 people. A nephew of Mr. Goldfarb's.... By the way, in... with...with us were the two sons of Mr. Goldfarb, Mordicai and Abraham. They were both, I think, painters; or one was a black...a...uh...locksmith, and the other one was a painter. A nephew of Mr. Goldfarb's--of the owner of that house, was a pretty sizeable house--wanted to come in there, too, with his baby. But they told him he couldn't come down; because if the baby starts to cry, he would give away all the other people. At 6 o'clock in the morning, we could hear the voice of one of the Judenrats--Kurt [Hirschmann (ph)] was his name--who yelled out--and we could hear it in..in the basement--"Alles, Alle aus den Verstecken!" "All of you out of the hiding places." "Piaski wird judenrein!" "Piaski will be cleaned of Jews." We sat tight and quiet; and everything was alright, until maybe two, three hours later we could hear.... By the way, where we were, there was an outlook in the room from where you crawled into that room. You could pull out from the inside a stone out of the wall and see what's going on. Three times the SS and the policemen came to look, and didn't find us. And suddenly we hear an ax working on that box. They pulled that box out. A Polish policeman crawled into that room, and he commandeered [**NB:** commanded] us to come out. And what actually happened: the fellow with the baby was found, and he gave us away out of...out of vengeance. Which actually saved me the life for the second time during 24 hours; because later on, I found out that those who didn't come out from their hiding places.... And I would have been in the hiding place with the other people in the other half of the ghetto. They didn't come out. They didn't found them. But they bombed all these homes, and the basements were...uh.... What you call it? Imploded-like, and the people died there in these basements. So if the

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guy wouldn't have given us away to the Germans, we would have been later on suffocating in that basement anyways. We came out, and we got a good beating; and were put into a huge mass of people who were already assembled and waiting in the big yard of the ghetto. The two sons of the Goldfarbs were in lead of that group with tied hands. And when we got in, our group--we were the last ones--we started our march toward Trawniki. That march was again horrible. The Germans...uh...mobilized some...in...in little villages, some farmers with their carriages where they loaded the sick and...and the half dead and those which they killed on the way, shot them on the way. They were all thrown on those carriages toward...on the way to Trawniki. I said to my... to ...to those ladies with who I walked, I says, "You know, it seems to me like we are walking on our own funeral." I got hit over the head by a Ukrainian. These were renegades of the Russian army who thought that they will have it better by the Germans; and they were used in this case, at least--as guards against Jews. I was hit with the butt of a...of a...uh... rifle in the head, and got a bad nose bleeding. We finally... well, it was raining all day, got to Trawniki. And there was another mass of people waiting from Izbica, another town where there was another ghetto. And they were squeezing them and forcing them into this cattle train; and then us. We finally were in the cattle train under whipping and hollering, and it...it was terrible. Squeezed like...like sardines. You couldn't turn around. And then the train started to move. We were glad that they closed the gates. And they put seals on them, and the train started to move. We didn't know where we are going. The train stopped quite a few times at night; but finally...finally around, I believe, 4 o'clock in the morning it stopped for good. (Sigh) We, of course, wondered where we were. And I crawled, or rather lifted myself, onto the small window of that.... There were two windows on each side of that...of that train...of that car. And I saw some...in the darkness, some towers. And I said, and I assumed, that we were in a mine field, in a oil-mine field, where they...they have oil fields or oil towers, rigs. And that I

would be...that we would be working there. That was my imagination. But by the way, I want to come back to the ghetto where there was a family that the man who was also a Judenrat. He was an engineer by profession and an expert in making fruit wine. One day the SS came in, and gave him orders with his wife to come with him...with them; and we only found out that he was taken out as an expert for fruit wines. With him lived also, as I assumed, one niece; but there were actually two of them, and there were no nieces. I got in touch with a lady in Israel only about a year ago who wanted some information from me on her rel...on her relative, a brother. And during corresponding with her, she told me that she knows of a people who were in Piaski in the ghetto. Their name is [Boehm (ph)], and they live in South America. I got the address, and I wrote to them whether they are that...that [Boehms (ph)], that engineer and his wife. And I got a letter back from her. I have it with me. The lady is over 80, and her husband just died. They were the only survivors from...not from, of Polish nationality, from the ghetto of Piaski. He worked in a plant making fruit wines for the SS. The girl who I thought is their niece happened to be in the same transport as they, and their family name was also [Boehm (ph)]. And they took them with them. But they did not come out when he went in this new job. And one of them got shot on the cemetery in Piaski, and the other one she wrote me also where. So that is the story of the [Boehm (ph)] family, which is just a coincidence what happened to them and to me. And it came into my mind when I wanted to tell you that for two reasons it was good that I went into that other basement. Well, we arrived. And then... and then the train started to move a little bit again; and the gates opened around 6 o'clock. And we were commandeered [**NB:** commanded] out of the cars on a ramp, and from there we walked down. And as...what we saw was really very attractive. Little homes, little front gardens, nice little bushes. And girls looking out from these homes; and we were walking. And while we were walking in this complex, I noticed that these were not oil rigs--those towers.

These were watch towers, with guards on top. As we walk, an SS man, whose name was-- as I found out later--Herman Mischler [NB: Oberscharführer Hermann Michel], give us a speech. And he said, in German of course, "Which heartless mother left her little child in that car there and is not...is exposed to starvation? Isn't there another woman who would have a heart and take the child?" And Mrs. [Rotter (ph)] says to me, "Kurt, do you think I should go?" I says, "Go ahead." And she says, "I think if God saved me up to now, he will help me with that baby." She came back with a naked child, about a three-year old boy. It was very scared. But the woman who left it there--I found out later, too--figured nobody will notice the child. The train will move out. They'll find the child, and somebody will raise it. Well, anyhow, as soon as we got deep into the complex, we were separated by sexes. Children up to six went with their mothers, and boys older went with the men. Now, I could see in this big yard. There was a group of women on one side, and Mrs. [Rotter (ph)] with that little boy on her arms. And we were in another section. And then we were marched off... And by the way, Mrs. [Rotter (ph)] just moved her shoulders-- like asking me, "What's going on?" And I did the same thing: "I...I don't know what's going on." Then the men were marched onto some kind of a big roof. I can't give you anymore description. But they were looking for artisans, and for certain experts. They took out shoemakers, I believe, tailors, electricians, glaziers--people who put panes into the window; and then they asked for textile experts. And I raised my hand, and this officer with an SD on his cap, which means "Sicherheitsdienst"--"Security Service"--says to me in a Viennese dialect, "Von wo sans?" [NB: Dialect for: Von woher sind Sie?]-"Where do you come from?" And I says to him, "From Brünn--from Brno [NB: the first name is the German for Brno], the textile center of Moravia." And he motioned to me; says, "Komme raus." [Trans: "Come out."] I came out, and joined the other group of these other men. And we then--it was a group of approximately 50 people--were marched away into another enclosure. And

there I have notice that one man with a whip was beating another young...little fellow. But I didn't know what was going on. And in this big yard, we were...we got coffee, bitter coffee, and I think some bread. And I was kind of walking around in that yard, and got in a corner where the...the fence, the barbed wire fence, was uh braided with coniferous wigs...uh, twigs. And I hear women cry...and yelling; and then when I look better I could see through. I saw silhouettes of naked women, running. In the meantime that fellow who beat the other fellow came to me with his whip; and he says, "Get out of here. It's not good to be nosey." So I left. Later on, I found out that he was beating the other fellow because he had the guts to go to some SS man and tell them that he would like to has his wife to help him, whatever he will be doing. And the SS man really got that woman out. That man's name was Jacob [Pertz (ph)]. We called him "Mitzelmacher," which means he was making caps. That was his trade. His children went into the transport; but his wife got saved and she worked with the women, whatever their task was. Then at noontime, uh...groups came of laborers, and there was food served for them. They got soup, and I don't know what else. Potato soup I remember for sure. Yah. And in the evening we were getting, ten men, a loaf of bread and some marmalade, which is actually made of beets. But these groups of people who came in, after they ate they stand up in...they stood up in the formation. We, the newcomers, were put into these formations, 3 in...in across. Then they counted all of us, and we were led back to our stations, where to work. I landed as a textile expert in...in a place on the roof where there were piles of luggage. Suitcases. Bundles. Boxes. You name it. And our job was to sort these luggage by quality, but also by kind. For instance, shoes: ladies, mens, and children. Uh, Men's suits: again, jackets, pants and if there were vests. The task was following. First of all, we had to take off the star of David, if there was any; and empty all the pockets so that there would be nothing left in there. And we were told that there are three classes. Rags, used, and new. And we have to bundle slacks. I believe, 20 or 25 pair

to a bundle. Jackets, I think, 10. The shoes were tied together. And on both sides of that place where we sorted and farther back, there were compartments built out of wooden poles with doors. And everything else was barbed wire. On the outside, were big blankets so that the rain and the snow couldn't come into these enclosures. And that was full of goods which was sorted while we did that. And that was after the victims actually who perished in Sobibór. In that same afternoon, I got a pair of pants--slacks--from a fellow who was in the transport, and his name was Josef [Albrecht (ph)]. Not from Boskovice; but his wife came from Boskovice. And he came with her there, and came into the transport to Terezín, and later on. And I recognized the pants, because they had a rubber, an elastic-- pardon me--an elastic on the bottom, which his wife put in to protect him from the cold weather. That's...for that they needed textile experts. Uh, there I worked for awhile. For three days, I could not conceive what's going on. As a matter of fact, when this...which was a kapo....that man was a kapo who chased me away from that spot where I was. I walked away. I see a girl. Her name was Bertha Kollek. She came from a little town not far from Brno, and her father used to be the mayor of this little village. And what struck then later on, the mayor of Jerusalem is also Kollek,⁶ and I wonder whether these two Kolleks were related or not. Well, when I see Bertha...she worked among the ten Czech people on that estate [NB: in Siedliszczki]. I says, "Bertha, what's going on here?" She says, "You should be glad that you are here, because the food is much better than where the other people went. And you will be working here, and you'll be all right." She arrived there a week before me. But...caught into another surrounding [NB: razzia]; and that time they took out a few women as laundress, and she was among them. And I questioned her farther, and she got tears in her eyes and run away. Well, it seeped through to me that actually what happened...

⁶ Reference to Teddy Kollek, longtime mayor of Jerusalem subsequent to the 1967 War.

the people, as they arrived, (sigh) they were sorted by sexes. They were told to undress, to tie their shoes; so that they wouldn't be mixed up when they go into the bath to be disinfected. And then they will get fresh clothing, and they will be going to some jobs. What actually happened when they...after they undressed, they chased them into the gas chamber. And that's what I have noticed with these women. And Mrs. [Rotter (ph)] went with that baby there, after the speech of the German **[NB: Oberscharführer Hermann Michel]** that there should be a woman with heart who would save the child. And that was the end of that transport. For three days, I couldn't grasp what was going on; until I realized that I'm in a factory of...in a death factory, where we are just as instruments being kept to work. For economic reasons. The whole was an economic enterprise. Next to the gas chamber, which was in Camp number 3, where we could never enter. Once you entered Camp number 3, you never got out. There was also a group of Jewish slave laborers who had to drag the dead people from the gas chamber; and in many cases, uh...taking out their dentures, the gold. And then either throw them onto a pyre. And if there was more...if there were more...more corpses than the capacity of burning, then they had a...uh...earth moving machine there which dug deep trenches where they threw dead corpses, covered them up with soil. And when there were no transports coming in and they had an opportunity to burn these people, they undug these graves again, took them out and put them on the pyre and burned them. And the ashes were being loaded in barrels. I have seen some. You could even notice a little pieces of bone within the ashes. And that was sent to Germany as fertilizer. Uh, that went on all the time until when I escaped. But in the meantime, I noticed there were two groups of people. The one which looked pretty healthy yet, and the other one which were really emaciated. In the meantime, I...they opened a little warehouse, which was not bigger than maybe three by three yards, with boxes full of small items--like brushes, wads of wool, fountain pens, pencils, you name it. Little, little items. And I got a job to

work and sort the stuff in there. Together with another fellow, his name was [Alfred Friedburg (ph)]--from Frankfurt, or close by. He was a shoe expert. He worked in a shoe factory, and I think also prior to that in an umbrella factory. He was one of the real older people taken out from a transport, for..for what reason I do not know. He must have been at that time in his 40s, or maybe 50s. We work in there, and I got smart right...right away; because I knew that we smuggled money in a brush. If you perhaps notice, there is the backside of the brush which hides that part where the...where the bristles are attached to the brush. We took these at home...at home apart, put money in there, and close it up again. I opened a brush or two, and there was money there, too. And we collected a lot of money. But the next day after we were there, or even the first day, a Ukrainian guard came in and he picked up a few pencils and a fountain pen. And the next day he brings us Polish kielbasa. This is a sausage; and a liter of vodka. And I don't know how it came to the amount, but I says, uh, "How much?" He says...somehow the amount of 800 zlotys came about--no, 800 marks. And we already had money from those brushes and from the wads of wool. We very often unwound some; and there was money in there, too. And I gave him 800 marks of the money which we were supposed to deliver to the Germans. And he brought us every second day, two pounds--one kilo--of sausage, and one liter of vodka. He worked with the horses; but he was only supervising the horses. Or rather, the laborer. The man who worked in...in the stable was Samuel Lerer. He owns today a limousine in New York. He got away. (Laughing) And...and I got acquainted with him very well. I know his wife, his children. Uh, so that's what it was until they closed up that warehouse. And I noticed that there were people who looked pretty good, and others who were, as I said, emaciated. And those were were emaciated they had...they lived on what they got from the Germans to eat, from the SS. By the way, these little homes which we noticed coming from that...from the ramp, were the quarters of the SS. And the girls who looked out were the Jewish girls who

were cleaning up the rooms. And that was so deceiving to us, the whole thing. It was all figured out to the last crossing of a "T" how to deceive the people. And now I got back in the sorting department. In the meantime, I got sick. I got high fever and very...was very weak. And during a loading of a freight train--which was not on the ramp but beyond the ramp--we dragged these bundles of clothing from these compartments, from that warehouse actually, onto the train. And I was so weak that I hardly could make it. And an SS man, whose name was Kurt Richter [**NB:** SS-Unterscharführer Karl Richter], from Karlsbad.⁷ Maybe you heard that name even. This is a resort in Bohemia, western Bohemia--world famous. He pushed me in a latrine, I think, twice that day. Twice I crawled out, and somehow made it back into the barracks in the evening. And, uh, I got some help. This Bertha Kollek, she had somehow access to some extra food, and brought me a little bit. And my friend Chaim Engel, who also survived, helped me a little bit, I believe, at one time. I don't know where he got it, but he brought me a bottle of wine, I think. Anyhow, I made it. And in the meantime, transports were coming in so often. There was no schedule. They brought in a transport at night, a small transport, I remember at one time when I walked...went to get something. But that was already in the early fall; but I wouldn't like to forget it on that episode. While I was walking through the yard where the people undressed.... And by the way, later on they built also a barracks where the women were put in. And there was a group of what they called barbers who went into that barracks and... and...uh...cut the hair of all the women before they went in to the gas. Even that was utilized; I think as mattress filler. I think so; for U-Boats, for submarines. Uh, I forgot my...my thought. I mean, I would have to wait a minute because I deviated now. (Pause) Would you tell me what I said?

⁷ **Now:** Karlovy Vary. Town in Czechoslovakia known for its sulfur springs. Located 70 miles west of Prague on the River Oh_e, in area formerly considered the Sudetenland.

Q: You were talking about Chaim Engel.

A: What?

Q: Chaim Engel, your friend?

A: Oh, yeah. Uh, then later on I was still pretty weak and we were running in formation in the yard of the camp. And this one SS man, Oberscharführer Frenzel, had with him a St. Bernard dog.⁸ His name [NB: the dog] was Barry; and he [NB: Frenzel] chased the dog at those who couldn't run fast enough. And this dog bit me in my side here; but I had a lot of clothing on. I had a sweater, a jacket, and a top coat. And he didn't go...didn't go through. Then later on, I recuperated. And in the meantime I hear a rumor that the Germans want somebody to take care of the sick Jews. Up to then, whenever you were sick or you told them that you were sick, you couldn't do anything, they took you right away and they said, "You go into the Lazarett [NB: the infirmary in Camp 3]." They took you into Camp 3, and there you were shot and that was the end of you. But now for their own benefit, to have a small going--because we knew already exactly what to do and how to do it. And also they wanted to save, although they...they didn't have to necessarily have do that, but they were expert...trade experts. There were cobblers who made shoes to order, and boots. There were tailors who made clothing to order. There were goldsmiths. There was a shop of over 30 carpenters who made beautiful furniture. And the SS, who after 42 days of service went for 18 days on furloughs, and dragged every time anything they could get and ordered in the

⁸ Other accounts indicate that Barry was used by SS Oberscharführer Paul Groth to attack the prisoners.

meantime from these shops. All these shops were in the Camp of number 1...Camp number 1, where we also slept and where there was a kitchen; and in the center was a artisan [NB: artesian] well, where you pulled the water with a long rope...rod or pole. On the end of which, there was a hook; and you let a wooden bucket go down there and then pulled the water up. That was Camp number 1. There were barracks for women and barracks for men. I was in the camp, I believe, a few weeks. I was...I was still kind of greenhorn. I still worked in the sorting. In the morning.... They...they counted us three times a day. In the morning, there was an "Appell" and they counted us; and at noontime when we went back to work, and in the evening before we were get into the barracks to sleep, to find out whether there is anybody missing. This one gray morning--I would say it was the end of November, maybe in December already--there were two men missing. One's name was Miller. I forgot the other one. One of them was a carpenter, and the other one was a bricklayer. One of the two, I don't know which one now, had a broken arm. And this Scharführer Michel [NB: Oberscharführer Hermann Michel], who was a male nurse, actually fixed it for him. Put it in a splice and bandaged it, so that he still could work somehow. They were very important to them, because they were building something. These two men, during a rainy night, dug a hole in the sandy ground under the fenced wires. And in the morning they were gone. So during the appell, Scharführer Frenzel [NB: Oberscharführer Karl Frenzel] noticed that two are missing; and he at random took, I believe, every 10th [NB: man] and he had 20 men now to be shot for the two who got away. Somehow, after a while, another SS man came. He was the second in command. His name was "Johnny." They called him "Johnny." Johann Niemann [NB: SS-Hauptscharführer]. He came from Friesland, which is a border region in eastern [northwestern] Germany--between Holland, I believe, and...and Germany. And he never spoke a word. He had his nice little whip, always in gloves, perfectly dressed; and he

walked so slow that you think...you thought he might lose his balance. It was amazing how he walked. And he goes to Frenzel, and they talk a little bit. And they cut the amount of the 20 to be...to be shot, to ten. And the ten people then were taken away. Why Niemann cut it to ten, I don't know. Nobody knew. And we didn't know what kind of a person he was. Allegedly, he was a nephew to the head of the SS, [Heinrich] Himmler. Allegedly. I don't know whether this was true or not. But that was the first time anybody tried to escape at night; and it cost ten lives. Uh, could you shut it off for a minute please? I want to...I want to see here a few notes.

Q:You can just quickly pause.

A:Okay. I just don't want to use up the tape for nothing. (Pause) Here...well, I forget to tell you, for instance, that when we were in the ghetto, it was...the last few days people were afraid to get even water from the other part of the ghetto; because they were constantly rounded up. And we bribed other people to get us the water. Not us. We were in the same place [**NB:** as the water]. But those who came from the other side, they had to bribe people to get them...to get them the ghetto [**NB:** the water]. (Checking notes) Uh...

Q:Uh, we.... Let's not worry about that. Let's...let's get to Sobibór.

A:I don't...but I, I don't want to forget anything which is characteristic and important.

Q:The Sobibór story is very important, and that is what we really need you to be telling us about.

A:(Checking notes) Uh, the...what else? What's going on there? Yah.

Q:I'll tell you what you can do. You can come back at the end and you can spend some time.

A:No. No. That's all right. I remember now what I wanted to tell you. There was a rumor that the Germans are looking for somebody who would take care of the sick. And at that time already, one of the first transports from Holland, from a camp called Westerbork, were arriving. Always on Thursday morning, or latest Friday. Once a week, there came a transport of 60 cars of regular trains with 40 people in each car. That is 2,400 people. And that started somehow in early March, I believe, or mid-March [1943].

Q:Okay. Where are we now?

A:In...in Sobibór. And these people too, they arrived; and if they needed somebody they took him out. And the rest went right away into the gas chambers. I remember at one time they let some women sing Dutch songs, gave them postcards to write to whoever at home. And after they did that, they went into the gas. Now among the people who were taken out from one of the first transports from Holland was a Dr. Ninc and a Dr. Sabice...Soubice. They were two M.D.s; and prior to that, there was in the camp a Dr. Broesler, a Polish Jew who was a dentist. These three men told me that they heard that they will be looking for somebody to take care of the sick; and they would like me to take on the job. And they will help me as much as they can; but they were not allowed to do anything for the Jewish people. Shortly afterwards, at the "Appell" in the evening, Frenzel asked for somebody who would be able to take care of the sick. I raised my hand; and he says, "What is your name?" And I says, "Kurt." "And where did you...how did you acquire any knowledge?" I says, "I was a medic in the Czechoslovak army." Which was not true; but I needed some alibi, and

he bought it. He took...he told me I will be taking care of the sick; and the rule was, a Jew can be sick for three days. If he is sick longer, I have to deliver him...I have to deliver that patient to them. Tell them about it. "Fine." According to...knowing the...I would say, the mentality of the Germans, I immediately set up a little [card-a-take (ph)]. I don't know what you call it in German. A little file system. And I wrote down, "Barney so and so got sick on the 12th." And when Barney wasn't right on the 15th, I tore that card up; and on the 16th, I wrote another one for 3 days. Once in a while, they came to the barrack. Sometimes they asked me how many sick. I says, "14" or "9," whatever I had. And in most cases, they didn't even check it. But sometimes they went to the barracks, and I had to call the names and they had to answer. So they knew these people are there. That happened, I would say, during the whole time and I was there from November 6th [**NB:** 1942] until October the 14th [**NB:** 1943]...maybe it happened six times. I don't know exactly. Maybe five, maybe seven times. Uh, on. Oh, yeah. Now then, I got...I occupied now on Camp number 1 a little hut, a little building with a stove of Dutch tiles. The thing was not larger than maybe four by four feet. It was a little home which they disassembled, a log home, out in...in some village and brought back into the camp and assembled it there. I don't know what was there before I was told to be in there and do my job in there. There were also many other buildings in the camp. Like, for instance, the administration building which is a real huge home--log house--which was disassembled and then assembled again in there, where the Germans had their administration. Uh, then there were a few more where the artisans were. The carpenters, and that's the...the people who worked with paints and with uh tools, they had barracks. The carpenters had the last barracks. There must have been over...quite over 30. And the...the...the whole camp was actually a state in itself, because the SS had their jurisdiction. They were...they were the judges, the executioners; and they did whatever they felt like doing to their own benefit. And they were also interested into a smooth flow of the

whole operation. So, now I am...I am the medic who takes care of the sick. And I protected the people. I also was allowed to bring in from another warehouse--which was in Camp number 2, where the sorting was done--vaseline, cotton, and bandages. I got very friendly with the fellow who worked there. His name was Leon Halberstadt...Halberstam... Halberstam, or Halberstadt. I can't remember now. Would have to look it up. Uh...He brought me once in a while things which I was not allowed. And I also smuggled in things. I was allowed to go there every second day, and took other things, too, which I was not allowed. And I want to tell you a very interesting story. One day I have my little satchel with the stuff over my back, and I walked from Camp 1 into back Camp...from Camp 2 into back Camp 1...back into Camp 1. And I was thinking, "What would you say if Gustav Wagner [NB: SS Oberscharführer]"--who was the roughest of them all and very cunning and very smart--"if you would now meet him, what would you tell him?" And as soon as I finish the...that thought, I can hear him in the back. "Kurt!" And I turned around. "Yes, Scharführer!" "What do you have in there?" And I says, "Cotton." And he says, "And?" And I says, "Bandages." "And?" "Iodine." "And?" "Aspirin." And in the meantime, as we walked we come into Camp number 1 and he says, "Spread it." There was a table on two posts with a board across, and two benches. I poured the whole thing out. And there was a box with cotton. And he had an steel rod with which he walked. And he pushes the thing around; and hits that table, that the objects which were there, they virtually jumped up. And he said to me in German, "Du hast Schwein gehabt." That means, "You were lucky." That is a German idiom. He was an Austrian. And he walks away. And if he would have opened that one box with the cotton, he would have found there a box...a can of sardines. And I wouldn't be here today if he would have found that. That was really another lucky coincidence.

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Q:You know I think this a good place to stop. We have to change the tapes again.

A:Okay. Is it already an hour? Okay. Okay. Change it.

Q:We have seven more minutes?

A:We do?

Q:Oh, I thought you said four minutes to go. Oh.

A:Hold on. I have to see where I am.

Q:We have time for one more story, then.

A:Yeah. Oh, yeah. When I was in the camp, one day I asked for permission whether I may get a coat out of the new warehouse. And there I found--and this SS man, one of the nice ones, says, "Go ahead." I walk in there, and there was my new winter coat which my father took along from the ghetto! It was amazing. So now I knew. They left on the 22nd. The routine was: gas on the 23rd. And when I think of my sister and my parents going into that gas, and the terror and the dehuman...dehumanization [**NB:** dehumanization].... It's just terrible. It's very hard to explain it. I knew, on the 23rd I have, according to the Jewish religion, "Yahrzeit." That means you light a candle on the day of the death, the demise of whoever your relatives were. That's what I found in..in that warehouse. My...my rain...my raincoat, my new winter coat. Uh...There was another thing which was very interesting. There was a girl with who I got acquainted from Holland. Her name was Minnie Katz, spelled with a K

though. From Haarlem, in Holland. That girl, she spoke Dutch, German, French and English. Very educated and very, very fine person. One day she comes to me, and she says, "You know, Kurt, I found some money today." I says, "What did you found?" She says, "Dollars." I says, "How much?" She says, "Two thousand dollars." "Where did you find it?" "In a pot, in luggage." There was a pot tied up with some rope on top, with paper; and when she opened it up, there was that money. I says, "What did you do with the money?" She says, "I threw it in the latrine." Now, I didn't want to tell her, "If you find money, bring it to me." Because I had channels where the Ukrainians, who you could bribe, brought you stuff. But this is what happened once in awhile. Uh, what else happened in the camp? Oh, yes. Once...once in awhile the SS men came, usually Frenzel, and asked me for the sick and took them away. And we never saw them again. They were shot. But on November the...on, uh, November the...October the 14.... On October the 11th--I think it was a Monday--he came, and he wants to see the sick. And I had 14 of them at that time. One fellow whose name was Federgrün who had frozen off toes, he couldn't walk. Because if you lose your toes, you lose your balance. And he [NB: Federgrün] was in there, too; and he [NB: Frenzel] took them away, and he recognized a few who he saw during the last inspection. And he knew that I was cheating. And as he takes them away, he says to me, "Du kommst nächst!" And he raised Hell. "You will be next!" I don't know why he didn't take me at that time, to make number 15 out of the 14. That was on a Monday. Tuesday, he sees me running across the yard; and with his whip he motions to me. "You just run. I'll get you anyways." That was another warning. The following day, it was already organized to start with the uprising, which didn't happen on the 13th. It was postponed by the 14th. But that I will tell you on the other tape.

Q: You're absolutely right. Good.

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TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

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TAPE #3

Q:Okay. We're on.

A:During the winter of 1943, which was a very severe winter...

Q:You're going back.

A:Yes. Uh, we experienced a visit of the head of the SS, [Heinrich] Himmler. Uh, I remember seeing him in...with a group of the...the SS people who were in the camp constantly. And uh...he had...he was a short fellow with dark glasses, dark rimmed glasses. Very nice uniform. He arrived in a...in an armored train, and he...he left the same day. But the day after he left, the Jewish cook--whose name was [Johanna Koch (ph)], she too came from Frankfurt, just like [Friedburg (ph)]--was dismissed; because he told them probably that a Jew cannot cook for them, because there's an opportunity to poison all of them, you know. So I don't know who replaced her; but that was one of the things which I forgot about the camp. Another one was, I had been hiding all those months two people: one was Josef Siegel, and the other one was Kiewe Herz. Two inmates who had difficulties walking, because they too had frozen off toes. And whenever we were counted during the formation time, they were in formation and they counted them. And as soon as it was over and the groups marched away, they disappeared in the barracks. And I kept them there for a month. As a matter of fact, Josef Siegel got out of the camp, but he didn't make it later on. Kiewe, I don't know whether he made it. So one day we are in the barracks, and I checked with him down there; and Kiewe brings a couple of roasted chicken. And, uh, I says, "Kiewe, where did you get those chicken?" We started to eat them. He says, "I found some money." I

says, "Where did you find the money?" He says, "Here in that post, there's a hole in. There was a few hundred dollars in there." When Frenzel took away my last 14 patients--no, at another time. I'm sorry. That was prior to that. When Frenzel took away at one time a group of people, I think at that time there were 11, among them was the fellow Federgrün. I made a mistake there. He whispered to me, "Where das Messer is, ist das Geld." That means, "where the knife is, there's the money." When he marched away with these, I believe, eleven...eleven men and had them killed right in Camp 3, I went back where Federgrün slept. He slept on the first tier of the three tier high...uh.... Whatever call them? Lodgings. And above him, there was a knife in...in the board above him. And I pulled the knife out and pried away; and there was a few hundred dollars there. I didn't say anything to anybody. I put them in the place where I slept. There was a hollow in the post, and I slept on the highest berth. Put it in there. Kiewe found that money; and he bought the chicken, smuggled through an Ukrainian. And then (laughing) actually that...that money legally would have belonged to me; but I didn't tell him it was my money because there was no...no need. But that...that's how I ate..ate at one time chicken in the camp. These are unbelievable things which...which can happen. Well, anyhow, eighteen days before October the 14th. Oh, yet I wanta came back to Westerbork. Out of Holland, we got approximately 15 transports, each with 2400 people. They were coming in from March until, I believe, into May [1943]. Either on Thursday morning or Friday morning. And they were also..there was also a transport from France; and from Belgium, I think. Uh, and these people, of course, the same thing happened to them what...what to the rest. But there was a group of people which was called "Waldkommando." That means "forest commando." There was a group of um 72 men--no, there was a group of maybe 30 men--who went every morning out with couple of horses with a carriage. And they were felling trees, cutting trees down in...in the forest; and brought them back as fuel into the camp under the auspices of a

couple Ukrainians and an SS man. By the way, the SS kept four horses in the camp. Very often, they let some of the people crawl up the tree with a rope to tie it on top, so that they can pull it down then. And many times they pulled the tree down before the man came down, and he got badly injured. And in the end, I kept him for a few days; but there was...it was just horrible. They went to death. Uh, one day, we...at the evening Appell, there came an SS man--I think it was Gomerski [NB: SS-Scharführer Hubert Gomerski]--with a few Ukrainians with automatic guns. And Frenzel gave the order all Dutch men to come out from the formation. There were 72 of them. And he looked them over; and there was one whose name was Max Van Dam, an academic painter. And he says, "Maler, komme raus."--"Painter, come out." He [NB: Van Dam] was just about working on his [NB: Frenzel's] portrait. The rest of the 72 were marched away...marched away, and...and.... What do you call it? In...on the double, and were shot. We found out later that somebody either told them, or they assumed, that the Dutch are organizing an uprising. And that was the result of either rumor or the giving away by somebody else who wanted to ingratiate themselves to the Germans. That was that case. Then another very important incidents. The original Kapo when I arrived was a Moshe [Sturm (ph)], and there were under him a few other Kapos. Among them there was a fellow, they called him "[Bunya (ph)]." His name was Benjamin Katz. And then there was another one, whose name was...you are...I'm smiling, because you're wondering that I remembered the names. But I remember. There was another one who...who we called "[Rejwiczer (ph)] ." He was a young kid, maybe 18, 19 years old. And they all had whips. The [Rejwiczer (ph)]'s name was Herbert [Siegel (ph)]. And the name "[Rejwiczer (ph)]," he get from the local people--from the Polish Jews--because he came from the little town of Rejowiec. So they called him [Rejwiczer (ph)]. These three men, one Sunday, got hold of some vodka, got a little drunk, and caused a tremendous upheaval in the camp. On Sundays, we didn't work. And they also were

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talking about escaping, running away. On Monday, I think at noontime--yah, I think at noontime--Scharführer Frenzel [**NB:** SS-Oberscharführer Karl Frenzel] came and took these three men away, and they were shot. And he nominated immediately another Kapo, and maybe some other Kapos. But I remember only the one who he nominated to be the head Kapo. He called himself "Berliner." He came from Berlin. His name were Herbert [Naftanya (ph)], of Polish parentage. He talked a perfect Jewish; which I did not. I talked only Czech and German. And he was very happy that he got that job. But somebody saw him entering that day the administration building, and he told them what these three guys wanted to do. And that was the end of their lives; and he became now the Kapo, the main Kapo. But he was really miserable. Miserable, nasty person! One day, while we stood in formation while the SS came to take us away, he said, "I take you all into Camp 3." That is the...in German, that is the gas chamber camp. "And I alone will see Berlin after the war." And that did it. There was a fellow whose name was Shlomo Szmajzner, and I'm telling you only what I put together and what I heard. I didn't talk to Shlomo about this. He got a hold of a lot of money, put them in a pair of socks, went to Oberscharführer Frenzel, gave him those socks and started to complain about the Berliner. I don't know what story he made up. At the next "Appell," Frenzel raised Hell with the Berliner, and told him to lie down on the bench which he had to bring. I was on that bench one time, too. I got 25 [**NB:** lashes] myself. But he got at least, maybe, a hundred whips from Frenzel and from other Kapos. He really got it good. And then he got exhausted and sick and tired and beaten up into the...into the barracks. And a couple of days later, he was dead. And as he was...he was carried out on a blanket, wherever they passed other people they spit on his body. That was the end of the Berliner. And they named...nominated another fellow--his name was Spitz, S-P-I-T-Z--from Vienna, who was a real decent guy. Now the difference between [Sturm (ph)], who used his whip excessively anyways, and... and, uh, Berliner was that

[Sturm (ph)] would never denounce you to a German. He was the big shot, but he never would do that. And he had deep down a feeling. But to keep on top and to save his own he...he did pretty erratic things. He hit me at one time with a pole with which the water was pulled out of it...uh...where the water was...the...the...uh...the source of the water [NB: the well]. And there was a long pole with...he took that pole one time--I don't know why--and he hit me over the shoulder that it broke. The thing was at least that thick. Broke on my shoulder, and for a few days I could hardly move my arm. But then we were again with good friends. I mean, he...he was just...you couldn't figure him out. That was the difference between the Berliner, who was really a traitor to his own people of the worse kind, and [Sturm (ph)]. As...as you can see, nobody complained about him, that he wanted to run away. But this one guy, he did. It was...he probably said that he will be promoted. Well, anyhow, Spitz was a guy who had no energy. He just walked around among the laborers; and...uh...uh...only he was not too long--maybe six, eight weeks--the...the main Kapo. So in the meantime, after all the Dutch transports came in, and other transports, one evening--no, one afternoon--I walked to get something from Camp 2. And there is--in the morning, and there is a little pile of clothing. And on top of the clothing, there is...there are two photographs. Uh, pretty big ones. A wedding picture of my boss's daughter, Ilse, and her husband, [Siegfried Lufbehr (ph)]. And the second picture was the wife...Ilse's two other sisters, Ruth and Lydia [Brill (ph)]. So I looked at the pictures. I don't remember whether I took them or not; but anyhow I knew that that night, these four people came into the camp. And that was...that was end. What else can I tell you about what happened in the...in the camp, it was...what of interest. The picture, the situation... Well, at the end of summer--no, it was later than end of summer. It was the end of September [1943]. A few more transports came. One was big. There were some Czech people in it. But they came from, I

think, from Bia_ystok⁹-- from a city deeper in...in the territory, east...east from us. Among them was a fellow whose name I remember. A Czech named [Stranski (ph)]; and this Otto Sander, who was a young kid. And I was working ambulantly in that little hut; and when the Russians came in, I--a group of uh...I don't know, maybe 60, 80 people--they had some spunk in them. They were not terrorized. They knew that the Germans can...can be beaten. And whenever they...they march in their own formation. They used them for...I don't know anymore what they did. They were singing Russian songs. And it's beautiful how they sang, the Russian songs. And they right away started to figure out to get away. Now we knew that the German front is coming closer. At that time, I would say there may be 400 kilometers from our camp; because we found in the sorting room a little radio which they smuggled into a barn. And there was an electrician from Germany--his name was Schwartz...Schwartz--who strung an antenna; and now they were listening during working hours in that barn while somebody was always watching there are nobody's coming in, what was going on. And we knew from these news that the German front is coming closer and closer. And we have two choices: to wait until they come close and then we will be liquidated--as it happened to some other people from camps who were workers in other camps and they liquidated in our camp; or get away. And there was already some talk among the old timers and when the Russians came, the thing ripened. There was a Russian officer--his name was Sasha Pechersky, Alexander Pechersky--who...who laid out the plan, how to do it. I was approached by Feldhendler, who was one of the senior...I would say elders, whether I would also like to come into the committee and whatever, prepare for this. And I says to him, "I'll tell you something. I will help as much as I can, but I do not want to

⁹ In subsequent communication, interviewee identified this transport as originating in Brest Litovsk. See Kurt Thomas, Appendix I (Letter to Linda Gordon Kuzmack, dated March 18, 1991), attached.

be involved in any meetings." And the reason was, I...I just felt that I'm more secure the way I am; and I'm doing plenty for the other people. As a matter of fact, up to that point I was the only one who risked my own life for the benefit of whatever I could do.... Well, for those who claimed to be sick, or were sick. Well, the plan was to kill the SS in individual spots. Because they used to come to pick up their boots, their clothing, whatever. And, uh, there was one took care of...who was a supervisor in the...with the horses, and so forth. That was the plan; and then we would get...to get the...the room where there were the weapons--the armory--and arm ourselves, and walk out from the camp like an armed unit. Of course, it didn't work out that way. On that...on the 13th...on the 12th of October, the women who worked in Camp number 4 where they were sorting and cleaning ammunition which was brought in from the front. And it was ammunition from...from Russia. They were supposed to bring in a few hand grenades; but they got afraid, and among those women who were supposed to do that was the wife of Jacob [Pertz (ph)], the man who we called "Mitzelmacher." They didn't bring it. So we postponed the uprising from the 12th to the 13th. And on the 13th, they were to bring it again; and they didn't again. So the decision was made, we have to do with...tomorrow, like on the 14th; because on the 15th, Wagner was coming back from his...from his furlough, and with him around it would be much more difficult. Around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, I was told by one of the people who were...who were on the committee, or whatever you want you to call it. I really don't know how it was organized, and I didn't want to know. But I was told to watch Spitz, who was the top Kapo; so that he...if he sees something not going the way it should, wouldn't go and report. Personally, I didn't feel that it was necessary, because he was an honest man and he was a good man and he wouldn't have done it. But I kept company with him until about 3:30 or so. And then I let him go, and went back in my little hut. And...uh...in came Leon Friedman, who had two professions. He was a young strappy fellow. He was shoemaker, a

cobbler; and a electrician. I think he came from either Warsaw or _ód_. And he, at one time, had a big boil in his groin. When the groin...he couldn't walk anymore then, and I let him lie on his...on his berth in the barracks. And when it was ripe to be open, I got from...from the barracks anesthesia in...like a spray can. And I sprayed it and killed it, opened the thing, got all the...the...that uh.... What you call it? Pus, out; and gave him some bandages. In a couple of days, he was down on his feet. When the day came of the uprising.... No, from then on he was bringing me gold coins, which he as a shoeman, as a shoe expert, was finding in the heels of some shoes. And he just brought me today two and then two days later three, whatever. And I was putting them in a jar, and buried in...in the sand behind the...one of the barracks. On the day of the uprising--no, a day before--I took a spade, the jar out of the ground, and put it in that little oven which was in the hut where I worked. By the way, with me at that time was also a Russian, one of the Russian, uh, soldiers. These...these were POWs who were brought in the camp--a fellow who was a barber; but he wasn't with there...with me there at daytime. At daytime he had another job. Then after 6 when they...when the work was finished, he shaved those who wanted to be shaved in that same place. Well, on that afternoon around 3:30, Leon Friedman comes into my hut; and I pull out the jar. "One to you, and one to me;" and we divided that money. And I put mine in a sock. I put it in my pocket. He put it in his pocket. And he came with cleats. He was very upset, very nervous. I says, "Leon, you have a job to do. Gather yourself, and do it now." And he kissed me very fervently; and he walked out to that pole...uh...which there wires on, and he put the cleats on.... I think he put the cleats on in the room where I was there. And he walked there, got to the pole, put his belt around the pole, and started to climb up the pole; and cut the telephone wires, so the SS wouldn't have any communication with the outside. That was his job. Where he went, what happened to him, I don't know. The last time I saw him going up on that pole. Then uh a little while...I

mean, a little while later...in the next or so, individual laborers who somehow could get away were gathering in...in Camp number 1, where they were not supposed to be at that time yet. Because they were supposed to come when the day was over at 5 o'clock, or whatever in wintertime, together with the whole group. And there was an accumulation of people--maybe 50, 60. Mostly young people. Suddenly, a Ukrainian comes on a bicycle. He was what...what we call "Volksdeutscher." He was actually of German heritage--son of some probably German farmers, who came under the Czars as a farmer...as a...he was a child--or rather, an ancestor--of these farmers, but they still spoke a bad German among themselves. His name was Alex Kaiser. He come on a bike into the camp through the gate; and as soon as he entered the gate and got deep enough, a group of young boys went at him and stabbed him to death. The bike was lying there, and he was lying here. And there were two barracks close to each other. And I look and see that there is a guard on the tower which could have seen what's happening, but somehow he probably did not. And I dragged this man with another fellow--I don't know who the other man was--between those two barracks. So nobody would see that he's dead, and what happened to him. I had blood on my hands, human blood; it was very, very horrible...uh... feeling for me. Anyhow, more people came; and prior to that there was a real eerie quiet in that whole big yard on which there were about six or eight barracks, the kitchen and all these shops. And there I see Shlomo Szmajzner running diagonally from one corner of the yard into his shop, with something wrapped in a blanket. And then these people were coming into the yard. Well, anyhow...by 4, 4:40 or 4:50 or so, the carpenters' job was to come out from their shop and storm the armory. Oh, yeah; but prior to that the following happened: at 4 o'clock, Untersturmführer Niemann [**NB:** SS-Hauptscharführer Johann Niemann] had an appointment to fit a suit. Exactly 4 o'clock. And as I explained before, he came on a horse. The horse's name was Tsili. A brown mare. Her name was Tsili. There were four horses;

but I remember Tsilj, and I think there was another one, Ima. And he gets off the horse. And right to the gate, there was also a bakery and the baker's name was Israel. We called him "Srulek the baker." And he [NB: Niemann] says to the baker, who looked out, "Baker, hold the...keep the horse." And Srulek took the horse, and he's holding the horse. And he [NB: Niemann] walks just as slow as ever, with his hand on the back, and his whip; and enters the...the tailor shop. And as soon as he entered, they must have hit over the head and that was the end of Niemann. And Srulek knew that he wouldn't come out anymore; and as soon as he opened that door, he hit the horse on the rump and the horse turned around and run out of the yard and back to its stable, wherever it was. That was the only SS man I have seen walking to his death. But altogether, I think 11 were killed. Now...now then...then comes the carpenters. Kaiser was already dead. And the carpenters go to the fence and try to storm it. And a salvo came from the other yard, where the Germans lived and where was the main entrance. There came a salvo of machine fire, machine gun fire. How they knew or why they did it, I do not know; and I don't know whether anybody knows, or ever knew. They got scared and retreated. And I was behind them, and I says, "Bridder, noch a mol!" And I guided them, "Brothers, once more!" And they tried once more, together with the other crowd; but another salvo came, and the fences were too solid anyways. Behind the fence a few yards farther, there was the armory, where we wanted actually to get the weapons. And they turned around and ran along all these shops to the fence. In the corner between the last shop--the carpenter's shop--and the fence, at the end of which, as we could see, was a tower with a Ukrainian guard. In the corner at the hidden behind that...uh... carpenter's shop was an improvised ladder. Two pieces of wood with rungs across. I didn't know about it at that time. But suddenly that ladder was up the fence; and they kepted...the people were scrambling in a tremendous chaos to get on that ladder and under the fence, and just away. Now I'm in my hut, and I'm watching; and I am watching the Ukrainian,

what he will do. Whether he will start shooting or what. And he was just standing, and didn't react. And the yard was getting emptier and emptier. And then he picks up his rifle to prepare to use it. At that time, a shot was fired next to my hut in the...in the mechanics shop. That was Shlomo Szmajzner, who stole a rifle in the barracks of the Ukrainians. He shot at him. He didn't hit him. Whether he heard that bullet...bullet pass by or whatever, he put his rifle back to his foot. When he did that I says to myself, "Now it's time for me to go." And I ran to that ladder, got over on top of the ladder and jumped down into the mine field. But nothing happened, somehow. We have, of course, tried to neutralize it long before. Whenever we could, we took a stone, threw it over the fence into the mine fields, and sometimes they...we hit a mine and it exploded. Sometimes a rabbit probably exploded another mine, if it was heavy enough. I do not know. But that's what we did; but I got through. And as I run now, behind me was Shlomo Szmajzner with that rifle. I only found out later. He was the last, and I was the second before last who got away over the fence. There was a dead girl there. Her name was Myra. Shot by the salvos which came from the other yard toward that spot there we were running away. And as I walked fast...I run first, and then I only walked. I took over, I passed up Yossel Siegel [**NB:** Josef Siegel]; and he says to me in Yiddish, he says, "Kurt, loif!"--"Kurt, run!" And I says, "Yossel, I don't run anymore. I am a free man." But, of course, that was eu...euphoria. We were not free, because we had nothing. We were exposed to the dangers of being caught by the Germans or delivered by the Polish population. Whatever. But anyhow, I felt that I am the big hero. I'm...I was free. And I land in the forest, which was called the Forest of Owls--which in Polish is "Sobi," which is a owl,¹⁰ and "bór" is a forest. "Sobibór"--that's where the name comes from. Somebody came to me there. It was half dark already. He had, uh, a little, uh,

¹⁰ The actual Polish word for owl is "sowa."

shot on, on...he was a little damaged on the calf; and I bandage...bandaged. I had bandages and stuff with me. And then Chaim and Engel--Chaim and Selma.... The girl [NB: Selma] was from Holland, from Zwolle; and he was from _ód_, Chaim. We are there; and Minnie didn't make it. My friend did not make it, I was waiting. So then they say to me, "Kurt, why don't you come with us?" And I felt where they are two, a third isn't necessary. And I says, "No, I...I'm going on my own." And this Otto Sandner--a young kid maybe 18 years old--says, "I'm coming with you." He was from Czechoslovakia, also from Moravia; and he came with one of the last transports. Must have been maybe 5,000 people, taken out for labor. So we walk.... By the way, then small groups were founded...uh...formed, and each went on his own. There was no more cohes...cohesiveness. So we walk through the forest. And when we were far enough, we tore from trees a few branches and lie down. We were exhausted. The next morning--it was already daytime--we were awoken by the bells of cows who were going on pasture. And we got up--it rained at night, we were wet--and walked again in direction away from the camp. And I had two plans: to go either to the farmer, if he would save me, if he would hide me; and if not, I'm going farther west to Czechoslovakia, to Moravia, the...where I knew a lot of people and where I was friendly and I trusted some of them that they would hide me. So as we go, we suddenly see a little house in the front of which, or on the side, there was a pile of manure. And there was a young fellow working on the manure. And I says to Otto, "You watch here. Stay out; and I'll go in and see what...whether we can get some food." There was a woman in there. I says, "I'm hungry. I want food." She got scared; and I says, "We would like to have butter and bread." And uh she says, "I don't have any butter, but I will send my son to the [szoltis (ph)]." Which is like the...the mayor of that complex. They have homes between the fields. It is not like a village here. There is one home here, and another one far away, which belongs in the vicinity to their own fields. You know? So she sent the boy to get some butter. And

Otto came in, and she gave us some black Chicory coffee, and some bread and cottage cheese. And when we are through with eating, we were watching whether this fellow is coming back alone or with somebody else. But, uh, she says, "Where do you come from?" In Polish; and I talked some Polish. And I says, "Oh, we are from Czechoslovakia. We work for the Germans in a camp, and we run away and we are going back home." And she tells me, "You are Jews who...who got away from Sobibór, where they are burning the Jews." In Polish: "[Do ydow palenie (ph)]." That means, "where they're burning the Jews." Well, I didn't have any discussion with her. Uh, Otto stole a knife with which we were cutting our bread, and we left. Oh, pardon me. I gave her from the money which I had an old Tsaristic ten ruble piece--gold, which she recognized; and she gave me Polish currency in paper as change. It was either 60 or 80 zlotys. And we left. And we walked that day and whenever we saw a farmer in the field, I went there and I says, "[To dim kierownku (ph)]?" That means, "In what direction is Lublin?"-- which was approximately west of us. And they tell me like that. We never walked on roads; but always only through fields or, if necessary, through a forest--because we didn't want to be caught by somebody in a car, by a German, you know. Whatever. And that evening, the first night, we slept in a hayloft in the fields. It was nothing but four poles with a thatched roof and full of hay. And when we crawled up in there, there was a berth. Somebody slept there before us; because there was always...also an empty bottle there. So we lie down and we slept. And the next morning we did the same thing. Again we asked, "Where is Piaski now?" And during that day we came to a river. It was the River Wieprz--which means "war" in... in English. And that was hard to...to cross, but we had to cross it. So we walk a little bit along the river. It was November,¹¹ cold. We would have...we would have to swim it. It was rather deep and

¹¹ Interviewee subsequently corrected the month to October. See Appendix I.

not very wide, but still.... And there I see a boy, a young boy with a boat. Well, I says, "Come here and take us across the...the river." And he says, "I am not allowed to." And I give him those 80 zlotys which I had, or 60 zlotys. He takes the money. He put us on the boat and takes us across. I want to tell you, there was so many coincidences which was pure luck. One of them doesn't work out, and we are licked. So then we again...we got food some in...some in some homes. And that evening, we went in the evening...before we went to sleep in a...in another farmer's house; and we knocked at the door, and we asked for food and we got some food. I think the people were giving us food there are afraid that we would avenge ourselves, whatever. Not out of goodness of their heart. At least, I don't believe so. Then we went back into a meadow; and in the meantime it was already half dark and we hear shooting. We assumed that the owner of that house now went out to scare us away, to tell us that he has weapons. Well, anyhow, we...we didn't have any such ideas. We just wanted to survive. We get into this meadow, and there were small piles of hay. They handled the hay entirely differently than in this country. The hay is rolled. Over there, they put it together with forks and make little piles. And then when the weather is convenient and they have the time, they take those piles and put them on carriages and bring them back home in...into a barn. I remember we took two or three of those piles, put them into one pile; and each of us crawled then into this one pile and slept through. In the morning, when we awoke and crawled out, it was raining all night. And we were dry like bone, because the water was running down on that hay. I didn't know that until I found out in my own experience; but the meadow was so water soaked, as you walked in it you could hear the swishing. So that was the second night. Then there was...that was, I believe...Sunday? Well, anyhow, the next night we slept again in a hayloft. But I am not sure, but I think we slept two nights in two haylofts. And that was Sunday morning, when we got out again. And as we walk, we see single home again. And as we approach it to the

left, there was like a burned out home. And I walk over there, and there were some remnants of Jewish prayer books. So I knew that this was a home occupied by Jews who was burned down. To the right and forward a little bit, there was a horse behind the fence of a house looking at us. And in the meantime, a man comes out. We approach him; and I says to him, "We would like to get some food." And he says, "Come in." I was very suspicious. He gave us good, white bread, preserves. This is no joke. He gave us hot water to wash. I shaved with his own razor--with his safety razor, not...with a straight razor. I knew how to do that. And we got dressed again. He didn't ask a question from...he didn't...he knew what's going on, probably. I gave him some money, a gold coin; and we left. That was Sunday. We slept one night in the forest, one in a hayloft, one on the meadow, and the last night again in the...in a hayloft. But I forgot now the...the sequence exactly. It was Monday, Monday morning. And we are already close to Piaski. And in the meantime, I explained to Otto everything about this farmer. He has a daughter. She goes on the bicycle to Piaski. She works in a bank, whatever. And I tell him all the circumstances, get him acquainted with him. And I also gave him at one time a few coins, gold coins; that if he has to go to shop or whatever, that he would have money on him. That afternoon--and I must tell you, I can't...did I understand...don't understand at all...I have a very bad, miserable, impossible sense of direction. I can get lost in my town easily. I can go in the wrong direction in my car until I find out that I should have gone the other way. Anyhow, we come and we are in Siedliszczki; in the outskirts of Siedliszczki, in that little village. But it was still daytime. And we lie down in a ditch. And when it did get dark, I'm going to try to find my farmer's house. And I landed from the back at his barn at the exit of the yard. And on that yard, there were two more...living two more farmers. One was [Kisolecki (ph)]...[Kisolewski (ph)]; and the other one [Sokolowski (ph)]. They knew me and I knew them, because in, in.... Because they were all friendly, you know. They lived on

that big yard; but only my farmer had the barn there. Coming in from the field, the barn was to the left. In front of it was the dog's...dog house. To the right, was his stable with the two horses and three cows. And then there was the pig sty. Do you say pig "sty" or "stay"?

Q:Pig sty.

A:Pig sty? And then was in front of it a little shed. On the other side was another stable, which belonged to those two other farmers. In front of it was a pile of manure; and on the other side, in front of that shed, there was also a pile of manure. And then there was a little yard-like fence. And to the right hand side was one of the farmers living with his family--a mother-in-law and two or three children. And on the other side was my farmer in a thatched roof home, like all those homes were. It was Monday night, and it...it was already pretty dark. As I passed the dog--his name was Caesar--he recognized me. He didn't even bark. He just moved his tail and sniffed at me. And I...I petted him and I continued walking...to walk in the yard. And I opened the little gate to the farmer's little front yard, you know. And I look in, and there I see a petrol lamp and they are eating-- which they baked every Monday, that was a Monday, sweet bread. I mean, not sweetbreads...sweet bread baked in their own oven, and chicory coffee. They baked the bread for the whole week's supply every Monday. But they made one loaf which was mixed with sugar beets and poppy seed. And that was the sweetness in it. And they ate that; and then on Tuesday after the next Sunday, they ate the dark bread. And I see, and I'm waiting now until he will go and make his rounds to let the dog loose, and to lock the barn and the stable. A little while later, the far...uh, the day worker--his name was Joseph--came out. He didn't see me. That's how dark it was. And he walks out, and walks away through the little gate. And not too long later, the farmer comes out; and I says, "Gospodarzu." That means, "Farmer." I called him

"Farmer." But this is...in the Polish language, it is like a title. That was uh, a...respectful, you know? And he says to me, [Jetisdu bedisz (ph)]?"--"Where do you come from?" He recognized me right away. In that darkness with that one word which I said, "Gospodarzu." And I says to him, again in Polish, "I came to save my life to you." And he says, "Marno." He says, "In vain." And then he says, "[Czostsamnu (ph)]."--"Come with me." And as I walked with him, he says, "I owe you some money." That how decent and honest he was! He owed me money for that suit which I sold him, 700 zlotys. I says, "I don't need any money. I have a little money on my own." "Where do you come from?" I says, "I run away from a concentration camp." He put me in the...in the stable with the horses, locked it from the outside; came back in a little while with a bottle of hot coffee. Yeah, by the way, Otto was left in the fields--not too far, but maybe...maybe a hundred, hundred fifty yards. And he says to me also as we walk to...to the stable, he says, "[Ale ty sam amnisz (ph)]."--"But you are alone." I says, "Yes." I figured if I say we are two, I have lesser chances. He put me in the barn; and then he come back later on with that hot coffee, with that sweet bread, with that little carpet. He put that carpet in the stable on the floor, on...on the straw, next to the horses. And he says, "I'll see you in the morning, early in the morning." And I drank and I ate, and lie down on the...that was a home woven carpet. This is made out of rags. You tear the rags into strips, and then you braid it between the...waft [**NB:** weft?], I believe, you call it in English. It wasn't bigger than maybe a good yard long. I laid down there. At night I awake when one of the horses got loose and smells at me. And that woke me; and in the darkness I knew where it's supposed to be, and I got up and got that horse.... By the way, that was a beautiful mare. It was a half-blooded mare. When she walked, the head up, it was a pleasure to look at...at that horse. The other one was not so lively. But this one here, I loved that horse. And I took her back to the throw, and put the halter on; and lie down, back on that...whatever...when I found then the carpet and slept. He came around...I don't

know...5 o'clock in the morning. It was still dark. And he took me into the barn, across the yard kitty corner-like into his barn. And I crawled up on the ladder; then when it got a little bit lighter, high up in the stacks of straw or whatever there was. In the afternoon, the farmeress comes with a bucket in which she had hot tea in a bottle and bread with lard; and gave me the food and told me that they had visitors at night. Some people came; and they were sign...some kind of little bit acquainted, because they knew they have a daughter named Joann¹² and they have a bicycle...she has a bicycle. And they wanted that bicycle. I knew right away what happened, but I didn't tell her. Otto must have bumped into some group of people; and he told them what I knew about this farmer, and they came to ask for the bicycle. And he must have joined that group, probably; or maybe they did away with him. I do not know, but I never found Otto; because I later on inquired in that town from where he came whether he returned. I didn't get an answer. So that was the arrival in...in...in Siedliszczki.

Q:We have only about ten minutes.

A:All right.

Q:Can you tell us briefly what happened?

A:All right. I was in that barn; and during the next few days, [Wacek (ph)], the man who used to work there for them at the time when I was there the first time, a year before, wasn't there anymore. They had this time a maid; and she comes into the barn, and I was down there

¹² She is named elsewhere as Theodora (nicknamed: "Todzia").

and she sees me. Well, then the farmer comes and she tells me...he tells me, "She saw you." I says, "Yes." Well, he didn't say...he didn't complain. He says, "I'll take you Monday in the pig sty up on top." Which he did. They brought me food either in the barn or over there later on in a bucket; always three times a day--breakfast, at noontime and at dinner. On that Monday, early morning, he took me from the barn again across the yard. And I crawled up a wall in the shack...in the shed there, which was the wall of the pig sty. And he told me to go down deep there. And then later on during the daytime, his day worker who he hired--the same Joseph--he was bringing straw from the barn, and he was with me up there to fill in all the holes so that the wind and the cold wouldn't come into that enclosure now. Joseph...Joseph did not know...Joseph did not know that I'm up there. Only the farmer. And when he was done with the job, he went down; and now they started to feed me up there. There was a...there was some firewood like in front of that barn...that wall on which he always stacked, or the woman--the farmeress. And then they gave me this stuff; and I came up from where I was lying down there, got the bucket and the food. And I had there a bucket which I was using as a toilet, which he emptied once a week. Which I gave him, and he poured on the...on the...on one of the two piles of manure. That was...that was my comfort. And...uh...that's how I lived there. I could not stand up. I was kneeling in the center only. Even that was almost as high as my head was; because the roof was very low. And I told him that I would like him to buy me three things: change underwear, a blanket, and a revolver. And I gave him couple gold coins. And he brought me a change of underwear and a blanket; but he says a revolver he can't get. So now I had at least that blanket with...in which I crawled in, like in a...I made like a sack out of it, you know, and into the straw. And there I slept and...and...and...uh...rested all day and all night. I never went down the whole time from October 21st [1943], I believe, until the very end of July [1944]. Uh...I had a few experiences...

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Q:We don't really have time.

A:Then...then I will tell you then what happened while I was on...on the roof.

Q:Please, we have five minutes.

A:Okay. Gee, I work without those notes! I'm sure I forgot many things.

Q:That's okay. Tell us what happened...uh...on the roof and then liberation, would you? Because that's really all we have time for.

A:Okay. (Pause - checking notes) 10/25, I have here a note. "From barn to pig sty. Joseph. Straw. Podiali with me. Money to get underwear, blanket, revolver."

Q:Let's...let's.... Okay. Just tell us about liberation, would you?

A:Now, is the new...is the new tape already on?

Q:No. We don't know. We have five minutes.

A:Oh. Oh. And that's it?

Q:That's it. So, please, tell me about liberation.

A:Anyway, as summer went along I could hear machine.... What you call it? Machine...uh...rifle shooting. And farther away, also cannon shooting. The front was coming closer. And every day it was closer and closer, until one day I see my farmer. I looked through that thatched roof on the yard, and I see him loading a carriage to go into the fields. And in the meantime, I hear an explosion. A shrapnel was going above, and then it exploded. And the farmeress got very excited. And she was holding a cup of something in her hand. And he says to her in Polish, "Don't be excited...afraid of those who do you hear. They go far away. Those who explode in front of you, those you don't hear." They didn't go into the fields. A day later, a German tank came into that...went through this yard. And another day later, in the morning, there were Russian soldiers with little carriages and horses, and women soldiers--we called them "Marushas"--later in the yard. And they left, too; and then about two, three days later I went down. By the way, uh...I was so weak that I hardly walked; but I did. And when we parted he told me, "Don't go through the village. Go into the fields. Because if they find out, the villagers, that if I kept a Jew, they'll kill me." That's what he told me. And I went back into the fields toward Piaski. And there Russian soldiers got hold of me. And then they made a PW out of me for a while, or whatever. And then I got away from them; and I smuggled myself through different situation in Poland until I came home. And that is the end.

Q:Okay. I thank you.

A:You're very, very welcome.

Q:When did you come to the United States?

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A:I came to the United States on February the 4th, 1948. And that's it.

Q:Thank you very, very much.

A:I thank you, too. I, I think that some of these things should be preserved. Mainly, you know, the person of those...of those two farmers.

Q:Oh, yeah. That's an incredible story.

A:They were noble people. I was a lucky guy. They were the heroes. They were the decent people who, out of so many millions who took advantage of the Jewish people, really tried to save my life.

Q:Right.

A:At one time he told me...when he came back from a wedding a little bit drunk. He never was otherwise. "You I will keep 'til the end of the war. Anybody else, I wouldn't take for a million of zlotys in gold." And as he talked to me, I was coming out from my hiding place and I could smell the vodka on him. But that is the only time. These were two fabulous people. I am in touch with the daughter, Todzia. I forgot you when she brought me at Easter one time a basket with vodka and...and, uh, cookies. She lives in Lublin, and we are in touch.

Q:Sounds like marvelous, marvelous people.

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A:These are one in I don't know how many. If only somebody would interview me to write about them. Not about me, about them. They deserve it.

Q:About them. Yeah, they sure do.

A:They do deserve to be remembered in history.

Q:They do indeed, and they will be.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION