

Good morning. I am Joseph Preil, co-director of the Kean College Holocaust Resource Center, assisting-- working with me this morning on today's interview will be Dr. Mark Lender.

Good morning.

Director of grants at the college, and a fine historian in his own right, who's been very helpful to us in the development of the oral history project here at Kean. Our special guest this morning is Mr. Alan Moskowitz, a leading member of the Elizabeth Jewish community. Mr. Moskowitz, in order to get started, could you please identify the members of your family and where you lived at the outbreak of the war in September 1939?

At the outbreak of the war in 1939, I was in a yeshiva in Czechoslovakia called Šurany. Later when the Germans marched in, we had to disband the yeshiva and I went back to the place where my parents lived, which was Svidník in Eastern Slovakia.

How old were you at the time?

At that time, I was-- in 1930, I was 16-years-old.

Who were the other members of your family? Your siblings, brothers, sisters? I had one brother younger than me. His name was Hanschl, and had twins, a brother and a sister, who were about seven years younger.

So you're the oldest.

I'm the oldest.

Can you tell us something about life in Brusnica?

Well, Brusnica was the place where I was born. I only stayed there till I was about six years old, since it was a very small village. I was sent to a bigger town, where I had an aunt and an uncle. And I stayed with them, and I went to school over there. And later on, we moved to Svidník. And this is the place where I was when the outbreak of anti-Semitism and harassment of Jews started. We moved there in 1937.

And well, then I went to different schools, to different yeshivas, but I always came back to Svidník. In 1942, I found myself in Svidník. That's when I was first arrested and taken to labor kommandos.

I just want to know a little bit more about life when life was a bit normal, and you said you were staying in a yeshiva and so on.

Well, when I was in the yeshiva, I was 16 years old. In Šurany, we were not allowed to go past a certain area, which it was off limits, I would say. Because they didn't want the student to go to movies or to mingle with the rest of the population, to concentrate mostly on studies.

So it was a real yeshiva life in Šurany. And I only stayed there about a year and a half. And then I went back to Svidník and Bardejov, which was a larger town where I could study. Also, since the yeshiva was disbanded we had private groups where we studied. And--

The yeshiva disbanded in what year?

In 19-- the Šurany yeshiva at the end of 1939.

That's what, the outbreak of the war.

Yeah, the Jews were still be able to have their businesses and their jobs, but it just started. Different laws were introduced, and we saw it, coming little by little. The real trouble started in 1942. That's when they first took all the youth and sent them-- they told us they're going to Lublin, but actually they went directly to Auschwitz. Those are the famous letters that we used to receive, how well they are off in Lublin, but they

were actually already in the concentration camps, in Auschwitz.

I did not go with that transport. I was hiding out. I didn't trust them. Neither did my-- well, they did not take families yet, just the youth. My brother and I were in hiding. And my parents later on went into hiding with the two young girls-- with the twins.

How many-- what was the Jewish population of Svidník?

Jewish population of Svidník was about 25 families.

So it was a very small town.

Very small town.

And some of you understood not to get involved with the being gathered together.

Right. Most of them ran away. From my town, from the 25, I was the only one that did not go directly to the concentration camps in '42. I went later in '44. But most of them, most of the youths went. In fact, all of them that I know of went in 1942. The families were taken later in 1943 and 1944.

How was the decision made that you would not join them? Was that your parents or yourself?

My parents didn't trust them, and I didn't trust them. I always liked freedom, and I felt like I can be on my own. And because you heard all kinds of stories about what was going on in Germany. Most people felt, well, the war is not going to last forever. We're going to go there. We're going to go to work. We'll work for a few months, and the war is going to be over, and that's it.

But I felt differently. And I was not the only one. Quite a few of us did, that were hiding out. And later on, we got false papers and traveling as Gentiles.

Did you have specific concerns? Had you heard specific stories about what was happening to individuals who were sent off?

Well, I did not know what was going on in Auschwitz. I didn't even know that Auschwitz existed. I only heard about the letters that were coming from Lublin. But you heard Hitler talking on the radio all the time, to destroy all the Jews. And I felt, how can you trust a man like this?

What about your gentile neighbors in Svidník?

And since I know the language very well, and I know that I didn't look Jewish at the time, and I was able to acquire good papers and from one paper another paper and so forth, until I worked myself up that they were foolproof, because they were actually from a living person that joined the London-- the English Legion, the Czech English Legion. And I took his papers. Cost me a few hundred dollars. And I got myself a yearly card to travel on any train I wanted as a salesman and other papers.

And I was traveling freely. Actually, I was never stopped, but I was able to stay in hotels and support myself and support my family. Because my father and mother eventually went into hiding, too, and I had to support them. But in the beginning, before we were taken away, I saw what was coming, because they started-- anti-Semitism in Slovakia started. You heard cases where they were cutting off beards, where they put the beard on fire my father was afraid to travel.

And this is how I became a salesman. So my father sent me to-- we still had a business. the businesses were not taken away till 1942. So my father asked me to travel for him to Bratislava, to buy merchandise, to bring it back, so we could support ourselves.

What kind of business was he in?

Textile.

Textile.

So I was doing the traveling. And later on, when my father went into hiding and my mother and the twins, my brother and I were hiding in a different place. And there were periods where it was quiet, when no transports went. And that was the time that they were negotiating trucks for Jews. [INAUDIBLE].

In 1942?

That was in 1943, '44. Well, then I was traveling already. And during that period, my father was finally caught in a basement where he was hiding out with my mother. They were sent away to a camp in Slovakia called Novaky, and later on to Sereď. My mother somehow slipped out and went to Bratislava. We were hiding her out. My father went away directly to Mauthausen, and then I found out that approximately the time-- because I am keeping now the yahrzeit. So I found out approximately the time that he was taken from Mauthausen to the crematorium. And my mother was hiding out in Bratislava.

So from 1939 to 1942, you're part of Czechoslovakia, all of Czechoslovakia was under German rule.

No, they were under Slovak rule, but they were collaborating with the Germans.

All right.

The Germans did not to come in. Well, actually I saw German soldiers, because they were going to the Polish border. They were traveling through Czechoslovakia to the Polish border. But the administration was all Slovak. There was no German administration. The Germans only came in when it was time to take all the Jews away.

That was in '42.

Well, no. In '42, still the Slovaks were doing it. Maybe there was a German supervisor telling them how to do it, but the Slovaks were doing it. When they came to take the families in 1943, then in 1944, then the first time that we saw SS men coming in.

So the Slovaks were cooperating with the Germans.

They were.

In terms of getting the Jews to the camps.

Right.

And your family went into hiding.

Right.

And managed to hide until '42.

No, they didn't have to hide. They didn't start taking families until '43. They took the youths in '42.

Yeah.

And the families they didn't take till '43. So they went into hiding in '43. And they were hiding in '43, '44. The middle of '43 somewhere.

And so what happened to you in '42?

In '42, in the beginning, I went into hiding, and I got my papers. I got my papers in Bratislava. And then I was traveling. And I took my mother to Bratislava, and I was hiding her out. A Gentile woman gave her a room over there. And I used to come every week over there and pay for it.

In your hiding, in you're traveling, did you receive any assistance from Gentiles or get any reactions from your Gentile neighbors or business associates about the state of affairs?

In Slovakia, very few of them. I don't know whether out of fear or they just didn't want to do it. There were some of them that were hiding out. And there was one area in Central Slovakia where there were high mountains, and Jews were hiding out in the mountains. And at night, they were coming down from the mountains to get their supplies, and they behaved very nicely, some of them.

A lot of them did it for money. Later on, when then the Germans announced that if they catch anybody hiding a Jew, that he's going to be shot and so forth, the Jews had to leave. They wouldn't keep them any longer. Which I cannot blame them for it.

But most of them survived in Slovakia. Very few of them survived in hiding. They only survived in the mountains. Hiding out in the mountains.

Your mother was--

My mother was with a woman hiding in Bratislava, right.

Now, why did that woman--

For money.

For money.

Maybe she needed the money, and maybe she also wanted to help. I don't know.

And how long was your mother there?

My mother was there-- let's see. I'd say about eight months.

From when till when?

From the beginning of '44 to about-- and I was caught. I was caught the end of September. So let's say from about maybe February, March '44 till about the end of September or beginning of October '44.

So what happened to you, and what happened to your mother at that time?

Well, I used to go out every week to my mother, to visit her, and also to pay the Gentile woman. On the way back, it was a Sunday, going back from my mother. I was walking. And a car pulled over, and two Gestapo men jumped out of the car, and they took me into a hallway. And they told me to pull my pants, pull my pants down, and they examined me, saw I was circumcised. They slapped me, says "Jude."

And I find out at the time, they were not looking for Jews. They were looking for underground, for partisans. But the first thing, whenever they caught somebody, because in Slovakia, to be circumcised it was a 100% sign that you're Jewish, because the Slovaks did not believe in circumcision.

So they took me to the Gestapo, and they started to examine my papers. "Is this your real name?" I said, "Yes, Andre Kolina." I was going under that name. They say, "how come you're circumcised?" I says, "I don't know." So I got a few more slaps.

And then they asked me, "did your mother light the candles Friday night?" I say, "I don't remember my mother lighting candles." So they slapped me around a little more. So I figured it's not going to help me,

because I realized they saw I was circumcised. The papers I knew that they couldn't prove anything.

So I figured maybe if I admit something to give them a little help, so I told them that I remembered, though, that once you visited my grandmother, and she used to light-- she lit candles. And they had a lot of them like me over there. They didn't have time to do too much examination. They were going to send me away anyway, so they give me another slap and says "Mischling." That means I come from a mixed marriage.

So they put me-- I stayed in the Gestapo there a day or two, and then we went to Sered. In Sered, they had a special barrack for Mischling, for mixed marriages. And we were treated a little bit better than the rest of them, because we were not 100% Jews.

In what respect was it better?

Well, it was a little cleaner, because I saw the other one. There was lice over there, too. But this was just a gathering camp. This was not like a concentration camp. We still wore our civilian clothes. We didn't wear the striped clothing like later on in the concentration camp.

And the other ones went out, the Kommandos to work. I don't know. They were shoveling snow, doing other work, just to keep them busy. And I got a job to clean, to shine the shoes of Hauptsturmführer Brunner. Matter of fact, I have an article over here. It was in The New York Times. He's in Syria. They want to bring him back now.

So I went there every morning and shined his shoes. And it seems that he liked the way I was shining his shoes, so he kept me a little longer. Because there were a lot of transports going. And I did not leave for the camps till the end of December 1944. Auschwitz was already closed, and I was, as you can see, I wrote down over here my first concentration camp was Sachsenhausen Oranienburg.

And that's the one you're discussing until now.

Beg your pardon?

Shining the shoes was in that camp.

The shining shoes was in Sered, in Czechoslovakia.

Aha.

That's where Brunner was the commandant.

Right.

In fact, he was in charge of all the transports.

What happened to your mother?

Now, my mother, I found out that she left. I did not know what happened to her, but I found out that she's not in that place anymore. Somebody that came later on from Bratislava, he told me that she's not there anymore. How he found out, I don't know. But anyway, after the war, my mother told me the story what happened to her.

The following week that I did not show up, she still had some money left. But I did not show up, she knew that something went wrong, that I must have been caught. So she was afraid for two reasons. First of all, she was afraid that she's not going to have enough money. They're not going to keep her there long enough.

And another thing, in case, I had the address with me, that they're going to find her and they're going to come after her. So she packed up, and she started to walk until she came to a small village, where there was an inn. And she walked into that inn and told the woman that kept the inn that she's running away from the

Russian front, which was very common. A lot of people were running away from the Russian front. She was dressed like a peasant woman.

And she asked for a job. She said she's going to work just for board and food. So they gave her the job. They gave her a room. And she started to work there. And came mealtime, my mother was very religious. She wouldn't eat non-kosher food. So she told the woman she's a vegetarian. She'll only eat vegetables.

Says OK. You're the cook. You're going to cook, so you can cook yourself whatever you want. Then came Saturday my mother wouldn't work on Saturdays. So she told the woman she's a Seventh day Adventist. So the woman respected that. She says listen, you want to work Sunday, you can work on Sunday.

And she worked every day. And then German soldiers started to come to the inn. My mother was very religious, and she felt very uncomfortable. She was a good-looking woman, too. She was uncomfortable when the soldiers made remarks or they looked at her. So she turned away, and that woman, the innkeeper, noticed how uncomfortable she is when soldiers come in.

What soldiers?

The Germans soldiers.

German soldiers.

So she told her, listen, if you don't feel comfortable, I can see you are a very devout Seventh Day Adventist, and you don't want to look at strange men. Because she told her she lost the husband on the front. So she says you can go. You can go upstairs and find yourself some work upstairs. And this is how she stayed there the whole war, till the end of March when Slovakia was liberated.

And at this time, where were you?

I was in Sered. At this time, I was in Sered.

Yes.

And in December, shining the shoes for Brunner. And at the end of December, the last transport-- I thought it was the last transport from Sered, but when I was interviewed a few months ago by the Germans about Brunner, because they wanted me to testify against him, they told me that they were still catching Jews in basements, and they were bringing them to Sered. And the last transport went in the beginning of March in 1945. Just a few weeks before liberation, they were still sending away Jews.

Aside from polishing shoes for Brunner, did you have any contact with the men?

With Brunner?

Yes.

The only contact I had, when he walked in, in the morning I stood in attention. I was afraid to look him in the eyes, and I never said one word. The other soldiers sometimes threw me a piece of bread on the way out, the SS men. Because they were supervising the shoe shining.

But the only other contact when he sent me away, when there was a roll call, they were going to leave. And he went with his stick, counting off. And I was right in the front row. He looked straight at me and that's it. But he recognized me, because he saw me every morning there. So that's about it for Slovakia, what happened in Slovakia. Unless you want some other details.

How long were you in Sered?

In Sered I was only about Oct-- let's see, October, November, December-- about 2 and 1/2 months.

And what happened then?

Then I was sent away to Germany, Sachsenhausen Oranienburg.

How many were sent at that time?

There were about three carloads. I mean, what do you call it? The trains.

Trains.

Trains, yeah.

So they could have what, about 100 in each car?

Yeah, about 100. Maybe 80 to 100. Right.

And what was your work? What was your program in Sachsenhausen?

Well, this was the first real concentration camp. And we arrived to Sachsenhausen. First we were told in Berlin, when we came off the train, they told us that if anybody's caught with gold or dollars in Sachsenhausen that he's going to be killed immediately. So right away, everybody took out whatever money he had in gold, and we hid it underneath the stones on the railroad. And this was a ruse, because the guys that were going around telling us these things, after we left, they were going over there and picking up the gold and whatever we were hiding over there.

The reason why we took some gold, because from the letters that we got from Lublin, they told us that the Polacks come in once a week to the camp, and you can buy things if you have money. So everybody took some money with them in order to buy. But when we got to Sachsenhausen, the first thing, well, "Arbeit macht frei" you see on his.

And the beatings started right away. This is how we got initiated. You know, "schneller, schneller," and the Kapos, you know, rounding us up. The first thing you do, you go, you get undressed completely. You go to Entlausung, which means to see that you have no lice. And they cut all your hair from the head, from the body, all hair is cut off. And you get a striped uniform with a number on the uniform.

We did not get tattoos anymore than Sachsenhausen. Only it was that in Auschwitz they used to get the tattoos. Maybe in Sachsenhausen they got it in the beginning, but when we got there, we didn't get tattoos anymore. And then they take us to the bunks, and every day you go out to work. But Sachsenhausen was also only a transitional camp for us. We knew we're not going to stay over there. Then they just divided us to different places where we're going to go from there.

Did they send you to work?

Work, whether there was work or no work, they always kept you busy over there. There was shoveling.

What did they keep you busy with.

Over there I think we were shoveling something. I don't remember exactly what it was. But you had to go to work. But in Sachsenhausen Oranienburg we only stayed a few weeks. From there we walked to Berlin, part of Berlin. I don't know. I'm not too familiar.

This was 1944?

This is--

Spring and then through summer?

No, no. This was the end of December 1944. I remember--

Really? The war was almost over already.

Well, over there it wasn't over yet in '44. The war was over in '45.

In May.

Right. So the end of December or the beginning of January, we were walking to Heinkel Flugzeugwerke. Because I remember we still saw some of the decorations from the holidays in the windows.

How far a walk was that?

That was a few hours. I can't remember exactly, but I know we made it the same day. We left in the morning. We were there sometime in the afternoon.

By late 1944, can you describe the conditions, health, morale, outlook, otherwise of the other prisoners? When you arrived in the camp, how did you find the other prisoners?

Well, in Sachsenhausen at that time, I was in contact mostly with newcomers. So we still looked like human beings. But the Kapos, the ones that were over us, they had enough food all the time. But we noticed already in the other camps that were looking at us, they looked like zombies. First we did not know who these people are, because they didn't look human. They looked like zombies to us.

We used to call them a Musselman, which means he's on the way out already. It's his last few weeks. Most of these people weighed between 70 and 90 pounds. Later on, we all looked the same.

At this stage with the guards, in comparison to later treatment, did the guards act perceptively differently at this point?

In Sachsenhausen, there were beating because they wanted to train us, to keep the bunk in order. And when the Kapo called somebody, you had to jump right away. But I did not see-- at that time, I didn't see any killing yet in Sachsenhausen. In the few weeks I was in Sachsenhausen, I did not see any killings.

The people-- I don't like the use of the word "prisoners." I don't know what else to use at this point. What was the proportion that were Jewish with you?

With me, 100%. The ones that came from Sered were 100% Jewish.

And how did they live with each other?

The Jews amongst themselves?

Yeah, the prisoners.

The prisoners, in the beginning, as I said, a few weeks we still behaved like human beings. We shared. We shared bread with each other, with somebody. Because we didn't know what was going to happen. The rations were very small. But who was thinking about food at the time? Since we were still in Sered, when we left Sered we still had enough food. There was no prison food.

In fact, in Sered you could even get private food that the community used to send into us. So we used to share. Or we used to exchange. Somebody wanted to get a piece of bread and a piece of margarine, and somebody would give a half a slice of bread for the little piece of margarine. And for lunch was watered down soup with sometimes you find a little turnip in it, or maybe-- some said it was dog meat or whatever floating on top.

That was the lunch. And at night, you also got a slice of bread and black coffee. That was the diet over



there. The diet was about 350 to 400 calories, I would say.

At this point, was there any medical attention at all?

No medical attention over there at all.

And you were there for would you say how long?

Just a few weeks. I don't know.

A few weeks, and then you went to?

Then we walked to Heinkel Flugzeugwerke.

And how long were you there?

Heinkel Flugzeug just a few days.

So it was again a transition.

Just a transition. And then we walked to Siemensstadt.

How long did that take?

The walk, I think we walked some in part. In part we went by truck if I remember. Some of us went by truck. I don't remember. I part of it from Heinkel Flugzeug to Siemensstadt, I remember getting off a truck slightly.

Siemensstadt was a starvation camp. It was also transitional. We were not supposed to stay there. But practically no food. We were there a few weeks, and a few of us died from starvation over there. That's when we started to lose all our weight. I don't know the reason why, whether they were not able to bring in food. Because there were raids. Every night we heard the American planes bombing Berlin. And quite a few of us died in Siemensstadt.

From Siemensstadt, we went on-- they put us on a train, and we went to Ohrdruf. That took a few days. And it was very cold.

Still Germany?

This is all in Germany. This was all in Germany. I remember on one stop, that we stopped there was another train going with Russian prisoners. And the International Red Cross was handing out some food to French prisoners, Russian prisoners. On the other side were watching, and we hoped when they get through with them, they'll come to us. We never made it. They never came over to our side. They probably had orders they cannot bring any packages to Jewish prisoners.

Were they aware of your presence?

Yes, they saw us. I don't know whether they insisted, but they did their job. They unloaded the food that they brought in, but Jewish prisoners didn't get one meal. And then I don't know how many days it took to get to-- because a lot of times they had to take detours, because a lot of the railroads were bombed out. So it took a long time to get to Ohrdruf. That was my next.

Now, Ohrdruf was a real working camp. And this was, according to some of the prisoners that I met there from Auschwitz, they said that this is the worst camp that they've ever been to.

Really?

And I can see why.

Why?

Because the work was so heavy, so little food, and so much work. And we wore wooden shoes. If somebody lost a shoe, he was finished. Because he couldn't walk on the ice or on the snow and we had to carry heavy railroad ties, and clean the racks. They were building a railroad in the mountains for some reason. I don't know why. And we had to clean up the area where they want to lay the railroad tracks.

And there were heavy, heavy boulders. And we had to pick them up and carry them from one place to another. And most of the time, the ones that were hit the worst are the tall people. Because the short ones-- if the tall ones were up in the front, they carried the whole load. And the Kapos and the SS men were watching that nobody bends the knees.

So the guys that were in the middle, if they were a little shorter, they were lucky. They survived a little longer. The tall ones went first. And over there, there was a lot of beating, because if you didn't go fast enough up the hill.

And this is the place where I got my first beating. And I got my first beating during lunch. They brought out some soup to feed us. And while I was eating my portion, a black uniformed Ukrainian-- that was an SS but they had special uniforms-- started a conversation with me.

He noticed that my hands were not a worker's hands. So he asked me what my occupation is. So I told him a student, which was the truth at the time. I didn't have any other occupation. It seems he didn't like students, and he hit me so hard on the side over here, that to this day, I still feel it. The sciatic-- the sciatica nerve.

And over there most of us died in Ohrdruf. Very few of us survived. I met-- the only reason why I survived is I met a cousin that came there from Auschwitz, that left in 1942 Czechoslovakia. He was one of the first ones. He had one of the lowest numbers in Auschwitz.

And when he came to Auschwitz, he claimed that he was a electrician. They were looking for electricians. A friend of his told him, if they ask for electricians, whatever profession, just tell them that you know it. So he says electrician. And once he got in there, he didn't know anything about negative or positive. But the friends helped him out. They showed him around. And this is how he became an electrician.

And he was in charge of the electrified fence around the camp. They had to check it and see if it's all right. And this is how he survived Auschwitz. He got a little better food. And then he was sent to Ohrdruf. When he came to Ohrdruf, he already had all his connections with the other officials over there in the camp. And he found out that I was there, and he brought me. Every night he brought me some extra food, and this is how I was able to survive over there.

You said Ohrdruf was the worst camp.

The worst. In fact--

You were there.

Yes.

And you were the only member of your family there.

Only member.

You were a young boy.

Yeah.

What kept you going?

What kept me going is, I tell you, if I did not believe in God, I would commit suicide. Suicide was very easy to commit. A lot of them committed suicide. In fact, a lot of them gave away a piece of bread, and asked the fella, I'll give you my bread if you kill me, if you choke me.

And the only reason I didn't commit suicide, because I knew it was against my religion. If it wasn't for that, I would have probably-- especially before my cousin came. Because the work was so heavy, and it was so discouraging in the morning to see when they lined us up for the count, and you saw all the dead lined up.

Because they used to line up when they counted. The system was like this over there. There used to be-- they used to call them in German a "Schreiber," which means the one that used to write down. And a "Laufer" means a runner that ran between the prisoners and the office with messages, whatever he had to tell the leader of that particular barrack.

Now the Laufer and the Schreiber and the one that was in charge, the Jew that was in charge of the camp, not the German, they were standing in attention before the SS men with all the papers. And they were presenting the count, how many prisoners are presenting themselves this morning. And the SS man was counting to see if they were correct.

So they had to-- in the morning, the dead were counted in the barracks. And the sick were counted. Once they were recorded, they were counted in the barracks. And the living were counted outside. It could be freezing, below zero, you had to stand there for hours for the count. If the current was not correct, the Schreiber the one that was supposed to write and count, he was responsible. He could lose his job. He could become a prisoner like us. Or he could be killed.

It happened one day, which I witnessed myself, where all of a sudden everybody is in line before the SS men got there yet. They wanted to make sure the count is right. Everything was standing five in a row. And he had the count right. And all of a sudden, somebody comes running. He probably had diarrhea. He was in the latrine, and he was late. And he came running, and he stands over there. And he takes one look. He says, I got one more.

He took him back to the barracks. And I found later he was killed in the barracks, and he was with the dead people. So the count of the dead people he could fix somehow. But the main thing is, because the SS men a lot of times did not go to count the death and the sick, but they counted the living. As long as the count was right, SS man was happy, and he was happy.

So the Kapo killed.

The Kapo killed, killed him in order that the count should be correct. One other time I remember, now this was at night, when we got back we were counted again, to see we are all back. At that time, we they count the dead who are laid down right on the side of the living ones. And they counted the living and the dead.

So I remember one case, a lot of people lost limbs up in the mountains over there. You know, a rail fell down or a Kapo cut off his leg or whatever. One SS man was counting the dead, and he saw one dead person was laying there with a leg missing. He carried on there for, I don't know, 15, 20 minutes, where that leg is. And all the Kapos had to run around till they find a leg on a truck, and they brought the leg, and this is how we were dismissed.

Did these guards in their dealings with you have any understanding of who the various prisoner groups were? Did they have any overt attitudes toward the Jews or even know who Jews were? Aside from the prevalent anti-Semitism.

Inside the camp, it was all run by prisoners. The camp inside was run by the prisoners. You only saw the SS men-- you saw the guards on the towers. You saw the SS men. And then when it came to count, and to count the prisoners, or you saw him sometimes go into the office, if there were special orders, if they needed a certain group of people to send on a Kommando somewhere, or to send them-- or to send the sick people

away to the crematoria. Then you saw the SS men coming in over there. Otherwise, it was an administration all run by prisoners.

And as far as the Kapos, you had some good Kapos, and you had some bad Kapos. The German Kapos, I found out, were most of them were homosexuals and criminals that were released from prisons to become Kapos. Some of the Jewish Kapos were mostly Polish Kapos, because they had the training before the Czech Jews they became Kapos. Some of them behaved very nicely. In front of the SS men they couldn't behave nicely. Sometimes they had to give you a Slap but most of the time, they very nicely. But some of them were actually sadists, and they enjoyed hitting. Or they wanted to keep their jobs.

What was the proportion of Kapos to prisoners?

I would say-- I would say about every group of 50 had about two Kapos, one on each side. Approximately. I can't be sure.

How long were you in Ohrdruf?

In Ohrdruf I was from January '45, or beginning of January '45 till March '45.

What happened then?

Then we were marched to a camp called Crawinkel, which was underground bunkers, where we stayed.

Why did you leave Ohrdruf? Because the Allies were coming?

It could be. It could be. But there was no reason. Because there was no reason. There was no reason for sending people from one camp to another, anyway. This whole business of being in six camps in such a short while didn't make much sense, because the same work I did in Ohrdruf I could have done someplace else.

What I understood from our discussions, why this was happening, it seems that the guards or the officers that were running the camps were privileged people somehow that did not have to go on the Russian front. They had some kind of an in, in Berlin, that they were assigned these jobs which were easy jobs. They did not have to go on the front.

And in order for them to show that they are needed and they are busy, they are administrating, they used to send one transport here, one transport there, and this, and keep themselves busy.

And always they made these decisions themselves?

They made the decision themselves. I can't see what difference does make it whether I carry rocks over here over carry rocks in another camp. It doesn't make sense to me.

And from Ohrdruf you went to?

Crawinkel.

Crawinkel.

Yeah, that was a camp where we did not work. When I walked into Crawinkel, the first thing that I saw was about six Russians hanging. Over there, there was also a few barracks with Russian prisoners. So in the beginning, we didn't know what this was. In fact, I thought it was like we used to have those scarecrows. You know, in the fields.

You thought they weren't people.

I thought they weren't people. Then we found out that they were trying to escape. And this was a warning to us not to escape. And over there, also how I survived over there, I met another friend that I knew from the

old country, that came from Auschwitz over there. And he told me to come every evening after I eat my watered down soup to his camp, and he's going to give it to me from the bottom.

You know, there was big casks of soup. And thickness, all the good stuff was on the bottom. He says that he's going to save me a portion. And this is-- that fellow, the older brother, he died in this country. They're all over here. They're called the Berger family. They're in the plastic business. [? Very nice. ?]

But he died. He died in this country. In fact, I met him once, and I told him, you know, I owe you some soup. I'll take you to the best restaurant and I'll buy you the best soup in the restaurant. But we never got together.

This was March 1945. As a prisoner, were you aware of what was going on in the war?

In the war? We didn't know. We just heard that the Americans are getting a little closer. And we already-- you know, the overflights, we knew. Yeah, and also at the end, I also heard some of the guards. They were talking to us already. I don't know. Maybe they were trying to justify to themselves. They knew the end is coming.

He says-- he says-- one guy says, [SPEAKING GERMAN]. "You will be free soon." And we heard already from them. And we heard already the artillery. At night you could hear the artillery already approaching.

Did the approach of the Allies, in this case, the Americans, did this change the behavior of the guards?

Yes, it did. Some of them. Some of them it did. Some of them. You're talking about the German guards?

Yes.

The German guards, some of them did, and some no. Some till the last minute. I think there were cases where even the commandant already called in some of the officials from the-- not the Kapos but the Blockälteste, which was in charge of a whole block and had discussions with them. And in many cases, they were trying to find out how they think they're going to be treated.

And some of those commandants were looking to save their skin. And at the last minute, they tried to make it a little easier and gave orders probably not to officially kill anybody. But the plain soldier-- the one, let's say, when we went on a transport, or we were walking. Later on, we were walking from Crawinkel to Buchenwald, which took us a few days. We slept in the fields-- they were shooting still on the road. And they saw already the Americans, the American planes over us.

And if somebody stepped out of line, he had to relieve himself, so he went to the bushes, you heard a shot, and the person never came back till the last minute.

So you were in Crawinkel not long at all.

Not long at all. A few weeks, maybe.

And then you went to Buchenwald. We went to Buchenwald. And when we got to Buchenwald, Buchenwald was an organized camp. In the beginning, we did not see the crematoria and any atrocities that were committed. It was very regular, and everybody had to give his name and where he came from.

So the first thing they did, they separated the Jews. They said, the Jews on one side, the Polacks on another side, and the Greeks on this side. We had Greeks, too, over there. And I was then with my cousin, the cousin that saved me in Ohrdruf. His name was Shimon [? Bubker. ?] My name, I came to the camp under the Gentile name Andre Kolina.

So I told him, listen, we survived till now. We don't have too much. I don't like the idea they're taking the Jew separate and the Czechs separate and the Poles separate. I say, I'm going with the Czechs. I have a Czech name. I'm gonna.

He says, what am I going to do? My name is Shimon [? Bubker. ?] I say, listen your name is now let's reverse it. Bobby Shimko. Shimko is a Slovak name. They don't have records so exact. Don't worry about it. Come with me, and let's go to the Czech. And we went into the Czech barracks.

That was in the big camp. All the Jews went into the small camp. Very few of them survived. We were there only a few weeks, but few-- they went into the [? rat holes. ?] And many, many of them actually-- not that-- some of them died from typhus. I got typhus later on, too. But the Germans, as they were retreating, they were killing them off in the small camp. They just came with machine guns, and would kill them off as much as they can, and then they left.

The Czech barracks, the Czech had a little uprising over there. A few of very well trained Czechs, that were officers in the Czech army and were taken to Buchenwald, made an uprising. They somehow, they disarmed one of the German guards, and then they disarmed another one, and they got a hold of one of the towers.

And the Germans brought in reinforcements, and they wiped them out. But it was too late. They had to leave already. So they were machine gunning the Czech barrack. I don't know what happened to me. I know I was sick of typhus. Somebody pushed me underneath a bunk. And I woke up three weeks later in the hospital under the Americans.

That was liberation for you. You were sick and unaware of what was going on.

I was never--

Typhus.

Yeah, I was never aware that I was liberated. So after two weeks of whatever, I was in the hospital. After I got out of the hospital, I went back to the camp to find my cousin that I lived with. I wanted to see if he was still alive. And I was all white, and I wore a white hospital uniform. And I walked in over there. He recognized me, thought I came back from the dead.

Right.

And I only stayed there after liberation maybe one week. We used to go into Weimar. And when we walked in over there, one guy says, let's go into this restaurant. I says, you have money? He says, you don't need money. When the owners saw us coming and there were Germans sitting there at tables, you know, he told them to clean off right away two tables, and sat us down, and gave us to eat. He says, free of charge. They wanted to show--

And they claimed they never--

They never knew.

They never knew what was going on in Buchenwald. Now then, after liberation, I saw already the piles. The piles of dead were piled up. You know like you pile up lumber, firewood? You know, one row like this, and one row like this? This is is how is was piled up about 8 feet high, rows and rows of dead people.

Your contacts with the-- I realize that you were sick and unaware of what was going on when Buchenwald was taken, but upon regaining consciousness or your health, did you have any conversations with American military or medical personnel relating to the camps themselves and what happened?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Their reactions?

Oh, they were very friendly with us. And they took us. There was a ball game, I remember, going on in town over there. They took a few of us out to watch the ball game, the soccer game. And they took us over to the American army camp. And they gave us chocolate and whatever we wanted and took pictures of us. Asked

us if we have relatives in the United States. We sent messages with them, because they could write. They behaved very nicely.

This is the first time in my life that I saw a Black person. And he looked so good to me. Because normally in school we learned there is a Black race, a yellow race, a white race. But you know, all you saw is the pictures of them. It's the first time I saw a live Black person.

A GI?

A GI.

Did your contact with the American military have any influence on your decision eventually to come to the United States?

Well, the reason why I came to the United States after I went back to Czechoslovakia-- by truck we were taken back to Prague. I didn't stay one day in Germany after I could leave Germany. I went directly to Prague. And there was no transportation. It took me about a month before I got back to my town to find my mother, that my mother was still alive, to hear her story.

My brother was already-- the name of the town was Bardejov. That's where we gathered. So my mother was there already. And my brother came back from Auschwitz. He already left Auschwitz in January. And my sister was in Sweden. She was taken to Bergen-Belsen and to Sweden.

Now, my father died in Mauthausen. He was caught in Sered. He died in Mauthausen. The twin of my sister, they were both 14-years-old when they came to Auschwitz. My sister was lucky. She had a cousin, a girl that came in 1942 and she took her in as a helper, because she was taking care of one block.

And my brother could have gotten a job, too, through my cousin. But he says he wants to go. He didn't want to go. He says, I'm not going to work for the Germans. He did not want to work for the Germans. He went into the gas chamber. 14-year-old boy. That's David.

So of your family now, your father was killed in Mauthausen, your brother David in Auschwitz.

In Auschwitz.

And who survived?

One brother in Auschwitz, and one brother and a sister that were both in Auschwitz.

And you and your mother.

And my mother.

You mentioned the crematorium in Buchenwald.

Yeah.

Was that the only camp that had a crematorium that you were in?

No, every camp had a crematorium. Well, the crematoria that was like an assembly line was mostly in Auschwitz. Maybe they also had it in-- I'm not familiar with Majdanek.

Majdanek, Treblinka, that's all they had in some of them.

But Auschwitz, it was like a production line. They got off the trains, and this one goes to the left or right. They went straight to the gas chambers. They got it. Over there, mostly the crematorium were for the ones that were killed or died in the camp. They were burned. I doubt that they had a gas chamber in Buchenwald.

I think we'll get back to what happened to you after liberation after they put on a new tape for us.