RIGA SURVIVORS MEETING & ZIERING OPPENHEIMER INTERVIEWS

BOBINE 236

NY 58

the survivors meeting - long travelling.

NY 59

pano on the meeting

NY 60

pano on the buffet and the decoration on the wall

NY61 MUET

the Israeli and American flags

NY 62

gros plan - faces.

NY 63

Oppenheimer: It doesn't work? How come it doesn't work? ....how? (voices in the background).

NY 64

Oppneheimer: ...but many of yours...of you to turn up here, really grateful. I would like to welcome first of all, Mr. Lanzmann from Paris and his film crew. I guess everybody is aware by now what is going on. (applause). Please try to cooperate as much as possible with whatever Mr. Lanzmann is asking you. I would also like to welcome....we have a gentleman here from Israel, who is formerly from Riga, Mr. Zo Shalomson. Would you please get up. (applause). He lives in Israel, I don't know exactly where, you are welcome to speak to him afterwards. I just have a few announcements to make. I guess everybody is aware by now that Elliot Wells is at the Anti Defamation League, working for the new law of Nazi war criminals living in the US. I don't know if Elliot is around...Where is he?

(applause) Now, we have with us - I suppose everybody is aware of the cards. We have... There were about 50,000 cards printed in regard to the statue of limitation which expired December 1, 1979. I have this card, and I ask everybody to please send them to Germany. All you do is put a 21 cent air mail stamp on it. They will be passed around afterwards, and everybody can have as many as you are welcome to. We also have with us our new donation cards that will also be handed out. (unclear sentence). And we again have our Yad Vashem pages with us. Our prices were donated by various memebers of our society, without any cost to the...to our society or from our treasure. It's all free. And I think that about wraps it up. I hope everybody has a good time. But last and not least, we have a few announcements: We had last night, one of our girls got married in official frack, and we wish the Buxbaum family and the Fischel family a Mazel Tov. I don't know, I think somebody is...(applause). And (unclear sentence) And we also have one of the... Even though as a rule we don't do that, it just so happened in the last few days, we have....one of our ladies celebrated her 75th birthday, Mrs Lily Strauss. (Applause). And...In the name of all of us at the Society, we wish her all the best and many more years to come with,..amongst of us. (applause). I wish you all a good afternoon and we hope to see you again in our next gathering. Thank you (applause) (voices in the backfground) One minute, Ellio ...Elliot likes...would like to explain a little more about the cards. Elliot will explain a little more about the ca If there is anyone else that has something important to say, Please be welcome.

Elliot Wells : Ja, Okay, can you hear me? Now, let me say something. It's not much I have to say. I met with Wisenthal this summer, and we discussed this whole problem-the statute of limitation. And we are having quite a fight on our hands, concerning the German government. Now Wisenthal has a very large committee also in the US, and lest we ....The German government,as we all know,

BOBINE 237

NY 65

(Interview with three members of the Jewish police in Riga)

Claude: Okay, explain me what you wanted to explain. You were in the ghetto of Riga.

: When I was in the ghetto Riga and one day I came home from work and my mother told me: you have a note at home, you have to report to the Kommandatur at...this evening. And I didn't know what for. Once we got there, I saw a lot of young men who were all my age...

Claude: How old were you?

: At that time I was 23,I would say....old-young, and...

Claude: handsome?

: Well, not handsome...Nobody was thinking about handsome at that time, And then we were told that the next morning we would have to...be policemen in the Latvian part of the ghetto. The ghetto. the ghetto was divided in two parts: one was the Latvian side, which only Latvian Jews were in, and the other one was where German Jews were in. And we didn't know what it was all about.

Claude: but excuse me, you were all of you German Jew?

: We were all German Jews. And the next morning we had to report at...very early in the morning, about four or five o'clock, and the commandant of the ghetto, which we think at that time

Obersturmbannführer Krause, is that right?

others: right, right.

: Yes, Krause. He...he looked us over and he told us that we are from now on replacing the policemen of the Latvian ghetto, which were Latvian Jews, and we have to take over. So, nobody that particular Saturday morning - I remember it very well, it was a Saturday morning - we were not...nobody was alowed to go to work, all the working Kommandoes were held up in the ghetto and I saw a lot of SS men in trucks coming in, with machine-guns on ...on their trucks, and then we were...Some rumours were flying around that some people from the Latvian part of the ghetto had escaped to Sweden and the Jewish policemen of the Latvian ghetto were held responisble for this, and which turned out to be true. They were all sumoned into the centre part of the ghetto and were gunned down by the machine-guns...

Claude: they were killed?

: Yes, and we...

other : near the cemetry.

: Near the cemetery. This was the centre of the ghetto. It was [illegible] was called the Prager...

other: We called it Prager Platz.

: ...we called the Prager Platz, which means...which means place of Prag, that was...the Jews of the transport of Prag were living around there. And after this, we were explained that from now on we are replacing Latvian Jewish policemen in the ghetto of Riga and that was...that was the place.

Claude: Which means that they took German Jews to...

: ...instead of Latvians Jews...

Claude: inside the Latvian ghetto?

: They felt maybe they could trust German Jews more. I don't know

: the real reason....

Claude: But why?

: Everything was crazy. I really don't know. Maybe my colleagues here could help you out a little more...

other: I have nothing much to say more, but that's almost what it was.

Claude: Well,....

ohter: --- I was surprised as anybody else that they kept us at the ghetto. You know, we were all in Kommandoes to go to work.

Claude: This was long after your arrival?

: yes, quite long after our arrival. This was in the year of 1942 or -3.

third: 42, because...

: 42.

third: ...because 43 the ghetto was liquidated.

: 43 the ghetto was liquidated. It must have been in the year 42. We arrived in January 1941.

Claude: 41?

third: see, the Latvian ghetto had only men, because all the women and children had been killed in that so-called bloody Sunday. So the were only men. And that's...the policemen, of course, were also all men, so...actually....

: You see, something else, from the lettisch police (unclear) Very fine people.

third: They were mostly professionals.

(all three talk)

third: The ones that were killed, they were shot that way.

Claude: And what was the task of a Jewish policeman inside the ghetto?

: Well, the Jewish policeman had not really a very big task. He had to look that the Kommandoes in the morning wentto work well out in order....

other: they had to....

other: That windows were dark...you know, that no light came through.

: And we had to watch, after 10 o'clock anybody had to go off the street.

others: true. true.

other: Nobody was allowed to go on...on the...

Claude: You had a uniform?

: No, we had no uniform, but we had an armband...

other: Ordnungsdienst.

: which said the Jewish Ordnungsdienst, which means Jewish...

other: And we had a cap. We had a special cap....

(all spead together.)

Claude: Did you have ?

all: No....not really...no.

Claude: guns?

all: no, no.

Claude: No weapons at all?

: No, no, no weapons. no weapons.

Claude: Not even....

all: not even...no...no...nothing...nothing whatsoever.

Claude: And did you have...did you enjoy some privileges?

: not at all. None at all. We got the same.

other: We kept...we could keep ourselves cleaner...

all: yes.

: which was...we had...we had...

other: ...a police-station.

: We had a police-station. We could wash up better than other people, because the people in the living quarters were very crammed in. A lot of people living together, and it was very hard for us to keep ourselves really clean. And we could do some of this....keep ourselves more clean.

Claude: And what was the relationship with the...with the other Jews of the ghetto. I mean, did they like you or not?

: There was really nothing that they shouldn't like us, because we had no real authority. We only were told that we had to keep peace and order in the ghetto and that was it.

other: You see, in the morning, when the Kommandoes were out on the jobs, that everything was clean and smooth...

Claude: But were you sometimes obliged or forced to accomplish some unpleasant tasks?

all: Oh yes, oh yes.

: I remember many times that people that were...that were caught of having done some trading. They traded a little piece of goods in for some food, and when they were caught they were done away with...they were killed by the SS man, and we - I remember very well that I went quite a few times with the Kommandant of the ghetto to the cemetery, which was located in the cnetre part of the ghetto, and people were...they were killed there.

other: They just had nothing done except trade in some goods.

other: I got caught four times, and got each time ten lashes. Four time I got caught.

Claude: But in the cemetery, this was the execution place?

: It was execution....

others: Yes....yes.

other: The Kommandant used to read a fake...fake...I don't know that it was fake, but he used to read a verdict why the particular perso was shot. And I remember a very tragic situation, which I never forget as long as I live; there was a very old lady, she must have been close to 80 years old. She was caught of having traded something for a piece of bread. And it was a very bitter cold day. Everybody was shivering. And before she was executed, the

was asked to take her coat off. And the Kommandant Krause was standing next to me, and said: Okay, take...take her coat off. And the woman was freezing, shivering from cold,and she asked me if I could ask the Kommandant if she could put her coat back on. And I took all my courage together, and asked, if the lady could, before she was being shot, could put her coat back on. And...

Claude: She was what, she was a Latvian Jew?

: No, she was a German Jewesss. She was from the Berlin transport. I'll remember it till my dying day. And so then she was allowed to...to put her coat back on, and I was holding the coat for her. And while she was slipping her arms into the coat, the Kom... Krause, Obersturmbannführer Krause shot, and I remember the woman falling down, and I was standing there, holding up the coat. That is something I will never forget.as long as I live.

Claude: How did he kill her, with...?

: He was....yes, with a bullet in the head. That was only one of ...of many.

Claude: There were hangings too?

: There were hangings too in the ghetto, of course.

other: A brother of mine, who was at that time 16 - 17 years old,.

Claude: Please?

other: A brother of mine, he went off from the Kommando and...in a field to get a potato. He was caught and was hanged.

Claude: you...your brother?

other: My brother. 16 years...17 years old brother.

Claude: Did you watch the hanging?

other: We had to watch.

Claude: You were already a policeman?

other: No, not at that time, this was in...in special Lager in Salaspils.

another: It was twenty miles out of Riga, but it belonged to....This was a small Auschwitz without...a small Auschwitz without...without gas.

other: I just want to p int out....a potato, a young man had to...

Claude: be hanged.

other: be hanged. And everybody had to look at it. Even myself.

Claude: Yes, can you describe?

BOBINE 238

NY66

: One night we all...everybody from the police, also which one who went home had to come out. And we didn!t know what happened that night, but everybody had to be out. All of a sudden we see a truck coming in...

Claude: A what?

: A truck...with SS and with weapons, and the Kommandant from Riga, and the kommandant from the ghetto, a lottof SS and SA people, And they looked up....they said: follow us. follow us. And they went in the Latvian ghetto...Latvian...

Claude: They said this to the police?

: right...to the Latvian ghetto. There was a little house. And the SS went in that house and we heard shooting and they shot two lettisch Jews...

Claude: Two lettisch Juden?

: lettisch Je s, ja. nd then they called us, we should go in that house. And we went and we saw a Kitchen. In the kitchen was a stove that they cooked on, a real old-fashioned iron stove, with the rings on top, you remember....

Claude: Yes?

: And so he said: Remove the rings. And we removed the rings and

inside are stones, two stones. And he said: remove the stone you push it out...The stones were on a glider, they would open up and you couls dee a big hole in the stove. And he... the SS man said: who is the smallest? maybe 8 pounds.

Claude: Yes?

: The smallest one goes in there.

Claude: It was the hole of a bunker?

: right. There was a ladder, which went from the stove into the earth. And I went down there and I thought maybe somethings to eat down there. And I saw - big shelves, a big hole, and maybe thousands of weapons in there.

Claude: thousands of?

: weapons.

Claude: weapons.

: hand-grenades and....all kinds of weapons. So I said: this is the end. So that Oberscharführer, he called himself, he gave me a lamp, and he said: what's down there? I said: there are weapons, and munition. And there was a plan from the ghetto.

Claude: a map?

: a map... a plan where you could go maybe two miles under the earth to this oven. And see, that was when they started to close up the Lat...Latvian ghetto, and they wanted to kill all the Jews too. But since there was...What was his name... who had the Kommando....Kommando...

other: You mean Himmlich?

other: no, what do you mean, Rudi Haag.

other: Haag...Rudi Haag...the police-chief.

: He was the Jewish police chief. Piece of...

other: He saved his life.

: He saved his life. And this man, he helped that we didn't ge get killed. Because they were...they killed the whole ghetto off.

Claude: Excuse me, he was the chief of the Jewish police of the Latvian ghetto, he was a Latvian?

: He was one of the chief of the police of the Jewish people.

ohter: He came from Germany. He came from Germany.

: He was a boxer.

other: He was not a Latvian, he came from Germany.

: He came from Germany, he was a boxer. And I think a lettisch SA Mann, no? A lettisch boy.

other: A Latvian SS. A Latvian SS.

: the one that killed him. He was drunk, and once he killed him. And he went through....down (unclear) ....and he said look, the Jews...the German Jews have nothing to do with it. It is on the part of the people of the Lettisch Jews. And if was true, we didn't know anything about it.

Claude: The weapons had been gathered here by the Latvian Jews...in order to make an Aufstand.

: They...they had, see, they had connections among...on the outside. Every...every evening they brought something in there. You know, they brought munition and all kinds of...

Claude: They wanted to fight?

: They wanted to fight. That was all set up already.

other: They were saving it for the day when they can have some revenge.

: ...the main reason for they got... they w killed. You know, but they had plenty of their people. day they would ....in the ghetto and they would kill th

Claude: What happened after you found weapons?

: The weapons were then picked up. I think that ten big load von weapons....They brought in a truckload of soldiers and they had...taked all the weapons away. In that time they... closed the Latvian ghetto, right?

other: It was right after the uprising...

: and a couple of months later they also the Jewish g...the...

Claude: How many...how many German Jews of the Jewish police were yo in the...

(all speak together)

: I was one of the policeman.

Claude: Yes.

: Right after they shot all the Latvian Jewish police, we were ..... we were summoned one morning to appear in the Kommandatur...the Kommandant's house, and there was Roschmann, the famous Roschmann of the Odessa File. He was there, and he said: you are now the new police. So we became policemen. I wasn't a very good policeman, I was fired after three weeks.

Claude: But you know, there is one thing which is very interesting for me: it is the first time, since I am making this enquiry and making this film, that I have f...that I find people of the Jewish police who admit that they were in the Jewish police and who agree to talk. For instance, I have found people of the Lodz ghetto, who were in the Ordnungsdienst of the Lodz ghetto, I found them, they are in Israel, they are in America. They don't want to talk. Can you explain me why?

: I will tell you, I will tell you why. You see, we had to take the job. They selected the people.

Claude: You had no choice.

: We had no choice.

: You couldn't say: no, I am not going to do it.

: But it was also good for the people there...all people, because we could warn them in advance.

Claude: Did you do it?

: Sure, how often. I was...I was fired from the police because somebody said something and they found out that I warned somebody not to bring that day something in, because there will be a...a very strong control.

Claude: Yes, but how do you explain what I said, that the people of Lodz, for instance, of Lodz in Poland....

: I don't know.

Claude: ...they don't want to talk!

: We have no idea. We don't know what happened in Lodz. The only thing is: if there would...if the mass of people that was there would have had anything against us,...

: ...we wouldn't be here.

(all talk together)

: That goes to show you that we had absolutely nothing to do with...

: Look, we had to guard Jewish prisoners. There were always them in camp...in a jail. It was our job to guard them that they don't escape. Well, nobody wanted to go anyway. So what we did at night, when the SS wasn't there, we would bring them some food. We would even sometimes smuggle their families in to say hello to them, at the risk of our lives. So that....

: Latvian Jews were not supposed to cross over....

: right.

: ....into the German ghetto.

: We were standing there watching and whenever a Latvian Jew came and said we want to go into the German ghetto, we just turned around and let him go.

: There were some girls...there were families there, and they were only men, so they were looking for some social life or com any so at least they dould go visit them....

Claude: The German and Latvian....

: They were divided by wire. By wire.

: And the main street.

: A main street with wire.

(all speak together)

Claude: Please, but no.

(all speak together).

: [illegible]more than they should have been. I know they had a... a terribly high....they had to...they had to listen to SS

(all speak together)

: If they would, instead of taking us, they would put SS a police over there, what would happen? Half of the people who was here wouldn't be alive.

Claude: But you have not the slightest guilt feeling, no?

: Why should I?

(all speak together)

: You can ask anybody, if they have something against it. I mean, there are some people who did something wrong. The name 'police' meant for them....they gave them powers, you know, to do some-thing wrong. But if we...we weren't there...We helped a lot of people who came from outside and brought food in there. And we know there is a control, some of us went in front and they told: throw your stuff over because there is a control.

Claude: But you think that the conditions were very different from one ghetto to another?

: It's possible.

: In any society, even if you take the New- York City police force

there are crooks, there are some that are radicals, now you can't say the whole city police force are crooks or radicals. There are always isolated cases, no matter where you go, that overstepped the authority. Right? So you hate them for it. We had them all over.

Claude: But is it true that the Hangman was a Jew?

all: who?

Claude: The hangman.

(all speak together)

: But that wasn't in the ghetto. That wasn't in the ghetto.

: Wasn't in the ghetto. Was in Salaspils. He even was a wrest[ler] from the Olympics of '32.

Claude: He was what?

: He was a wrestler. He came from Austria, from Wien.

: Prag.

(all speak together).

: Look, I was a policeman too. There not...

Claude: You were a policeman too?

: Yes. In Salaspils, not in the ghetto.

: In the ghetto, too.

: In the ghetto, too?

: for a few weeks. few weeks.

BOBINE 239

NY 67

(4r wing of the tombola)

woman: 214. 214. 214 anyone? 137. 137. 197. 218. (applause) 161. 161. Anybody 161? You got it? (applause) 192. 192. (applause) 185. 185. (applause) 168. 168. 143. (applause) 144. (applause) 183. 150. 150. 229. 229. 196. 196. (applause). 180. 218. 218. 207. 207. (applause) 217. 179.

NY 68

(Interview with the Frontkämpfer.)

A: Mein Name ist Fred Baer(?) . Mein richtiger Name ist Friedrich Fritz Baer in Germany. Ich bin geboren am 4. März 1899 in Köln am Rhein. War im Ersten Weltkriege in der Feld 83, Köln Riehl als deutscher Soldat. Dort war schon ein grosser anti-Sitismus. Ich hatte einen Feldwebel, der mich ausschimpfte: du Saujude.

Q: Du Saujude?

A: Ja. Daraufhin habe ich mich gemeldet bei dem Offizierskommando und habe dem gesagt was ich gehö...was er mir gesagt hat. Daraufhin hat er gesagt, er kann nichts machen. Es tut ihm Leid. Daraufhin habe ich gesagt: Dann will ich in die Front. Und da haben sie mich in die Front geschickt, und zwar südlich von by La...La....

Q: Cambrey?

A: Cambrey, yes. Dort war ich dann bis zum Ende des Krieges, 1918, wurde entlassen mit Ehren- und Ordenzeichen, das Eiserne Kreuz und Verwundetenabzeichen - denn ich war verwundet am rechten Bein, und...

Q: Bitte.

A: Dann bin ich entlassen worden, und zwar mit 50 Mark und einem Anzug, einem Zivilanzug. Dann war ich...

: Entschuldigen Sie, wo waren Sie geboren?

A: In Köln, I am sorry. Dann bin ich natürlich wieder Nach Hause, und bin angestellt worden von einer Department store in Gelsenkirchen, als Einkäufer und Abteilungsleiter. Dort...dort war ich ungefähr drei Jahre. Dann habe ich die Firma...Dann kamen die Nazis und kamen rein in den store und haben sämtliche Juden, die da waren, rausgeworfen.

: Ja, und was haben Sie gedacht?

A: Sie haben gesagt: Raus mit den Juden. Wir haben...Wir wollen keine

Juden hier im Geschäft. Dabei der Inhaber war selbst ein Jude. Der owner, der manager. Es war ja ein Konzern. Dann,von da aus, bin ich wieder nach Hause, und zwar bin ich dann nach Herme in Westfalen. War dort in einem department store beschäftigt. Dort habe ich meine Frau kennen gelernt und wir haben geheiratet. Und...

Q: Und bitte.

A: Das ist nämlich meine Frau. Und dann war ich in Herme....Dann kamen die Nazis natürlich und da bin ich von einem Ort zum anderen gefahren zwar: nach Gelsenkirchen, nach Köln, nach Düsseldorf, nach Duisburg, damit die Nazis mich nicht kriegen konnten. Dann plötzlich hat meine Frau telefoniert, es ist alles ruhig, du kannst kommen. Dann bin ich gekommen nach Hause, und als ich nach Hause kam, haben sie gesagt: die Nazis kommen, du musst dich melden. Ich habe mich natürlich gemeldet, und wie ich auf den Office kam...auf dem Büro kam, wo die Nazis waren, da sagt ein Nazi zu mir: was, du meldest dich freiwillig? Sage ich: Ja. Ich muss doch. Ich bin doch Jude. Sagt er das ist gut. Dann haben sie mich nach Dortmund geschickt. Von Dortmund kam ich nach Oranienburg ins concentration camp.

Q: In welcher Jahre?

A: Das war im Jahre 1939,

Q: 39?

A: Yes. Dann war ich...ungefähr...wie lange.....38. Ja. 38. Dann war ich ...wie lang? Einen Monat war ich nur im Lager, und dann haben sie... dann haben sie die Schranken auf gemacht, und haben gesagt: du kannst gehen. Ohne Geld. Ohne alles. Mein Anzug war in der Lauseanstalt gewesen, der vollständig zerknüllt. Dann kam meine Frau dorthin und wollte mich abholen. Wir wollten in einem Zug wieder nach Hause fahren, da hat der Zugführer, also der Kontrolleur uns nicht angenommen. Wir nehmen...wir nehmen keine Juden an. Daruaf hin haben wir eine Zeitlang gestanden am Bahnhof und sind dann doch mit einem Zug nach Hause gefahren. Und...

Q: Ein anderer Zug.

A: Ja, ein anderer Zug hat uns mitgenommen, nicht? Wir sind nach Hause gefahren. Und dann bin ich ausgewandert nach Panama. Ich war 7 1/2 Jahre in Panama. Und war natürlich getrennt von meiner Frau. Ich bin alleine ausgewandert nach Panama, weil ich hatte kein Visum für meine Frau weil die Konsulate kolossale Preise genommen haben für die Visen.

Q: Das Panama Konsulat?

A: Panama Konsulat.

Q: Wie viel?

A: Oh ich weiss nicht mehr, ungefähr,,, wie viel war es denn? Wie viel haben die genommen?

Q: Kolossal?

A: Ja, also ziemliche Summen. Nicht? So das ich nicht eine zweite Summe auflegen konnte für meine Frau. Dann war ich in Panama, 7 1/2 Jahre, und habe dann, nach 7 1/2 Jahren Nachricht bekommen vom Rotten...Red Cross, dass meine Frau gerettet ist, dass sie in Schweden ist.

Q: Und Ihre Frau war in...

A: ...in concentration camp von Riga. Ich habe nichts von ihr gehört, und nichts von ihr gesehen.

Q: Für 7 Jahre?

A: Ja, und im Lager war es...im Lager, in Oranienburg war es damals nicht so schlimm wie es später in den anderen Lagers war. Zwar, wir hatten einen Fall da, da war ein Recht..da war ein Nazi, der suchte einen Rechtsanwalt der ihn verurteilt hatte bei irgend einer Gelegenheit, und den Rechtsanwalt haben sie gefunden. Dann haben sie den Rechtsanwalt so geschlagen, bis das er leblos auf die Eisenbahnschienen gelegen hat und sich nicht mehr gerührt hatte.

Q: Ja. Und Sie sind jetzt 80 Jahre alt.

A: Ja. Ich bin jetzt 80 Jahre alt.

Q: Ja. coup.

BOBINE 240

NY 69

Q: Ich habe eine Frage an Sie. Bleiben Sie,

wife: Nein, ich will nicht sprechen.

Q: Nein? Warum nicht?

wife: Warum...

Q: Warum nicht?

wife: I don't want to talk.

husband: Du kannst deutsch sprechen, der Herr versteht deutsch.

wife: Ich will nicht sprechen.

Q: Warum nicht?

wife: No, ich will nicht sprechen.

Q: Ich habe eine Frage...

A: I don't want to.

Q: Haben Sie Deutschla...Deutschland geliebt.

husband: Yes. Warum nicht? Früher war es ja sehr schön in Deutschland. Wie der Kaiser noch da war, da war es ja sehr schön in Deutschland.

Q: Haben Sie den Kaiser gekannt?

husband: Yes, Kaiser Wilhelm der Zweite.

Q: Und waren Sie ein Mitglieder der jüdische Frontkämpfer?

husband: Yes. Ich war ungefähr einen Monat als jüdischer Frontkämpfer.

Q: Sie waren nur ein Monat?

husband: Ich hatte keine Zeit. Nicht? man musste ja arbeiten um Geld zu verdienen.

Q: Wenn die Nazi, nach der Machtergreifung, hatten Sie....haben Sie Hoffnung....hatten Sie noch Hoffnung oder keine Hoffnung mehr?

husband: Ach Gott, ich hatte...ich hatte ja...nach der Zeit natürlich hatte ich keine Hoffnung mehr irgend etwas in Deutschland zu

unternehmen. Nicht wahr? Deutschland war für mich, in dem Moment war Deutschland, als ich im Lager war, für mich erledigt....Ja, Moment, ich komme.

Q: Ja.

husband: Und...ich weiss, früher war es sehr angenehm. Wie Kaiser Wilhelm noch da war, der hat nie den Juden etwas getan. nicht? Die Monarchie, nicht?

Q: Sie sind niemals seit dieser Zeit in Deutschland zurück gegangen?

husband: Nein, nein. Ich will es nicht.

wife: Sicher, wir waren....

husband: Ja, einmal waren wir da, aber nur kurze Zeit. Meine Frau hat da sehr geweint, und ich bin sofort raus.

Q: Sie hat sehr geweint?

husband: Ja. Sie wollte, sie wollte nicht da bleiben.

Q: Und Sie?

husband: Ich habe...ich habe mich befriedigt, nicht?

Q: Was war Ihre Eindruck?

husband: Der Eindruck ein sehr schlechter, das das Volk nicht mehr das ist was es früher war. Der Deutsche.

Q: Können Sie das erklären?

husband: Erklären in so fern: Wir waren in Köln, und wir haben verschiedentlich mir Leuten dort gesprochen, die eine Ansicht hatten, dass der....das Regime, wollen wir sagen....also, wie sagt das?....die Regierung, dass die in Ordnung ist. Nicht? Und ich war damit nicht einverstanden. Ist doch klar.

Q: Warum nicht?

husband: Warum nicht? Weil ich im Lager war, weil ich Jude bin, und... Ich habe dort mit einem Mann gesprochen, der 70 Jahre alt war, wo man....in der Strassenbahn, und habe ihm gesagt....in Köln.. habe gesagt: "Wie ist das Köln?" Da sagt er zu mir: Das Köln ist

nicht mehr das, was früher das Köln war.

Q: Ja. Und haben Sie noch anti Semitismus gefunden?in Deutschland oder nicht?

Husband: Nein. Nicht direkt, nicht direkt. Weil dort, Sie waren noch den Dollar, den wollten sie gerne haben. Nicht?

Q: Ah, Dollar. Und Sie haben Dollar?

Husband: Yes. Ich war doch hier in Amerika...habe doch von Amerika. nicht? Und den Dollar lieben sie doch, nicht? (wife talks him) Ich habe nämlich einen driver,der uns nach Hause fährt darum....Er wartet.

Q: Ich danke Ihnen vielmals.

Husband: Ich kann nur sagen, ich danke Ihnen. Aufwiedersehen.

Interview Oppenheimer Ziering

NY 70

Q: Well, Mrs. Oppenheimer, it is your turn now.

Oppenheimer: (very low voice)

Q: Yes.

Oppenheimer: Well, I was born in Germany, Hannover, and when the Nazis came, my father thought nothing was going to happen to because he was in World War One, and he didn't want to leave Germany. My...

Q: Did he like Germany?

Oppenheimer: Did he what? Did he like Germany?

Q: Yes.

Oppenheimer: Well, he felt secure, he was a German citizen. I don't think he disliked it. Up to that point.

Q: And the...Your family lived in Germany since a long time

Oppenheimer: Yes, they have lived in Germany, I suppose, forever. Grand-parents, grand-grandparents. They have all lived in Germany. On my mother's side, as well as on my father's side. And

when the Nazis came, he really, he sort of felt secure because he was in World War One, he thought nothing was going to happen to him. And when the so-called Crystal Night came, this was just now forty years ago, it was really....well, I guess that he felt they would do something to the Jews also. Our house, though we lived in a German neighbourhood was absolutely forgotten. He never went into prison in 38. Of course....

Q: What do you mean, your house was forgotten?

Oppenheimer: Was forgotten by the Nazis, to come in and get my father in...during the Crystal Night. Even though we lived in a Jewish neighbourhood. But busi...he had to give up the business, and he...things got worse. But he...he still felt ...I think he felt too unsecure. He felt, what more can happen? By the time he had started to get papers from the United States to emigrate....

Q: certificates.

Oppenheimer: Yes, affidavits. We got them from relatives here, New Rochelle, N.Y. And by the time we applied for a number they told us we had to get a number, which unfortunately was wrong, the number...the number...an Immigration number to emigrate. They had told us at the various organisations that we need the numbers before we get the papers, but that was wrong. By the time we had gotten the papers from the United States to emigrate, we got a very high number and couldn't get out anymore. So my mother in turn, tried to get my late brother and myself out to England or the Netherlands with a children transport, but that also didn't work. So we were stranded in Hamburg. And were deported in '41. But meanwhile, in September of '41, I believe, we

had to get out of our appartments, and went into Jewish ...in homes which used to be the school, and people lived in cemeteries, etc. etc. We shared one room, our family with their four people, and later on even that...everybody we were men, women and children put together in one room. And the cemetery, the Jewish cemetery all over....

Q: Waht do you mean, there were people who were living inside the cemetery?

Oppenheimer: Yes, absolutely.

Q: But where in the cemetery?

Oppenheimer: In the....where they prepared the people years ago for burial, etc. And women and children slept there, and the former...where we had gym lessons. They slept....They had about sixteen or fourteen houses for sixteen hundred Jews. Really, sort of...everybody....

Q: sixteen hundred.

Oppenheimer: Yes, they were all crammed together from September '41 till we were deported in December.

Q: It was what they call the jüdische Häuser, no?

Oppenheimer: jüdische was?

Q: Häuser. Häuser.

Oppenheimer: Yes, yes, Jewish homes. Right. Judenhäuser sortof. That's what they were called - Judenhäuser. And we got...they gave us one store to shop. And at night the police came, they went inside the houses, they...we had to go up and down the stairs, whether the women were pregnant or not. They... they tried to just make life awful. Till the day we were deported. People also committed a lot of suicides in those days. We...we got up in the morning and there were a dozen

or so people that had just killed themselves through drung or they hung themselves, various . Life was unbearable. Till we were deported in December '41.

Q: Excuse me, there were many suicides?

Oppenheimer: many -pardon me?

Q: Many suicides?

Oppenheimer: Many suicides, about a dozen a day. For that went on...

Q: A dozen a day?

Oppenheimer: At times. That went on for days and days. Because it was... It was a period of three months in all houses. Hannover had at one time a large Jewish population. So, there were still hundred Jews left, from those a thousand were deported to Riga in December of '41.

Q: Did you...Did you wear already, at this time....Were you marked?

Oppenheimer: Well, we had a Jewish star. Of course. Everybody. All the Jews in Germany wore a star, which said Jude. And we were only permitted to go out certain...during the day. You had you could only walk on the side walks not on...next to side walk, where the cars were. You...There were stor.. certain stores assigned, where Jews had to shop. Jewish schools were closed. Of course the synagogues had been burned down. And that was sort of the life we had in the three months prior to the deportation.

Q: and the...the authority you had to deal with, they were only the Germans, the Gestapo, or the...or the Jews of the Reichsvereinigung?

Oppenheimer: No, no, the Germans. Gestapo.

Q: In Hannover?

Oppenheimer: Yes, in Hannover. The Gestapo. But...they took care of everything, the Gestapo. And everybody had of course a

Kennkarte with 'J'. I have one at home, even.

Q: What was your name at the time?

Oppenheimer: Oh, we...the women had to add the name Sarah. My name was Lore Sarah Pelsen, in other words. And the men had to add the name...add the name Israel on their cards. We had a Kennkarte with a 'J' on it. Everybody had that. I think it was even nation wide.

Q: What do you mean - nation wide.

Oppenheimer: All Germany had a Kennkarte. Everybody. I have one at home even.

BOBINE 241

NY 71

Q: Okay, Mr. Kempinsky, you remember yourself this peri... vi...vividly?

Ziering: Yes, I do. I was born in Germany, 1926, Kassel. My parents came from Poland after World War One. And...

Q: You are from Polish origin, you are not originally a...

Ziering: No, my father and mother both came from Poland. They married in Germany, and I was born there. In 1933, I had attended already a school, I could not go already to a gentile school, I had to go to a Jewish school. But in the town, where we lived....

Q: What was the town.

Ziering: Kassel.

Q: Kassel.

Ziering: In Hessen....Jews were already at those times seperated from non-Jews. We attended a small school which was actually in the beginning a synagogue, then they rebuild

it and made a school out of it, and all Jewish children had to go there. And only we had there Jewish teachers, and tha how I started my school years. We...The teachers were not the quality we would have wanted to have at the beginnin because already they were seperating among the students, among the Jewish students.so called....I was called as a child already, ein Ostjude, because my grand mother spoke Jiddisch, and I would come to school sometimes with expressions in Yiddish, which I was laughed at.

Q: By whom?

Ziering: By the children, by the teachers...

Q: Bu...You mean the Jewish-German children?

Ziering: Correct, and by the teachers. And you could...you had a certain feeling, of already, that you are somebody else, you are not just,..not enough you were a Jew, but already you had a feeling you were somebody else, that you were a special minority in the minority, so to say. You would feel that when a teacher had to punish somebody, he would do so specially if had...were an Ostjude. And some of the would come out openly out, and tell you so.

Q: But how did they say, as an insult?

Ziering: No, they are ways for a teacher to say things. Sometimes was an insult, and sometimes it was a...meant seriously. In other words, the children would call me names, and the in any school you find groups of children, certain teams, like they have here sometimes,..certain identities, groups I would say, children from East Brooklyn they will play a themselves, and German Jewish children would play among th selves. Even they would come on a Saturday and a holiday, the so to say Ostjuden would have their seperate synagogue

they would go to servides there, and the German Jews had their seperate synagogues.

Q: This is true...there was...there was despise, mostly in Germany, among the German Jews towards the so-called Ostjuden. But I didn't know that for a child it was so.

Ziering: Well, as a child you felt it, because the mentality...you were always pointed out: here comes the Ostjude. Even I spoke fluently, my father, my mother - they all spoke fluently German. And somehow, somewhere they were always pointed out.You were seperate. You are...You don't belong. All the problems starts because of you.

Q: That's what they said?

Ziering: That was the feeling and the opinion. In other words: the German Jew felt there that nothing could happen to him, but the peopele from the East, the Ostjuden, they brought all the problems, they had not the manners, they would not have the....the...they did not speak so well German, they would not have the...the courtesy how to approach people, they would not...they would do things differently than people were used in Germany. And that became quite a conflict. And as a child I felt it very deeply. And as I grew older, I felt it more and more, The friends I had and the people I would get in contact with were mostly people with the same background as I am.

Q: You mean Ostjuden?

Ziering: Right.

Q: Yes, and was there a change when the German Jews started themselves to be segregated from people?

Ziering: I would say, there really was no change. Because the German Jews still felt at the time that each served in World War One, and maybe had the Iron Cross, or he went to

college, or so to say university. He was a businessman. He felt thathe still...nothing would happen to him, but only to the people they came afterwards.

Q: What was the job of your father?

Ziering: My father was a business man, in Germany. We had two clothing stores and we lived quite comfortable....

Q: Yes?

Ziering: Yes.

Q: And in spite of this you felt this segregation among the Jewry?

Ziering: Right. I...I did feel it all those segregations as a chi

Q: And did you...did you know Ostjuden? In Hannover.

Oppenheimer: Oh yes, oh yes. Quite similar. I went to a non Jewish school in Hannover. I guess with the age of 5 - I was also born in 1926 - nad after having been there two or three years, they started the Jewish school in Hannover and my father wanted my late brother and myself to atte there. But as far as the eastern Jews were concerned, in generally speaking, that was true. It just happened that my late father was very close with them. We were ve known in Hannover, and all our friends or most of them really, were eastern Jews. In fact, that's more or less ...Why? He was from a different city. That's exactly wha he said. IN fact, our society was started with a close friend of mine, who lived next to us - also an eastern Jew who died...

Q: You mean the Riga ghetto societ..

Oppenheimer: Yes. Because she had come and visited us and she was als one of those - what they called in those days eastern Jews. And they were deported - a lot of them had come

back. That was the same with you, I suppose. Before they went back in their own homes, they first went into our appartment, but in generally speaking, unfortunately that has happened in Germany. Absolutely true. And I guess we as children did not feel that German my father or my parent did. To us we were Jews. But I think the way most German Jews, including my father, felt: what is going to happen we were in World War One. They never expected this to happen. Or they really would have immigrated earlier, especially my family. We could have, if my father would have wanted to.

Q: But Mr. Kempinsky, you were...your family, you were deported too, I mean, before the...before the Aristallnacht.

Ziering: Yes, we were deported since my parents both came from Poland, and were stateless. That meant we had no Polish...we didn't have a Polish nationality, and really we did not have the German nationality. They took us and they deported us to Schneidemühl. It's on the Polish border.

Q: Yes, and can you explain why.

Ziering: How it happened?

Q: Yes. And why.

Ziering: Why it happened?

Q: Yes.

Ziering: Well, the German police said that all people which are not of German origin, or not German born, cannot live anymore in Germany, and since they feel we do not...we are not Germans, we do not belong, we could not live in Germany. They came to us one evening, and they said that within one hour we have to pack. We just can take one suitcase. And they marched us to the train-station, and - I believe

we were about 500 men women and children....

Q: And this was when exactly?

Ziering: This was in 1938.

Q: Yes, in the summer of 1938

Ziering: Right, right. And they put us on a train with guards, public As they marched us from the homes to the train-station.

Q: They gave you one hour delay?

Ziering: One hour warning.

Q: They came suddenly?

Ziering: They came suddenly. Right. And we had a and just one suitcase, as I have said before, and they marched us to the train-station. People on the street would look. The police was marching in front and in the back, so that nobody could escape. And we were locked in in a train, and it took us about two days to reach Schneidemühl, which is on the Polish border.

Q: It is near...near ~~Sbonsin~~ Zbaszyin

Ziering: Right.

BOBINE 242

plans de coups - HUET

NY 72

Ziering The reason I believe that they deported us is that all Polish citizens at the time, had to send their passports in to Frankfurt, which had a Polish consulate. And the Polish government had to extend the visa or stamp the passport for extension, whereby you would be then a Polish citizen. Which my father did. And the Polish government did not send the passport back. So that made us at the time stateless. And what I believe is that the German government at the time felt they wanted to get rid of all the

Polish Jews or certain elements, which was not desireable, so to speak. And I think that's why the action between the two governments happened...

Q: It was an escalation.

Ziering: Right.

Q: Before they didn't want the Jews....

Ziering: Right, the Polish government didn't want the Jews back and the German did not want them in Germany. And that's what happened.

Q: As a matter of fact, it was the first decisive experiment. It was a kind preliminary for the extermination.

Ziering: Right. right. Be...Well, it was very hard for a child to believe suddenly and that the police comes and within one hour you have to go to the railroad station in a city where you were born, where you knew everybody, and you felt like a child: what did I do? And here you are being marched and everybody stood and looked at you like you are...a man with two horns in your head. And suddenly you believed what the Stürmer would show you: with a long nose and with dirty clothes and all the propaganda we used to have during the years...

Q: What do you mean, you believed?

Ziering: As a child. I mean, you hear every day: you dirty Jew, you dirty Jew. And you see the newspapers. And you read German. You know the language. You see this daily. Somehow suddenly, as a child you see you are being taken by the police. You feel, well, maybe I did something wrong. You... I mean, you are talking now about a boy ten-eleven years old, who suddenly sees the boys in the street, they play football with. They are playing football and you are being marched by the police to the train station.

And you are somebody else, you are somebody different. We were crammed in the train, as I told you before. And it took us about two days to reach the Polish border.

Q: Yes, and what happens.

Ziering: At the Polish border they kept us about over night in the train, which...suddenly all the heat and everything was shut off. And the next morning we start...the train started going into Poland and the Polish government stopped us and we had to come back. This went on...once...well, two or three times. And then the German police, who was guarding us, came and said: well, the Polish people will not let you in. What you have to do is:you have to go back where you came from. But we have to charge you for transportation.

Q: You have to pay.

Ziering: You have to pay for it. So some of the people did not have enough money with them, because they were taken on the spur of the moment. Some others helped them out. And we came after two days back to Kassel, where we started from.

Q: But for you it was...as a matter of fact, it was rather short. It was...As far as I know, for other people it lasted several weeks....

Ziering: Right.

Q: ...or even months.

Ziering: Those were people who were taken before us. We were happy... not happy, we were lucky that we were one of the people who were taken at the latest transport, where they just....the Polish border, they closed it. I don't know if we were lucky or unlucky. I mean, it's...

Q: It's difficult to....

Ziering: It's hard to say. Sitting here today and looking back at

all the years, what happened to me, I think we got lucky.

Q: I think so too.

Ziering: If I would have been in Poland, I would have probably not have survived the war. So.....this is....

Q: And what happened when you returned to...to Kassel?

Ziering: When we returned to Kassel, again we had to attend to school and then in 1939 the war broke out.

Q: Between...?

Ziering: ...Poland and Germany. As soon as it started, ...a moment, now, you have to forgive me. A month after we came back, the German police came again and they just took the men, not the women, just men. They took my father, my uncles, and about another forty Polish stateless - so to say - men, and they had some people from Hannover, I believe, and from other cities, just men, and they did the same thing. They sent them to the Polish border, and this...they would get them outof the train, and shoot after them and chase them across the border. The Polish police on the other side would chase them back and shoot after them with dogs and hunt them at night. This went on for about three days. That's what my father told me. At htis time, the Germans would not let any one in to Germany. What he did at the time, he escaped from the group of about fifty people, my father, and he came back during the night, after four or five days, I not sure, to Kassel where we lived. And he told us what happened to him. And what we did then the next morning, he left very early in the morning and he took a train to Berlin and there was an organisation the Reichsvereinigung deutscher Juden in Germany - Deutschland. And he worked out that all the people in his transport from Kassel would get

right away a visa, within one week, that they can go, immigrate into England.

Q: Yes.

Ziering: With this my father came back to Kassel and he went to the police station, to the mayor of Kassel. And he presented him with those papers, whereby all the people of the transport got permission to come back to Kassel and within three days they had to leave it and immigrate to England. There they went to a...Kitchener camp, I believe...

Q: This is what happened to your father?

Ziering: That's what happened to my father.

Q: He immigrated to England?

Ziering: He immigrated be...just before the war broke out into England.

Q: And you stayed in Germany alone?

Ziering: And my mother, my brother, myself, we stayed in Kassel [illegible] and we sup...we were hoping that he would work out papers for us, that we would im...immigrate after him to England. In the meantime the war broke out between Poland and Germany. And the first day... they rounded us all up and we had to go to the police station. Because then the Germans said we were Polish citizens. And here I was twelve years old, my brother was eleven years old. And....

Q: Suddenly you got a citizenship.

Ziering: Right. Suddenly I was the enemy of the Reich. And we would have to report every morning, before I went to school, the police station, and come in and I would have to say I am the Jew Abraham Israel Kapinsky.

Q: You had to say this?

Ziering: Yes. I was eleven years old.

Q: Every morning?

Zeiring: Every morning. And the police Wachtmeister - that is like a seargent - sometimes would keep me standing there, five minutes, ten minutes, sometimes he would kick me in the rear and say: get lost. Sometimes he would say: say it again. ~~would say it again~~ say it again. or - sing it for me. And here was I with my brother, who was a year and half younger than I, my mother. My mother would have to say: I am the Jewess Sarah Kempinsky. My brother would say I am the Jew Sigfried Kempinsky and I am the Jew Hermann Kempinsky.

Q: Why did you get this name, so German name? Hermann, Sigfried

Zeiring: I keep wandering myself, but I felt that my parents felt quite secured when they emigrated into Germany. And they spoke the language well. They...

Q: They wanted to assimilate?

Zeiring: I believe so, to a certain extent.

Q: Can you say it in German, how....how you had to do it every day?

Zeiring: Yes. Ich bin der Jude Hermann Kempinsky. No...Hermann Israel Kempinsky. or my brother would say: Ich bin der Jude Sigfried Israel Kempinsky. oder meine Mutter würde sagen: Ich bin der Jude...die Jüdin Sarah Kempinsky. And the funny thing is that sometimes the Wachtmeister would look at you and say: Dein Name ist Hermann? Unser Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, wie kannst du denn Hermann heissen? Uh, it was a very good question.

Zeiring: Mit elf Jahren habe ich ihn angeguckt, na, was konnte ich ihm denn antworten? Aber hat er gesagt: du bist ein Schweinehund, dein Name ist nicht Hermann. Du bist ein Schweinehund-Hermann. Wie heisst du? Dann hatte ich dann....then

I would say

BOBINE 243

NY 73

Ziering: At the police st tion I would have to say: My name is Hermann Israel Kempinsky. My brother would have say: I'm Sigfried Israel Kempinsky. And my mother would say: I am the Jew...Jüdin Sarah Kempinsky. So then sometimes the Wachtmeister would say: How can your name be Hermann Israel Kempinsky? Our Reichsmarschall's name isHermann. At the tiem, eleven years old, I didn't know what to tell him. So he said: Your name is Saujude Hermann Israel Kempinsky. What is your name? And I would have to repeat the same thing. I would have to stand at attention, straight up, look at him and keep on telling him. The same went for my brother and the same for my mother.

Q: And you said exactly?

Ziering: Exactly the way he had: Ich bin der Jude Hermann Israel Kempinsky. Oder ich musste sagen: Ich bin der Saujude Hermann Israel oder Schweinehund Jude. Jedesmal einen anderen Namen. So...Das war immer verschieden. Und dann h sie mir immer....They...they would tell us always what happened to Greenspan, the Jew in Paris. Because Crystal Night started on this account. Because he went and he sho in the German Embassy Vom Rath.

Q: Because his parents have....

Ziering: His parents have been deported from Hannover, I believe.

Q: Yes, like you.

Ziering: Like me. And I could understand, if I would have lived in Paris, maybe I would have shot the whole embassy. Even at the age of ten years. The...I was too young and I think

I didn't have the courage or the proper thing. I did'nt know what I was doing.

Q: Yes, and do you...you had to do this every morning?

Ziering: Every morning before I went to school.

Q: For how long?

Ziering: Till we were deported to Latvia, to Riga.

Q: To Riga. This means for almost two years.

Ziering: Correct.

Q: Every day?

Ziering: Every day, every morning, and they would have a special book for us, and sometimes there was a Wachtmeister, sometimes just the police officer, always were different people on duty. It depends the mood he was in. Sometimes they would sit around, ten or eight of them, and laugh, here comes the Hermann. He has the name of our Reichsmarschall. Hier comes Sigfried, and they would make fun of us. And my poor mother would have to look at this. And she just didn't know what to say. And we just had to do it.

Q: And do you remember the...the Crystal Nacht in Kassel?

Ziering: Yes, I do remember. They...at the time, they...we were in our house. We had a curfew, we were not allowed to go out after certain times, after nine o'clock, I believe. And then the SA Storm troopers, they wrec...they broke all the Jewish stores, all the glass, they took everything out they could. They start making fires in the synagogues. and the next day they came and the took all the community well known people. They had to clean up. They would put a sign on them: Jew, and would put on all the storm sign

on that nobody was....Juden, jüdisches Geschäft, that nobody should come in and buy anything or do any business with Jews.

Q: Yes.

Oppenheimer: I remember the so-called Crystal Night today very clear... what is called Crystal Night today very clearly. My late brother and I went to school. We had a Jewish school. We went there in the morning, not knowing what had happened. And it was a short walk from our house, maybe five minutes walking. And there was a bedding store between. I still remember the name: Speyer, which was completely demolished. the feathers, everything, on the...on the street. Well, we had no idea what happened. We come to this Jewish school. And there were no teachers and the police was there. And they told us the synagogue was burning. That's all we were told. And the synagogue, again, was within walking distance. We didn't think much of it, that it was in all Germany, because there was an article in the papers prior to this, that the large synagogue from Niedersachsen - that part of Germany - was going to be burned down. And that would have been the synagogue in Hannover. Anyhow, we went back home, my late brother and I, who incidentaly perished in Dachau after Riga.

Q: Your brother?

Oppenheimer: Yes. He was with us in Riga, and he was deported after Riga to Stutthof, like I was too. When from Stutthof to Dachau where he died or killed...was killed in March of 45. Anyhow, we walked back to my parents to tell them that the synagogue was burning. And my late father, of course, not very upset. We didn't know that there was much more than it to it. And he went on the way - half way to the school there was a

Jewish family, Loewenstein, who were in charge of the Chevra Kadisha, the burial service of the synagogue, He went there, wanting to ask if he could save...help to save some sefer Torah - the holy scrolls of the synagogue. They opened the door for him. And he was very lucky. They asked him, where do you want to go? and he said, he wants to see Mr. Loewenstein. Well, they just said he wasn't there, and sent him home. Never...I mean we were very lucky in as far as they didn't tell him Mr. Loewenstein was already in. verhaftet or put into jail. They sent my father home. My father came home very upset with what had happened. He was there and he couldn't do anything. Meanwhile he put the radio on, even though it was prohibited in those days, in those hours rather. And we had heard what had happened, that all the synagogues were burning. In fact the paper? had flown over to the streets where we lived, and we just sweated it out. We were just sittin there. I mean, while we heard that all the men were put in jail. Somehow they forgot my late father. And after this was all over, 24 hours or so later, we had a call from a non-Jewish man. His name was Fritz Kohler, so I remember, He called up that they were going to put the last men in jail and he wanted my father to come there and hide, which my late father did. And somehow he was spared in 38 to be put into jail. I think he was one of the few, if not the only one, that was not put in jail. And for some reason or other, they forgot our appartment, whereas all the other appartments - not only were the stores destroyed, bu the appartments - the paintings the pictures. They just demolished everything.

Q: Everything?

Oppenheimer: Everything. The pictures were cut. I mean, everything. They just...all the st....everything was just...whatever a Jew owned was just...Business was closed after that, nobody was allowed to do anymore business and the Jews...after all this after the men were...Some of them were freed weeks and months later, some Jews had to emigrate to Shanghai - that is how that emigration started. I had a late uncle, a brother of my father, who had the emigration papers ready for Australia or somewhere. And he was released from Dachau in those days with the understanding that he would leave Germany within a few weeks. And that family - his.. my uncle and the aunts family - they all went to Shanghai in those days. That's how a lot of Jews were saved via Shanghai. And the Jews,after all this was after...over a few months later, some Jews were released from these jails, some had died there, some immigrated to Shanghai. They had to work on the streets in Tiefbau...what was called ...ditching graves and odd works in the city. I think that was also all over in Germany.at that time. And my father in fact had a severe heart condition through this. I mean, he was not accostomed to heavy work like that. And he died later on due to that in '41, which is another capital in itself. In fact he died the night the first air raid attack, heavy air raid attack on city was, due to the fact - not through bombs - but we couldn't get no ambulance, no doctors, or nothing. It was in February 41 that he died due to the heart condition that he got from working outdoors.

He died in Hannover?

Oppenheimer: In Hannover before the deportation. But more or less due to the...due to the Hitler era, due to the work he had t do after 38.

Q: Yes, of course. Okay, can you tell me more what we said about the daily life....the...

Oppenheimer: The daily life got more and more rough. I think in that respect each city had about different...a little differen circumstances. You had, like you said, Juden unerwünscht on all the stores, and we had seperate stores for each one t shop groceries...

Ziering: We had the same. We were not allowed to go in every Arya store. We had a store where only Jewish people could go i and where like you would get second rate merchandise. The food wasn't the same as anyone else. You would get specia type of food. The meat wasn't what it should have been. In other words, probably if a horse would die in the street, thi would be what we had to eat.

Q: But you were gathered too in special h uses?

Ziering: They took us...yes, yes. They took us little by little ou from our homes and they would put like where usually one family would live, suddenly three four families would have to live in. They started to concentrate more and m re the people to certain areas and certain directions.

Q: Yes, it was a kind of ghettoisation.

Ziering: Ghet...right, right. Also, all the men had to start workin and the children over 14 years, they wouldn't go an more t high school. They would take certain jobs. And suddenly you just couldn't do anything anymore. You...you were just..an where you walked, anywhere you went, they knew right away who you were. Specially in a town like Kassel with 200,000

people, you knew all your neigbours. As soon as I walked in the street, I was pointed out. If I would go in the morning to the school, children in Hitler youth uniform would be standing there and 'Lets get the Jew'. It was every day a struggle for my brother, for myself, to get to school. There wouldn't be one man or woman or anyone standing saying: why--why six - eight youngsters would suddenly throw themselves on us, start beating us and hitting us.

BOBINE 244

NY 74

plans de coupe - MUET

NY 75

Ziering: In the morning after reporting to the police station: I am the Jew Hermann Israel Kempinsky, we would go then to school. On the way to school usually we would find eight ten Hitler youths in uniform or sometimes without it, they would call us dirty Jews, would start hitting us. (By us I mean my brother and myself). And no one in the street would stop and say: leave the children alone, or why are you fighting? or interfere in any way. And that was a daily occurrance. It was quite a struggle for us to get every day to school. The same thing happened in the afternoon on the way home. To come home was again the same thing. We would have to run away. Or since my brother was smaller, and I was the oldest one, I felt like protecting him. And sometimes this was very hard to see that four-five other kids, neighbours, that we used to play football with, that we used to know them by the first name, that we used to

play in their homes, would beat up my brother. So I was the the big one and wanted to protect him, would go in so we both would get it. And the only way for us was to run. And then again, they would call you the feige Jude, who is always running away from everything. Whatever you did, you you never did the right thing. Then we were restricted to, with food, clothes. And we had to buy from special stores, which was quite a hardship too, because it wasn't the fresh food, it wasn't the...the meat it should have been. It was everything second and any price they wanted, they would charge us. Like coals in the home: we couldn't get the coals, so my brother and I would go once a week or twice a week out about an hour away from our home with a little cart and would pick up coals and bring it to the home, or deliver it to some older people that had no heat in their homes. Our bank account they stopped, so my mother would have to go out and wash cloths for other people, that we would have a few dollars to buy food and the necessary in life. And this is what I remember....

Q: There were cases of suicides too in....

Ziering: Oh yes, yes. Usually the suicides you would find among people which were born in Germany, which lived there all their lives, and they believed in...the only thing that really mattered to them was bein German. I can give you a very small example. I am going ahead now a few years. In 42, when I was in camp, and that was in Riga, in concentration camp, in Kaiserwald, there we were working, and suddenly planes were flying above us. And one elderly German Jew said to me: our planes are flying.

They said this!

Ziering: Yes, and I am as a little child, I asked him...I wasn't so little little any more, I was a man - fourteen years old then. I asked him: what do you mean 'our planes'? You are here in a concentration camp, all your people are being killed, your clothes are being taken away, you are beaten daily, one slice of bread and coffee. How can you say 'our planes are flying'? And even as a child, I couldn't understand the mentality of those people.

Q: Yes, these were the German Jews.

Ziering: Right, right. And again, as a child, you were taught be respectful, we kept quiet, but somehow all your mind, everything in you was mixed up. You just didn't know what is the reality, what is wrong, what is right. You...you just wandered, what people could be, what they had been through, what they have seen, what they have suffered that this in their mind, saying: our planes are flying.

Q: Yes, but what Mrs. Oppenheimer said is very hard to believe. You talked about dozens of suicides, daily? for months?

Oppenheimer: Yes. Daily, daily. Constantly....

Q: Are you sure of what you...

Oppenheimer: I a a hundred percent sure, in fact, we have seen the graves in the Jewish cemetery in Hannover, My father is lying there. There is one...one stone after another - all the same dates. We have seen it a few years ago. In fact I have showed it to my daughter and said: these are the graves what had happened right..right then and there. Because we were living all together and they hung themselves in the toilettes or they took pills. It was every day the same story. Looking back now I think,... mean

looking back, I survived,but the majority did not survive. I think those people were better off. They saved themselves from a lot of problems which were still ahead of them, which they didn't know in those days. This was prior to the deportation.

Q: And this happened in these Jewish houses.

Oppenheimer: In the Jewish houses, yes. Absolutely.

Q: While you were gathered.

Oppenheimer: Yes, absolutely.

Q: How did they kill themselves?

Oppenheimer: By taking sleeping pills, by hanging themselves, various kinds.

Q: Did you witness this yourself?

Oppenheimer: I personally have not seen that. Boy, but I mean, we were children, I guess. My father was not alive anymore. It was in 41. In the fall, before we were deported. I guess my mother tried to spare these things from us. In fact, we shared a room with only 12 - 10 people or so. But...yes. Some of these rooms had 15 and 20 people in there. Or if you take the former gym hall, there were hundreds of them upstairs as well as downstairs. They just....

Q: What do you call the former gym hall?

Oppenheimer: Well, what would I say - Turnhalle, what do you call it? A gym place. that's a gymnasium. A gymnasium. Where there was upstairs used to be for the...for us children to get undressed, and downstairs they had all the equipment. Now meanwhile a few hundred Jews lived there, downstairs as well as upstairs. In those places there was no way out. You did see it. I mean, when the men and women went to bed downstairs with the children, you were very well aware to see it from upstairs. I personally did not live in there,

we were in the building what used to be the Jewish school. And since we had to get out of our houses, I believe it was 1940, out of the appartments, we had to, we and quite a few others. We were in this practically Jewish school already. But my family shared one room: My...my late father, my brother, my late brother rather, my mother and myself. Now while we just had partitions from each...the parents and my brother. But then, in 41 we all had to split these rooms with probably ten twelve others. This particular large room. Since we were in the building already, we moved in a room where there were only two families of eight or ten people, and let others go into that room where there were fourteen. Of course, if someone didn't wake up in the morning through pills, the others had seen it. But we were in a smaller room, so we didn't. I personally did not see it. But it ha---it happened daily. absolutely.

Q: Yes, and now the...the deportation, or the...

Oppenheimer: Well, the depo---

Q: ....for the east. I mean, did...did you expect this?

Oppenheimer: No. We were one morning being mad e aware. Since we were all living in these fourteen houses, the sixteen hundred Jews, One morning,it was December the 12th, we were told to go into what in German they said Gartenbauschule Ahlem, I guess it would say Hachshara, right? It was very well known.

Q: There have been previous transports before your transport, no?

Oppenheimer: No, we were the first one, except what Hermann just said, the eastern Jews. Some of them were deported, most of the

had come back, and then the men were deported, they didn't come back. But this was the first main deportation that went from Hannover, absolutely. I think...yes. The first and the largest. For we were only...we were only sixteen hundred Jews left.

Q: Yes. And this was in December 41.

Oppenheimer: In 41. The....

Q: And your own transport?

Ziering: We went December 41 too.

Q: A December 41, too?

Ziering: right, right.

Oppenheimer: That was really when it started, when the German Jews - so called were deported.

Ziering: With me it was previous, because I couldn't go anymore to school so they tried to send me to Frankfurt. They called it the Handelwerkstätte, that means to learn a trade, that I could be helpful to the German industry, or power, whatever it is. And I had to learn auto-mechanic there. And they sent me there, I believe, in May of 41. Right. in 41. And I....they sent me there and I had to learn to be an auto mechanic, and work there every day. About three months afterwards,..well, not three months, in December, beginning of December, my mother called me up and said: you bettercome back right away, because we are being transported, or...they did not say transported, you are being...

BOBBIN 245

MY 75

Q: Okay, did you expect your...the deportation?

Ziering: No. no, because in about May or June in 1941 I went to

Frankfurt, to learn a trade, auto mechanic. And just thinkin about it as a youngster, you just wanted to fight back and you didn't know how. You were not allowed to go anymore in movies, you were not allowed to go anymore to a concer you were not allowed to go to a football or soccer gam, you were not allowed to go swimming, you just were a J. So what I would do is, sometimes I'd take off my star and just go among the people. And one incident I remember very well, because as a child - maybe it was very very childish, there was a film playing Jud Süss, which was orginally book, I think, by Leon Feuchtwanger....

Q: A very good book.

Ziering: Right, an excellent book. And then the Nazis made a fi of it. And there was a very very long line to go into is movie. And I said: it would be nice to go in and really see. I took off my star of David, and I stook in the line. d of course people standing around and making jokes, whe you wait about half an hour till the movie starts. One sai in German: Es stinkt nach Knoblauch. It means it smells l e garlic. They would call that the Jewish people eat a t of garlic and onion, they would smell and they would s nk and thin s like that. Another one said: there is a Jew amon us. And I would say to myself: you are absolutely righ Then I saw this movie. I came out and - again, I was... here you see all the propaganda of the Third Reich. And her you are a child of fourteen years old. It really, it is ve hard to believe. You...you felt like an outcast yourse to a certain extent. You just was wandering, what is i all about. Answers you never coul get and noone would re y take the time out to talk to you. But it was a very vo

funny experience to me, to stay there in line, going into the movies, seeing this film and looking at the German view how a Jew really is...in their eyes.

Q: And how did they react during the movie?

Ziering: Well, they...to them it was the greatest thing. They believed with their whole heart in it. It...It was just... Even just standing in the line and watching them, to see their reaction, the way they talked about it, and remarks they made. Well, after this, my mother called me, I think in the end of November, that she was notified from the jüdische Gemeinde, which was in charge of all the Jewish people in Kassel, that we were being resettled in the east, and I should come back that we would go all together. It would be my brother, myself and my mother.

Q: The East was.....as...

Ziering: To the east.

Q: was...And what was the meaning of the east for you?

Ziering: Well, they didn't tell us. They just said to the east. To the...the meaning for us it could have been Poland... We never thought of Riga at the time.

Q: No, but I mean the meaning of the east, whatever...whatever was the place. It was frightening the east?

Ziering: Frightening? It was frightening. Here, we thought maybe he will send us to a factory where we would have to do labor for the war machinery of Germany and help them. That's... that's the way...really, I mean, we didn't give it much thought. First...first of all, we had no choice. Number two there was no other way for us than to obey, so really, we just....

Q: Yes. No, but it's a...for me it is a difficult question. Because this is what I call in the film the Gattheda. Ag

a matter of fact, the people were not resettled to the west. It was the east.

Oppenheimer: I don't...I agree, I don't think we gave it much thought. It could be also we were children. Don't forget, we were children. Our parents might have thought different. No.

Ziziring: There is a very funny thing about it too, because the way things was done. Everything was done in German order. Like you would have been....they notified you. For instance you would get a letter saying in German: "Unsere von der Abwanderung betroffende Mitglieder, müssen sich bewuss sein, dass sie durch ihre persönliche Haltung und die ordnungsgemässige Erfüllung aller Anweisung, entscheidet zurreibungsloser Abwicklung des Transportes beitragen können". Now, if you're going...Yes. If you're going to

Q: translate it, there...it says....

Q: But excuse me, this was a letter which was sent by the...

Ziering: ...sent by the jüdische Gemeinde to all the people which got orders. In other words, the Jewish Gemeinde got from the Gestapo an order that one thousand Jews have to be on this and this date ready....to leave. And they would make the list and names who they would take and who they would not take. And those people were hereby instructed, if you like me to transpate it to you: All the people involved in the.....emigration to the east...they didn't say to the east...in the immigration, must with all....must know exactly, personally through their....by doing in orderly ways all the....things they have been told. In other words, we should not do anything against the law or do anything what the list tells us. And we had to make out here a list, exactly telling then what we have, how many rooms in each apartment, what kind of furniture, if you have

a piano, if you have a bath-room, if you have a radio, and mark everything down. Your bank account...

Q: A declaration of...

Ziering: A declaration of property.

Q: ...of property that you left behind you.

Ziering: ...that you would leave behind you, right. And it should be in ordnungsgemäss....ordnungsgemäss is very very orderly manner...it should be transferred at a time of your departure....to them, and they would sign this thing. And then we would have to meet again in a gym hall, and each one could just take one suitcase with them. Where at those time they would come and the women all their wedding bands, all the gold watches and the jewelry, and money, they would have to turn over to the Gestapo. And they would get - the ironical part is - a receipt for all of this.

Q: Yes.

Ziering: Now, what you can do with the receipt, I don't have to tell you. I mean...And you see all those things as a child, it...here you have been taught in school and everything... to do everything the orderly way, and in those things, you were being taken as a criminal, or pointed out as a criminal even if you don't feel like one. You have to fill out a list, and you have to...to exactly tell them what you have, and I... remember I had an Eisenbahn, I even marked down... it is a little train...I marked that down too.

Q: A toy?

Ziering: A toy, yes. We marked that down, that we leave this in the appartment.

Q: Ah, you had to write that ....

Ziering: right.

Q: I possess a...

Ziering: right. right.

Q: But it is one of the most puzzling things, as a matter of fact, that the Jews of the jüdische Gemeinde, of the Jewish organisations, complied as a matter of fact to...without any kind of protest, in a complete German way.

Ziering: , well, first of all, whoever was the head at those times of the jüdische Gemeinde, looking back today, anyone honourable would not accept a job like this.

Q: This is what you think?

Ziering: In my opinion. I think there was a certain type of people, they were looking to better themself, personal reason, or they were hoping to be left behind and they would be benefitial by it, by putting other people's names on the things. I am quite sure that some names or some people... they had...they went by rules; very sick ones would not go, very old ones would not go. Only the ones who could work in the east. Very essential, like doctors and so on and so for they would stay back, and I am sure in my mind, today, that some people which were supposed to go, were taken out from the list and were changed by others. I am quite sure. How this was done...? maybe money. I don't know. maybe other things were involved, I really don't know.

Q: Yes, but this was the German way too, to segregate....

Ziering: ...segregate and put one against the other.

Q: Yes.

Ziering: Right.

Q: To divide?

Ziering: Absolutely. Absolutely. I am quite sure that some people they would even....it's hard to say, would spy and give informations to the Germans.

Q: Yes, there were. It's well known.

Oppenheimer: Well, they definetely didn't go - the heads of the Jewish congregation - with those transports....

Ziering: They usually wound up with second transport...

Oppenheimer: In 43, right.

Q: They didn't go?

Oppenheimer: They didn't go in 41. They went afterwards.

Q: In 43.

Oppenheimer: In Hannover they went in 43 to Theresienstadt. But none of them left in 41. They put others in ...They had to supply them with a thousand names...

Q: absolutely true.

Oppenheimer: That was the way it went.

Q: They were called Prominente .

Oppenheimer: Well, I...of course....

Ziering: prominents.

Oppenheimer: Ja. I remember that my parents wanted my brother and myself to get to the Netherlands with a childrens transport. And my mother had relatives in Amsterdam

BOBINE 246

MY 77

Oppenheimer: My mother had relatives in Amsterdam who wrote in those days that she should get my late brother and myself to Holland before we would be deported. So she went down...well, de...o ...actually we didn't know about it, but things were pretty rough in Germany. It was in 1940, I beleive. And my mother went down to where head of the Jewish congregation,..we lived in that building in those days, already we had one room. And my mother told him so and so was the letter, he

should put us down for the children transport...Kinder-transport, as it was called.in those days, for Amsterdam. So he said he had no idea about it. We wasn't...he didn't hear anything about it, but he most certainly would put my brother and myself on this particular list and we would be the first ones to go. When the day came, the children were sent to Holland, but my brother and I never went, because he probably...he sent his own children, which was a fact. And that's how the heads of the Jewish depart. Jewish congregation...The same with the deportation, afterwards, they never went.with those transports of December 41. They went much later. But his children at that time went to Holland. It turned out that he had a lot of gall, and when the deportation started, and they started in the Netherlands, he didn't want his children to be deported, from the Nether...Netherlands, and he was in Hannover. And he even got his children back to Hannover, which was very very unusual. Hitler was in the fulles power and the deportations went on. And they came back - in fact it was February of 41 that he got his children back from Holland and back to Hannover. And they all were depor---

Q: This...this is completely mad, no?

Oppenheimer: Pardon me?

Q: It is completely mad. We had the children....

Oppenheimer He got the children back. Believe it or not. But we never. In other words, there was this....they somehow felt they had a protection with the Germans. And his children came back. It turned out they went later on, in 43 to...they were deported to Theresienstadt, and then to Auschwitz, and this particular man, I believe he was killed on arrival. Whatever happened. The girls were twins, and they were

in the experimental block in Auschwitz due to the fact that they were twins. They...both girls survived. One of them just died a few years ago, I believe she killed herself. She had a nervous breakdown after the war, she had cancer. But...much later on she was only allowed to have children, and then...well, four five years ago, she killed herself. She was 51 years old. She would be today 51 years old . She was a year younger than I am. And one of the girls is still alive, still living here, in Manhattan.

Q: Well, this is the first time I hear such a thing.

Oppenheimer: Yes, in fact, she doesn't want to know nothing from the past. I mean, nobody actually wants to know anything from the past, but she in particular. The city of Hannover sent a book out about the Jewish congregation of Hannover, after the war, before the war. She wouldn't...she is not interested in the book. She just wants no ties...Also, a lot of people will talk about her father, she doesn't like to hear that anymore. Of course, she is right. She was a child. I mean, she really had nothing to do with whatever went on. But that happened. The heads of the Jewish congregation were spared...

Q: Yes, and they behaved like...like tools...

Oppeneheimer: They had to give a thousand people.

Q: ...in the hands of the Gestapo.

Zieving: They had the pull, and I am sure they paid off the Gestapo, the Reichsvereinigung der deutschen Juden in Berlin. I think in Hannover you had a Dr. Schleissner, by the name, and he promised to use the trouble...there was...they had certain districts. I don't know how it was at the time, but he would come to Kassel and select some children which

should be sent to the United States or should be sent to other places for Hachsharah to Denmark. And they were the ones who select. And I am quite sure, doing this, that the...certain arrangements were always made.where one was put aside and the other one was put ahead.

Q: Yes, but this is...Anyhow, this a very difficult question, because this happened...

Ziering: Right.

Oppenheimer: How do we know....

Q: ...everywhere.

Ziering: Well, we have...we have the same story. I mean, looking back now, that we are alive today as in camp or ghetto or Kaiserwald or wherever we were, there were thousands of people that go in the forest, the Wald, or to the crematory. A thousand went. If I jumped off the truck or I was hiding myself, still a thousand people went.

Oppenheimer: They put someone else.

Ziering: They put somebody else on my place. So, I have no right to judge.

Q: No. It's what I think.

Ziering: It's mayhe a guilt complex or I am too sensitive or whatever we have, and that's why we should never forget what happened. Because we are living because someone else went instead of me or of you of anyone who survived the holocaust.

Q: This is true.

Oppenheimer: It's very hard to make a judgement today.

Ziering: It's not hard. It's....you have to be realistic. A lot of people,they want to forget about it. A lot of people, they say: it just happened. But we have to be realistic, we have to train ourself our , our mind, and have no complexes

whereby...that we are a minority, we are like anyone else. And I think that's the most important lesson we should learn really.

Q: "ll right. Let's come back to...to the deportation.

Ziering: To the deportation.

Oppenheimer: We were...we were called out of our houses, out of these rooms rather, these quarters, not even rooms. On Decembe the 12th we all had to come downstairs. And....

Q: ou remember very well?

Oppenheimer: Oh yes. We were picked up by cars.

Ziering: Didn't you have to turn your keys over and?...

Oppenheimer: I don't recall that....because this was what used to be a school. They were open rooms.

Q: Ah, yes, you had no keys.

Oppenheimer: We had no more appartments. We had no more belongings. All we had was a bed per person. Because if you take the small quarters, I don't remember how many square meters each person got, there was nothing. We shared a table with ten people, or whatever was in the room. We had no more appartments. So whatever little we had, we went like this to the Gartenbauschule Ahlem, which was for everybody assembling. Three days we were there. Whatever little was still left, what you said, wedding bands and jewelry, everything had to be given up. And by us it was that the ones that really were in charge of this, besides the SS of course, the Jewish people who were not going with us to Riga, a lot of those who had mixed marriages....The Jewish men would have there, or the Jewish women, whoever,....I also believe and I heard afterwards that there was nothing we could do and maybe they were right, but they kept a lot of the stuff. And they

lived on...they sold some of the jewelry that they had taken away instead of turning everything in to the Nazis, they kept it in turn to themselves. Now every...everything had to be given aw...up because they said...so that nobody could commit suicide in the trains to Riga. If...At that point, in fact, we were told we were going to Riga.

Q: You were told...

Oppenheimer: We were told once we had been assembled in Ahlem, or whether it was in the station, to Riga in the trains. But at that point we knew we were going to Latvia.

Q: Which one of you arrived the first in Riga.

Ziering: I think our train was the second one to arrive in Riga.

Oppenheimer: We were the fifth.

Ziering: We arrived around December the 12th, 1941.

Q: And you...you were shipped there in freight cars?

Ziering: No, no, we were lucky. We were shipped in regular cars, overcrowded, but we were lucky. We were shipped in regular trains.

Q: passenger cars?

Ziering: passenger cars, that's right.

Oppenheimer: We were tolk we had...

Q: You too?

Oppenheimer: too.

Ziering: The thing what they did is, they shut suddenly, after one day on journey, all the heat off. It was very cold.

Q: December, yes.

Ziering: Right. But otherwise, the...our transportation was still not too bad.

Oppenheimer: Ours was the same, except, the belongings that one could

Q: She took a sewing machine?

Oppenheimer: I believe so.. That was taken in the trains towards the back, but that never arrived in Riga. In other words, we were put in certain cars, and whatever freight was taken along, went in the back of the trains, but it never got to Riga.

Q: Why did she take a sewing machine?

Oppenheimer: Well, she liked to sew, on odds and ends that were taken along. So we were told. She took it in other words from the south, at home, and they said it was going to Riga, but it never went. They put all the stuff in the back. We actually, when we got into Riga, only had the belongings we were able to carry in our hands.: the small suitcase, odds and ends.

Q: All right, and what do you...what do you remember? I mean, now...you remember the trip or you remember the arrival in Riga?

Oppenheimer: The trip went pretty well. Of course it was crowded and children were crying, And we had the food that we had taken along. We didn't get anything. They told us to take along. And we were....I believe the last night we stood in Riga Schirotawa, I believe was the station.

Q: Scirotawa.

Oppenheimer: Scirotawa. And that was the station we got! It was bitter cold. And the SS were yelling at us: stand right, stand left. I think the whole transport got into Riga, whereas other times a lot of them were left behind. And we walked. It was quite a....how many miles was it? I don't recall, but it was quite a schlep.

Ziering: A three hour walk.

Oppenheimer: A three hour walk in bittercold. We walked with our bundle into the ghetto.

Q: Inside the town of Riga?

Oppenheimer: In the town of Riga, right. And whoever couldn't walk... I believe even from our transport, they all walked there. But, whoever couldn't walk, who never would have made it, they...what happened in other transports, they were left behind or the old ones were right away assaulted, if I remember correctly, that was afterwards. But our transport still arrived in the ghetto complete. I think the first few transports. No?

Ziering: Köln and...and Kassel, I think, they...

Oppenheimer: they all did.

Ziering: ...arrived, yes.

Oppenheimer: Well, after us they didn't anymore.

Q: Now, can you talk about the arrival in the ghetto. I mean what happened when you...

Oppenheimer: the arrival?

Q: the...I would like somebody to describe completely, because the story with the Latvian Jews who had been killed ....

Oppenheimer: Well, they had been killed....

Ziering: The first impression when we arrived there: They opened the train and said: out,out, everybody raus. We had to get out. It was bitter cold, snow. We had to stand in a column of five, and we were marched to the ghetto.

Riga 61

BuBINE 247

NY 78

Ziering: We arrived there December 12th

(coupe)

NY 79

Ziering: We arrived at December 12th in Scirotava, It is outside of Riga. We had to get out of the train, and there was an SS....

Oppenheimer: ~~Oberstrumbannführer.~~

Ziering: ...Obersturmbannführer. I ~~think it was Lange. Lange.~~ And he greeted us and said: you came here to work. Line up in a fashionable way, five in a row, and we will march you to the ghetto where you will have quarters and food. and you came here to work. We started walking. It was bitter cold.

Q: What time was it?

Ziering: I think it was in the morning. The train arrived during the night and we left in the morning. The trains....It was about a walk, three to three and a half hours, I would say. May be even little longer. As we arrived in the ghetto with very old homes and a lot of barbed wire around it, they shoved us that there should be about four-five or six people per room in small homes. We found there already one group, which arrived two days before us from Cologne, from Köln, from Germany. We had, which was selected already in Germany, ein Lagerältester. Ours from Kassel was a Mr. Plättner, who right away had to report to the Kommandant which was Lange at the time. And they gave them instruction which houses we should occupy and where we should live. We found on the streets a lot of blood.

Blood

Ziering: Yes. We found some bodies, outside. And we start asking questions, but we couldn't get any proper answers. And it was very hard to believe that anything really had happened here.

Oppenheimer: Now, it was...it was similar like that with us. When we got in there, getting into the ghetto, the first group that met us were Jews from Cologne, Köln. And I do remember some of them say...well, we asked them: how long are you here? And they said: a certain amount of days. And then some of our people said...with the transport...: well, we won't here that long, the war is over. I mean, that's the way they looked at it.in those days. We were put into these little houses. Everybody. I don't know how many people into certain rooms with enough bedding or mattresses. And the blood was on the frozen ice. We found then out that the Latvian....

: There was blood, but can you explain it?

Oppenheimer: Well, the blood had been...It was bitter cold then....

Ziering: I think we should really say it this way: Here you walk in an a partment, and you see an appartment all destroyed. You see a table, you see a table-cloth on it, you see food on the table, you see a shoe on the left hand side, you see a pair of pants on the right hand side, you see blood stains there. And suddenly you come from far away, and they say: this is your home. You see some food in the stove. You would who lived, what happened. What's going on. It...it is just ....It's hard to explain your impression....I just don't know anymore now to describe it to you. Your feeling walking in a home, cold, icy and seeing all these things. Outside, in Latvia you mostly heat with wood. The stoves are heated

wood. In the...where they stable the wood you saw some bodies laying around.

Q: bodies?

Zierings: bodies. Blood. And...and you just feel lonely. You are a child, you feel crowded. You're with your mother, You are being put with six other people in a room. And you sit and you wait.

Q: Who had lived in these houses?

Zierings: At this time, we did not know. We didn't have an answer. You see the shabbeth candles, you see a Sidur, you see a.. a Hagaddah on the table. You see hidden under the sofa a pair of beautiful boots. You see....It is very hard to describe everything.

Oppenheimer: People had just left sometimes in the middle of the meals. I mean, we came in there, there was solidly frozen soup, or food was standing on the tables, and dishes...And you were told you had to live, you start looking around you. you also find...Some people found more, some found less. Some found...in...in as far as coins or jewelry was concerned, You could feel that people were living in fear that they were hiding things from the enemy, from the Nazis in this respect. And here we took over their belongings. And again lucky, but some of our people that got into these houses found a few pieces worth of value and they bartered them outside afterwards with the Latvian public and they got food for that. Some were more lucky, they got into houses where people were a little richer. But you could tell that these people were torn away from their homes out of their everyday living, just as suddenly as we were taken.

Oppenheimer: It was just a terrible sight to get into these places....

Ziering: No, they were not taken as we were taken. Because we were taken in a German orderly way. We had to fill out a list, we had to give them details. We had to say we had a radio, I have a stove, I have a refrigirator, or I have three pair of shoes I can't use, size so and so. We had to do eve ythi the proper way. Here you enter something....

Oppenheimer: They were just taken out.

Ziering: It's...it's...it's hard to describe. You see blood, you see food, you see unfinished ...like you see a plate, you see a child's shoe in the corner. And...and you are in a differ environment and just don't know what to..to say or what to do.

Oppenheimer: It's just like you have here something on the table. All of a sudden you have to leave an...

Q: And when....

Oppenheimer: that's the way it's left.

Q: When did you...

Oppenheimer: ...and the next one who comes in doesn't know what it is all about.)

Ziering: Not only this. We walked in, my aunt, my uncle escaped with my father to...went to England...my aunt she had a girl. She was three years old at the time. She started crying. We had carried her all the way from Seriotawa to the ghetto. And th first thing is...you...you want to please a little child. I am fourteen years old and I was already the man in the family, so to speak. And it was just a...a terrible moment to walk in.

Q: When did you understand?

Ziering: When did ...?

Q: When did you understand what had really happened?

Zierin: What we understood is...within a day or two...And here again, I...I maybe I am too sensitive to it. We were not allowed to go through the barbed wires. And there were myself and a few other boys, right away we had to know what's going on. My mother lived in a constant fear what I would do or my brother would do. Because we were probably too dumb to understand what will happen to us. That any little thing we would do, which wasn't allowed, we would be hanged or shot. On the other hand, we just didn't care. We...as young children you don't realize, you don't... you don't know what really life is all about. So, we would right away go under the wires and go to the other ghetto where we saw some Latvian Jewish people, and we started speaking with them in Yiddish. Of course for me it was very easy. Right away they called me the little Yekkele which means they have....a German Jew is called by....by east european Jewry a Yekke. And sometimes they add another word towards it. But they called me yekkele, and they start telling me that they lived in those homes. And within four or five days they came, and they were all wiped out. Now, we came back with those stories to our families, and of course all the rest of the German Jews said:this cannot happen to us. They brought us here because they need people to speak German, they need people to do this. We are here to come to work. They will never do this to us. Which again here, I as a child....

Q: This means that they...they had killed the Latvian Jews.

Zierin: They told us that they came in with machine guns and took the people to the forest and to the....We lived across the

the people in our transport and the other transports could not believe what the Latvian Jews told us. Because first of all, the Germans kept the Latvian Jews - there were only men left - seperate from us. What we did, we sneaked under the wire and we would speak to them. And whatever we came and told them, we...they told to us: it's not so, it's not possible. We are...were selected to help work and they will never do this to us. We speak the German language, and so on and so forth.

Oppenheimer: And actually....

Q: But....you came on the 12 of December,...

Ziering: Right.

Q: ...and I see that they had killed the Lat...Latvian Jews ten days before. It was the 30 of November 1941.

Ziering: ten...and even a little later.

Q: The bloody Sunday.

Ziering: Right. Even it took a few days because they would go through the ghetto and search and always they would find

BOBINE 248

NY 80

Q: You can go.

Ziering: And we would go under the barbed wire into the other part of the ghetto, which we were not allowed to go. We would meet some Latvian Jewish people, and they...they told us what happened. First of all they had some... Some of them had very bad reaction against us too. Because their feeling was that we came to replace them, that we came to replace their work. Because we came from Germany, we spoke the language. So, maybe to a certain degree they had reason [illegible]

against us too, and they felt here, that their women and children were killed,and here is somebody else comes and lives in their places. But I think they were very very very few like this. Most of them told us what's going to happen or what did happen. Which none of us wanted to believe. When I say none of us, I as a child already was very sceptical and sent...sensitive towards this. But I would say that 90 % of German Jews not believed that this could happen to them. They always believed it would happen to somebody else. And from then on our daily life was just...We would be called out in the morning, we would have to report to our group where we arrived with, and the Lagerälteste would give us work, where we would have to go out to work in the city. The first few weeks we didn't do anything at all. What we did then is, we would sneak in the forbidden territory and try and steal whatever we could find in the appartments, because we were hungry, we were looking for potatoes or old bread or whatever we could find. The potatoes would be like when you carry a sack of potatoes, it would would be like wood, clotting together, they were all frozen. Did you ever eat frozen potatoes? They are very sweet and very...terrible. But when you carry a sack on your shoulder and you are afraid that somebody will catch you at night and it makes a lot of noise, you worry a lot about it. And they caught me carrying a sack of potatoes when I came back under the wire. The SS guard...

I: Who?

Fleming: The guard. And they marched me, with ten or twelve other people to the cemetery. And right away, everybody knew that Rumours spread very fast. My mother was told that I was

marched into the cemetery, which meant that I would never come out again.

Q: Why?

Ziering: Because whoever was marched in by the SS, for whatever they found, or anyone who was found on the other side of the ghetto, they would shoot right away on the cemetery.

Q: Ah, the cemetery was the execution place?

Ziering: Right. Well, the execution place was another place where they would hang people, but right in the beginning, they would take people into the cemetery and just shoot them. And I don't know, again, it is one of the things I keep on wondering. As we were lined up and they started shooting it started raining. One of the SS guards was putting on his rain coat. And as he turned around to put it on, I threw myself behind a monument....a Mazeva, and I laid there still. They shot the otheres. I waited there till night, and at night I ran out, and I joined my family. After a while, they had certain occupations for people that were good in tailoring, people that were good in mechanics, and they would give them work in the ghetto and outside the ghetto. Certain German....type of armies. Like the army would use people for tailoring and cleaning, the Luftwaffe would use mechanics more, and there were like people were in groups.

Q: Yes, but that...

Ziering: ...for certain types of work.

Q: Yes, but there is one thing I...one question I am asking to myself, as a matter of fact, because they killed the Latvian Jews. I think that the Latvians were more skilled

Ziering: That's very true, but as I said to you before: I don know what it is, but the German Jew at this time, eve when he heard a false story, believed it would not happen to him, that he is special, that he is different. Such a thing cannot happen to him. There was a creation of a German Jewish police force. They had to keep order in the ghetto. There was a creation of a Arbeitseinsatz, it was one who was in charge of all the work which goes out of the ghetto. And this was put mostly in German Jewish hands. They did the running, like in a small city, all the operations of it. Of course few people were quite sceptical, but again, they spoke to the Kommandant, and ...the Kommandant then was Krause, and people said: well, he told us when we work and we deserve, we do a good work and orderly and all these long German words, and we do everything properly and directly, and we listen to them we will get our daily bread, and we will just work and supply them with the labour we can. And this is just, there was a blinding situation.

Q: blinding?

Ziering: Right. Because after a while, what would happen: anyone sick or anyone who could not work, there would come big trucks and the individual group, like...the ghetto had from Düsseldorf, from Köln, from Hannover, from Kassel all those groups, Ältesten would have to select like a hundred or two hundred people which would go out. They said it goes to Dünamünde. What is Dünamünde? They have there a place where they manufacture Konserven....

Oppenheimer: for all the people...

Ziering: Right.

Ziering: Right. Fish factories where they could sit down, it's a nice warm place, and work. What we found out later, that those people went directly...they had to undress....to the forest Romboli, they were shot there. And their clothes came back, was gassed and was sent then to Germany to the welfare....

Q: Yes.

Ziering: What would you call it in German? to the....

Oppenheimer: They used...they used to...

Ziering: Right. Right.

Oppenheimer: We also found out they had a group of people from the ghetto that had to herd on these mass graves to cover them up. they were not allowed to talk. And then there were...some of them came back to the ghetto, but with the understanding they were not permitted to talk about what went on. And that's how we really found out what happened to those people, that were deported.

Q: But do you know...do you know that the...the German Jews who...who were shipped not to Riga but to Minsk, nobody came back?

Oppenheimer: Yeh, well, from Riga percentage wise it is only a small amount that really came back. I mean, the fact was they really needed them for work. Why they killed Latvian Jews first, and bring the German....I mean...it made no sense really.

Q: Yes.

Oppenheimer: It made no sense. It made no sense. But like Hermann, that explains, I think, whoever survived has a little story among themselves how they survived. I myself went through some-

and I had to sort the clothes in the Kleiderlager, it was called, that came back from the front. And the only way survival in the ghetto is...was food. I mean, you couldn live from the rations you got, for three and a half year to survive.... So everybody took merchandise wherever yo worked, you tried to get merchandise to the ghetto, or y changed it with the population outside of the ghetto. So worked with a woman. Her name was Mrs. Hecht, she lives Australia now, which I found out through these get-togethers. And she took...the woman took something and I took some thing. And this particular woman...The men were shipped Salaspils, we missed that already, And her husband was there also. A young married woman. And she took a few things and I did. Evidently the Reichsbahn, they saw her taking these things and as we walked out - it was called Bretschn - it was the station, railroad station in Riga, she was wa[illegible] And as we walked out, they called us in, and she had to show whatever she had...They said get undressed and she had merchandise on her, and they said, well, we are going to deport you. And she started crying: have pity on me, my husband is in Salaspils. She even showed a picture. And stood there, I had a coat that I had hung over, and I pu two pairs of socks...I had put with a safety pin in the [illegible] but I wore the coat over my dress. I was brave enough, I don know how I had the guts, and I said: can I go out, I hav nothing on me. And they looked at me and they said: you can go. And the other woman they kept in. And I went to the toilet. Now these were open toilets, you know, no flush toilets, you just..... went in there. This Mrs. Hecht wa coming out, and she was known to be en...I mean to [illegible] ch anging goods for food, barter - what you call it tod

Bartering. And she went in with me. I said: look, this i
what happened. You want the merchandise? I am going to t
them in the toilet. I can't walk into the ghetto when th
is what happened. I had...this and this woman....So she
the stuff in her bag, she had a full bag, I still see it

BOBINE 249

NY 81

Oppenheimer: Well, I feel today, looking back, at the age we are in to
and being...that I was a child when we were deported and
Riga, that it most certainly was worse for our parents th
it was for us. I mean, as a child, we had to give up scho
we lost all our toys, etc, but if I look back today - I h
two grown daughters - if I would be torn away from my fam
or from my appartment, or from anything that's dear...dea
to me today...I mean, it certainly was worse for our pare
and grand-parents to be taken away from everything, to ha
lost everything. The men were taken in different camps at
times,..II really think it was much much harder for our pa
to have lost a child or children....

Q: Did you talk with them about this difference in the...I

Oppenheimer: In those days?

Q: Yes.

Oppenheimer: I really don't think so, because the times were very bitte
and hard in Germany, and my father had died already. And it
was hard to get food. After a while my brother was seperat
from my mother and myself. I was very fortunate to be with
my mother, always to others. I really don't think we
these things. But as it was later on, when you really look b

and we all were settled here, at least, I feel so, and we had our homes, and we married, that we looked at the situation from different eyes than we were in those days.

Q : Yes, you think ...

Zicring : I think, my mother, she lived in daily fear, because, boys of the age of myself and my brother, fourteen, fifteen and thirteen not knowing what life is, not knowing what death is, not realizing anything, we just didn't care, we lived for the minute, for the day, and just in a childish way, to day, looking back, get even ... What do I mean by get even? Do things in spite, we would have to clean some rooms for the germans, they wanted the furniture, we would break the furniture. We would find some money that we had to turn over to the germans, we would take hundred dollars bills, I found the satchel in the basement of the house we lived in, full of money, It gave me the biggest pleasure to light it, the hundred dollar bills afire, not just to give it to the germans. We would find gold, o in gold, we would take it and bury it.

Just doing things to hurt them in any way we could. And my mother knew this and realized it.
And especially we had our little niece living with us, three years old, we would do anything just to bring her something home. My brother worked in a Kommando at in Riga, where they were unloading fish. He would break open wagons and steal like he would find an apple. He would put it under his clothes and carry it into and they would search him going in and they would search him going out. My mother would work for the army with boots, she would under

her clothes bring back of boots. I would take it the next morning and sell it to someone. Or sometimes during the summer, when it was hot, and we carried two or three pounds of butter in your pants, you had to march for two or three hours, you can imagine what happened....

Q: to the butter.

Ziering: to the butter,

Q: But you knew what death was.

Ziering: We knew what death was. We knew...realized and somehow we...we just did anything just to...to live, and to help. And I...looking back, I don't think we realized what death really meant to us. And I think my mother was old enough to understand. She was in constant fear that we would do foolish things. And sometimes, we even were....Like we worked in the harbour for a time. We worked....when a ship came in, we had to unload the ship, an army boat. Because the boats usually would be attacked by Russian aeroplanes. And as soon as a boat came in, it was just a matter...within 24 or 36 hours had to be unloaded and loaded and out, Because it is a sitting target. So we would have to unload the boat. So, if we would work like 24 straight through, how could we stop a boat from unloading? My brother and I we worked on the winches, which pulls out a big net and pulls out all the cargo from the boat. We would run a rope which is a metal rope, over a winch, where it would break. And to put a little rope in during the night was impossible. They were afraid to put light on. So, we would get a five or six hour break till the next morning. Of course if they catch us, it meant right a way to be put at the wall. But things like this, which maybe were stupid, maybe were

childish, but somehow it gave us the will to fight and to resist, doing our own silly way such things.

Q: Can you talk about the hangings you were obliged to watch?

Oppenheimer: Well, the men...the hangings were infact....the gallows was in the part the...where people from Hannover lived. The ghetto was divided...by..by the cities, the way we came into the ghetto. So the gallow happened to be there. But nevertheless, when a man was caught exchanging goods for food or a woman, the man was hung and the woman was shot in the cemetery, what Hermann was talking about before. Or they had to walk in front of the Roma...Kommandatur, where the Germans were, with a sign: I did this and this, and then he shoot him.Now, the men were hung on this gallow, and whoever came from work, we had to pass by there and look at whoever was hanging there. I think they were hanging for three days. Right?

Ziering: It depends.

Oppenheimer: It depended on the case. But we had to pass by and see the person hanging there. They made sure that we looked up. If we didn't, the SS would either hit us or whatever. But... it was a dreadful sight.for a child. It...I mean we were children in those days. And a lot of times, we had hanging there people we knew very well. In fact, I know from one case in particular, the man tried to help my late father at the last few minutes before he died. And they ha...had hung him, because he brough food into the ghetto. In fact the brother was here this afternoon. It was terrible, especially if you know somebody well.

Q: Yes, I have spoken to the brother. And you were forced to

Oppenheimer: We were forced to watch. We also had one woman here, where the mother was shot. Her and I walked back into the ghetto from...from the Reichsbahn, and the mother had been caught getting something and she was shot in the cemetery. Death was our part of growing up. Death unfortunately didn't mean much in those days, as it did today if somebody goes, it.. It was a life, I don't think one can really describe it. It's just impossible to describe. Death was your every day living.

Ziering: Well, from the morning till night, constantly, you were at under pressure and not really fearful....I think you. maybe I as a child I overcame this, but older people, my mother and I am sure other parents, doctors and lawyers, people with education - we had no education at all - I think they...they were more fearful, they were trying to live up to the order of the ghetto, and trying to do to please the German to...that was their way they thought they would be living or would see the day where they would walk out free. Now to us it...we realized we never will make it and we just will live to do as much as we can and help ourselves. My brother had many times...the Latvian people where he worked at the fish...at the market, they wanted to take him out with them, to bring him to Sweden. And he could not do it, because if...he could have escaped without any problems, and I could have done it many times, but they would take them, five of my family, and other people and shoot them. And that was the reason my brother already was in a boat. He came back. So, whatever you were trying to do, looking back today, was the wrong thing. You should have escaped without asking or realizing any

thing. But at this time, you still had in your mind, maybe perhaps we will come out or they will come out. And you ca not...you cannot be responsible for other five or ten peopl to die.

Q: Yes, I know about this difficult question. bon. arrete pour maintenant,....You don't want to say why you...you don't show your face?

Ziering: I feel like I help more by...God, it's really not important. I don't think a face is important. I think the thing is what is important is here, if we can give the world a message, what has happened, that we shall never forget, that people can do the most cruel things in life, which nobody can believe in his wildest dreams. I...I don't think I...I could give you the...a real explanation how....I...I feel really. It's... it's very hard. It's very hard.(pause).

Oppenheimer: (half a sentence-unclear)