

Good morning. My name is Bernard Weinstein and I'm the director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project at the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Carole Shaffer-Koros. We are privileged to welcome Robert Rothschild, an eyewitness to Kristallnacht presently living in Eastchester, New York, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about his experiences and revelations of that period of time, which we are now commemorating.

Mr. Rothschild, I'd like to welcome you to Kean College. And I would like to ask you to tell me a little bit about the place where you were born, and something about your life and your family history before the war.

I'm glad to be here.

Thank you.

I was born in a little town called Mellrichstadt, which is in Bavaria, near the Prussian border in January of 1924. At that time, there were about 60 Jewish families living in a population of about 2 and 1/2 thousand, so it was a fairly large percentage, which was quite common in Germany in the small towns at the time.

And there was always underneath a certain amount of antisemitism, because in a small town like that, everybody knows everybody else. So you can't hide. And everybody knows that you're a Jew, although I went to a Catholic school, because the schools were run by the Catholic Church or the Protestant Church. I would say I don't know what the percentage was, but there was a small minority of Protestants. They had their own school, but the Jews went to the Catholic school. And there, girls and boys were separate. The girls were taught by nuns, and the boys had male teachers.

And there was kindergarten, which was also run by the nuns. And the Jewish children went there. And it was just like kids are nasty to one another. [INAUDIBLE]. When you had a disagreement with a Gentile child, they would come back and call you a stinking Jew. But it was just like calling you an idiot or anything else. I don't think there was much more depth behind it, although it did come from that background from their families, the way they thought of Jews at the time.

Were you--

But--

--required-- excuse me-- to participate in religious services, or did they--

No.

--allow you to--

No.

--abstain, as--

No.

--Germans?

We had a Hebrew school, which Jewish children, I think, attended Sunday mornings, and I think on two or three afternoons during the week. But for that, when the other children had religious instructions, the Jews were let out of class. And as a matter of fact, we had school six days a week, about 5 and 1/2 days a week, so there was school Saturday mornings. And the Jewish children used to go to separate services in the morning and then attended school after the service till the school ended.

And what happened was that in these towns-- and especially in the town I come from-- the majority of Jews were Orthodox. And my family was very Orthodox. And we were not allowed to write on Sabbath. So in fact, we'd get our neighbor in school to make all the rotations for homework and so on, because we were not allowed to write.

And I'll never forget this one incident. And I don't know what I had done that I forgot, but one Sabbath, after we went to school after services-- and I guess this must have been maybe around 1930. It was before Hitler came to power. And the first thing that the teacher said to me was that, well, I know you Jews are not allowed to write, but are you allowed to be caned on Sabbath? And for whatever I'd done, of course, there was still corporal punishment in schools. And for whatever I had done, I had to lean over a-- they had a sandbox in school. And I had to lean over the sandbox. And I got, whatever, two or three strokes on my bottom.

But even at that time, the teacher already made the point that the Jews had to be treated differently, that everybody else had to be in class Saturday morning but the Jews. And the service was-- so they were set in a way of second grade, there was always something different from the other Germans.

The antisemitic language that you experienced from the other children, was that also before '33? Was it before--

Yes--

--Hitler came--

--but--

--to power?

--it wasn't-- it wasn't any different than you would call a Black here, nigger. It was just in the folklore, more or less. And I don't think that the kids really thought about it, because after you made up, you played again, played together again. But all I'm saying is that in the background, it was always in the back of their mind that we were different. But we played. I mean, I have heard people say that before Hitler, the antisemitism in Germany wasn't much different than it is here today. It was there, and you were aware of it, but it was just part of the culture.

And so I went through kindergarten. Then I went four years to public school in Mellrichstadt-- and there was a Realschule, a high school, in Neustadt, which was about 14 kilometers from where we lived-- and of course, most Jewish kids, and of course, some of the others, too. But public schooling was free. For the high school, you had to pay. But all Jewish kids were sent to some high school. Mine was in Bad Neustadt, which is, I suppose, about 14 kilometers. Others went to different places.

And after four years of public school, you attended high school. And there was a commute of a 20-minute train ride. And in 1934, I started going, commuting to Neustadt. And again, because we were religious, and there was school till late Friday and also Saturday morning-- or it was Shabbat. We used to stay in Neustadt with a Jewish family, who happened to have a restaurant.

And I came home late Saturday night or early Sunday morning because, again, we're not allowed to travel. Because of this, I never met many of my more distant relatives or even cousins, because we were Orthodox at home. And some of these aunts and uncles and cousins, they're not. So we were never allowed to visit anywhere where we couldn't eat kosher. And anybody whose household wasn't kosher, we were not allowed to visit, as children.

So the people in whose houses you did stay, were they Jewish? Were they--

Yes. Yes. They were all Jews. But Hitler came to power in 1933. So when I started going to Neustadt, it was in 1934. And little by little, well, it started out that we were still pretty friendly, the schoolmates inside the class. And I heard some of my good friends say, oh, don't worry. I won't see you outside, but in class, nothing's changing. But little by little, they joined the Hitler Youth, and they were indoctrinated.

And then also, it so happened that my best friends, the father of one was a station master in Mellrichstadt, so he had no freedom which, of course, is the Reichstag, which was run by the state. So he was a state official. The other one was the son of my teacher in Mellrichstadt, and so he was also in an official position. So little by little, they were, look, you know, you're all right, but I can't do it anymore because my father would lose his job.

And so we just drifted apart. And although some of them probably never did me any harm, on the other hand, it was fear that prevented anybody from associating with Jews. Again, have come back to that in these small towns, probably three or four generations of Jews and Gentiles lived together and knew each other very intimately. And they knew.

Very often, people think of Jews as only rich, but these Jews in these small towns were mostly small merchants, or to a great extent, cattle dealers. And they were just as poor, just as badly off, as many others. But it's probably in the Jewish tradition, the Jewish culture, that you struggle, like Fiddler on the Roof. You struggle all week long. Come Shabbat, you get dressed up. You have the big, good meal of the week. And you just shut everything materialistic out.

It's just a different atmosphere, a different life, on that one day. And every Jew, or at least the master of the house, feels like a king on that day. And I guess, to that extent, they never felt poor, at least not on that day, that they're not poor, you see. But basically, they were no better off-- or probably worse off-- than many of the Gentiles in the town.

What was your father's occupation?

My father was a tailor by trade. But the tradition, especially in the small towns, was that, like my grandparents' times, these families had-- my mother of six children. My father, I think, was altogether 12, but some of them died in childhood. But there were all about six or seven that survived.

And what happened in these small towns, usually, like I said, the Jews were not well-off, but everybody pitched in. Usually, the smartest who was most often the eldest in the family, was sent to college. And the rest of them-- somebody had to stay behind to keep the family business going, to support the one who had to go, or if it was more than one, to help them go to college. And then it became that once they have so-called made it, it became the obligation to take care of the ones that were left behind.

Now, in my mother's case, because where we lived in Mellrichstadt was my mother's house, her father had died quite early and it was just her and her mother running the business-- had a piece good business. And of course, they were looking for an arranged marriage, for somebody to marry into the business. And somebody else in the town had married a brother of my father's, and so my mother was introduced to my father. And although he was a tailor by trade, they made a businessman out of him. And of course, he was never a good businessman. He was a good tailor, but he was never a good businessman.

And it had fallen-- see, well, my mother had four brothers. See, two died as a result of wounds right after the First World War and were just teenagers, I think, about 1919, '20, just shortly after the First World War. And then there was one uncle who never married to --

But there was my uncle, Izzy, he's the one who so-called had made it in Germany. He lived in Cologne. And then after he had made it, he supported my grandmother and he helped us. For instance, when we went to high school, he paid the tuition because, of course, we were poor. But that was the arrangement, that you support them to make it, to support them through college. And then it becomes the obligation to take care of the family.

Anyway, I went to Neustadt, and then, of course, Hitler came to power little by little. And we commuted. So molestation started already in the morning when we went to school, because everybody knew everybody else. So nobody would dare to be seen helping a Jewish boy. So we were pelted with bricks or fruit, or just shoved around. And--

How many Jewish boys were in the school at the time?

Oh, well, like I said, the school took in children from a whole radius of maybe 20 miles or more, so they all commuted. So from Mellrichstadt itself, I think there were four or five. Our friend, Stephen Praeger, went there, also. And so what

we'd try to do is time it, so we'd arrive at the station just as the train would pull out and then jump on the train at the last minute and pick a compartment which was fairly empty, or at least nobody was there, of anybody that we knew.

And so we'd been to Neustadt till 19-- in the spring of 1937. And at that time, my brother and I were the only Jews left. So one morning we were called into the director's office, principal's office. And he told us. He recommended that we resign if we didn't want to be expelled. That was fine, because we wanted to leave, because we just hated the commute. When we came in the morning, we never knew whether or not we would come home, healthy and hearty and safe and sound, because we were molested constantly.

I have a scar here above my eye. We used to have a lunch break and then be out in the schoolyard. Then we just had lineup and marched back into class. And the schoolyard had iron gates. And one day we were marching back, and somebody just give me a shove in the back. And I just had a big gash above my eye. And the scar is still there above my brows-- just things like that.

What had happened to the other boys in high school?

Most of them emigrated by the time. But first of all, because you were so conspicuous in these small towns, a lot of Jews moved to the larger cities in Germany, where they would not be known as individually and somebody knew them personally. There's no way you could hide in a small town.

As I showed you in those pictures, Mellrichstadt was a very small town. But very often, if I wanted to go from here to there, I would circle the whole town and come in from the other side, because some bully, somebody, was somebody I was afraid of. I was physically afraid to pass this person. He may not have done anything with me, maybe. I didn't know if anybody was going to do anything to me. But just by his presence, I would circle the whole town to go maybe one block.

To your knowledge, was any student ever disciplined for beating a Jew, or--

No. Well, see, this is the thing people get confused about in this country. In Germany, the law said it was legal. See? When you talk about minorities here, the law is on the side of the minorities. The law, the Nuremberg Laws, specified that Jews were free game, whatever you want to do to them. That was the law.

Did life become noticeably different after the Nuremberg Laws, from what it was before?

Well, I'm not sure that I can put a particular time on the-- it just changed gradually. See, as long as people had personal friends, then they'd start to say, well, you're all right, but it's all the others. See, because always the ones you don't know. See, but if they knew you personally, yeah, you are-- but ones that were afraid, ones that distanced themselves for whatever reason, don't forget that they all belong to some Nazi organization.

They were constantly indoctrinated. And they hammered that in, especially on an impressionable kids. After a while, they believe it. And as the distance grew further and further and further, they just didn't see you as human anymore. You are just some kind of vermin.

Did things get progressively worse--

Yes.

--before, say, '38? Or did they stay pretty much the same?

No, they got progressively worse because of that indoctrination. You heard of the Sturmer, all these Nazi papers. And day after day after day, you had these cases-- what they called Rassenschande-- of Jews seducing German women. And then they brought out the law that Jewish men aren't allowed to have any more Gentile household help, or any help at all by Gentiles. And it was all predicated on the fact that they were being sexually molested by the Jew. And once you lose touch with these people, with the general-- even the ones that knew them just believed the papers. They were--

By Gentile, did they mean Aryan, precisely?

Well, it-- again?

Were the two-- Aryan. Or were the two terms synonymous with each other?

Well, they didn't use the word, well, in Germany. "Gentile" is not a German word, even.

Of course.

It was either Christian or Jews. But it was Aryan, yes, because don't forget, in a small town, there was nobody else. There was the Germans and the Jews-- Christians and Jews.

And yes, there were very few that did the best they could. My parents were in Germany till 1941. And the Jews didn't get any more rations. But my mother would go and sit on a park bench somewhere. And some old friend, some school friend that she knew all her life-- I mean, as I said, most of the people were farmers-- she would sit at the other end of the bench. And then she'd get up and just leave a package of food there. And my mother would pick it up and go home. That's how they survived.

I mean, there were individuals, but they could never do it openly. They couldn't go into a Jewish house and bring them something. It had to all be surreptitiously, because whoever did this really took their own life in their hands. And there were certain individuals, but as a group, they didn't want to know. But subconsciously, they all know.

What--

Well, at--

Excuse--

And-- pardon me?

What happened after you and your brother left the high school?

Well, then, after, well, I still had to go to school because of the compulsory school laws. I had to go to school for one more year. So I was sent to a Jewish day school just to kill time for a year. And then I went to this uncle in [Place name] who also was a tailor. And I became an apprentice as a tailor. And that was an hour-and-1/2 commute every day. I left the house at 5:30 every morning.

And my brother was sent to a trade school. At that time, trade school, Jewish trade schools, had sprung up all over Germany to equip Jewish youths with trades for survival after emigration. My brother was training to be a locksmith, which he wasn't equipped very long.

[LAUGHTER]

Anyway, I was sent to the uncle, and I commuted there for about six months. Every morning, 5:30, I would commute. And then one Saturday morning, I was running an errand with another Jewish boy. And some Hitler Youth blocked our way. And one was about to pick up a rock and throw it at me. And I just gave him a push, and I ran. Well, because he had this rock in his hand, I caught him off balance, and he fell. Well, the other Jewish boy ran, too. And he ran before I. At the end, I was standing alone with this-- he ran right away. I was there, facing alone these Hitler Youth. And I pushed him, and I ran.

And at evening, after dark, I was summoned to the Nazi headquarters, which was in the school building at the end of a dead-end alley. And then the Kommandant-- how dare you, Jew, hit a German Youth? And he called me all kinds of

names and abused me verbally.

And then he said, well, for your own safety, I recommend that you leave town at once. And I was already congratulating myself that that was all there was to it, as I left that building. But as I came out in the alley, I realized that I had been trapped. There were three Brownshirts. Two blocked the alley exit. And one beat me up something terrible with a rubber truncheon, hit me mostly in the face. I have bags from my eyes to below my cheeks that's just hanging like loose bags. And I don't know how long it lasted. It seemed like it would never end. And finally, I tried to be as quiet as possible, and eventually the three just walked away.

Were these three boys, or men?

No, they were men. I would say they were men in 20s. See, the boys were Hitler Youth. These were SA, the Brownshirts, stormtroopers, so mostly were at least in their 20s. I knew they were. I mean, like I said, it's a small town. I knew they were.

And I was dazed, but I made it home. And my mother says, if you'd gone to [? summer ?] services instead of running around with your friend, this wouldn't have happened. Well, I guess it didn't do much for my religion.

[LAUGHTER]

How old were you at the time?

14. Anyway, the next morning, I went to my uncle's house to stay. And that's where I lived on the 9th of November, 1938.

And as you know, on the 7th of November, this German official in the Paris embassy had been shot dead by a Polish Jew. And for two days, all the papers and the radio were ranting and raving and calling for revenge. Well, on the 9th of November, revenge struck.

That night, all Jewish men were arrested. And first of all, synagogues were put to the torch. Jewish store windows were all smashed. That's where the name "Kristallnacht" comes from, which means the night of the broken glass. And the stormtroopers invaded homes, arrested people, beat them up, destroyed their homes. And matter of fact, my wife, at the time, lived in [Place name] She tells the story of where the stormtroopers broke into her house. And then she had a canary, and they killed the canary and smashed the whole apartment.

Anyway, my uncle was arrested at 2 o'clock in the morning by the police. And we were lucky to be arrested by the police, because the police did everything according to the rules. So whoever was arrested by the police was not physically harmed, as long as we were in the custody of the police.

But anyway, my uncle was arrested at 2:00 in the morning. And by 11 o'clock in the morning, I was home alone My aunt had gone out shopping. And there were three policemen outside. And they said that there were three Jewish men who were working as forced labor on building sites. This area had a lot of armament factories that were expanding at the time. And they took Jewish labor from neighboring villages and used them as forced labor. And some of these guys heard that Jews were being rounded up, and just left, just disappeared. So the police were looking for them.

So there's nobody here. And they came into the apartment and looked around. And all of a sudden, one of the cops looks at me and says, who are you? I told them, I'm a nephew. And he looked at his sergeant, or whoever his superior was. And he said, hmm, just take him along. The orders had been that all Jewish men, I think 16 or 18 to 60, were to be rounded up. But by the time these orders go down to these smaller places, this town in [Place name] only had three Jewish families. They got a little muddled, and so they took everybody they could find.

So we were taken to the police station. My belt was taken from me, like any criminal. Shoelaces were taken from me. And we were treated just like a criminal. In the afternoon, we were taken for a walk around the prison yard, holding up our pants with both hands, and slouched along in laceless shoes.

And all of a sudden, there's a big commotion. They brought in another Jew. This guy never knew he was Jewish. He had one Jewish grandmother. And somebody had found that out and reported to the authorities. And Hitler had decreed that anybody with that much Jewish blood was not Aryan. So he was arrested, like the rest of us. This guy didn't know what hit him. And he also went to Buchenwald with us.

Anyway, in the evening, after dark, they lowered us into a police van. Didn't know where we were going. And after a couple of hours, all of a sudden, the ride got very bumpy. And so we knew we were no longer on the main, paved road. And one of these policemen told us, well, this is where Buchenwald is located. That's the forest where Buchenwald is located.

Well, the sinking fear was a terrible feeling, not because you really knew. We didn't know anything, what Buchenwald was. But over these years-- that was '39, so for six years, they hear all these rumors about concentration camps. And you knew it was something terrible, but you couldn't put your hand on it. It was a fear of the unknown. It's a terrible feeling. It's just this empty feeling in your stomach, and because you really didn't know what's going to happen. But you knew it was going to be terrible.

So the name Buchenwald itself didn't have any association for you, just--

Yes, yes.

--the--

We knew it was a concentration camp, just like Dachau or Ravensbruck. You knew the names of the main concentration camps. As it turned out, there were a lot of smaller ones which you had not heard of. But the major ones, like the three I just mentioned, you knew they existed. And nobody ever talked about it. And nobody who was in there ever talked them, because, as we were told after we were released eventually, nobody is released a second time. And everybody knows that, so if you talk about it and you ever come back, forget it. You'll never come out again. So that's how they kept everybody's mouth shut.

Anyway, so we arrived at this big courtyard with a lot of lights. And brightly lit up and there's guard towers, the barbed wire, and over the big gate, Arbeit Macht Frei-- labor liberates. Well--

What time of day was this?

It was at night. Everything happened at night. And all of a sudden-- and then the police left, because they arranged everything so outsiders wouldn't see much. So after the police had left, the gates opened up and we were pushed and shoved through the gates onto a big parade ground. And all of a sudden, the lights went out. Dogs barked. We were chased and prodded by rifle butts. We didn't know where we were going. We'd never been there. We didn't know where to run. We just ran around in circles. And the dogs were pulling at your legs and at your clothes, and we got-- and it was just terrible. It was confusing, and we were so intimidated.

And all of a sudden, the lights went on again. And I was face-to-face with a guard. And he looks. He smiles at me, and he says-- I was a little boy, 14 years old. And he says, did you bring your schoolbooks along? I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to react, just smiled at him. I was scared stiff, was shaking. And he whispers to me and says, look over there. He pointed with his finger to a barrack. That's Barrack 2A. As soon as the lights go out again, you run as fast as you can in that barrack, because that's where you're going to be.

Well, in the meantime, we had to register and where. And I remember my uncle was being molested. He had to sign his name, and I think they made him sign his name 20 times. What are you writing, Hebrew? That's not German. That's Hebrew. Write it again. Write it. And they really intimidated people. And he must have written his name 20 times or more, till they finally accepted his signature.

Anyway, eventually the lights went out again, and I ran as fast as I could. And there were maybe half a dozen people

who had overheard the conversation between me and the guard. They followed me, and we ran to these barracks. And it was just a bare shed, with six tiers of shelves just supported by poles. And it was just empty, was nothing else in there.

And we just stood around. And we heard the cries of the other prisoners. And they were chased around again, and the barking of the dogs as they were bitten. And we really felt guilty that we were there. And we were just standing there, shivering. Well, after about a half hour, they were marched in, and most of them were a bloody mess.

And before we arrived, there'd been quite a number of Austrian Jews in Buchenwald, who'd been there since the Anschluss, since Hitler had annexed their country. And we were put in their charge. They bandaged the wounded, and they instructed us of the camp rules, and so on and so forth. And some of those Austrians were very good, very helpful. But there were some of them that were almost as bad as the German guards. And they kept on saying, well, we have no choice. If we don't give it to you, they'll give it to us, so we've got to save our own skin.

But I was lucky again. There was a Dr. Herzog. And he took me under his wing. And he told me, get yourself a safe place. Climb up to the sixth tier, because nobody ever gets up there, because there was no way of getting up there, except by climbing up those poles, like a cat. So all the old and the sick were on the bottom shelves. And whenever the guards came in, at night or at any time, they got the brunt of all the cruelty, because these guards all came in with their rubber truncheons and they just lashed out at random.

It was a no-win situation. They would come in and say, hey, you. What's your profession? Let's assume he was a doctor. Let's assume he was a businessman. They'd say, how many Germans committed suicide because of usury? Now, if he'd say, none, they'd beat him up for lying. If he gave a figure, they'd beat him up for causing this German's death. There's just no way. They'd just, with this type of question, ask a doctor, how many women did you subdue in your practice? He'd say, none, again. He couldn't win. He either lied, or he got hurt for doing it. And it was always the old and the sick, who couldn't help themselves. They were beaten mercilessly.

And the routine was, for the first few days, in the morning was roll call. We had to go out to the barracks. Don't forget this was November. It was cold, and we had to stand in front of the barrack at attention all day long, except for the meal break at lunchtime. Meals, at lunch, we had some thin soup. At night, we got a piece of bread and a wedge of cheese, or that black pudding that's made from blood, pig's blood, whatever it is.

And for the rest of the day, we had to stand at attention in front of the barracks. And of course, as I said, it was November. It was cold. It was raining. It was a clearing, just a clearing in the woods, where they put out this temporary barracks. When we arrived and been standing there, they were put up while we were watching--

Were you--

--in front of the--

--issued any clothing, or--

No. We were wearing our own clothes, nothing. See, they were issued clothing on the other side in the camp, where the prisoners were there for some breaking of the law, like my father, for instance, who had said, you still laugh today. I'll know who'll laugh tomorrow. But at the time, I didn't know he was there. He was arrested in September '38. And now, where we were, there was nothing. It was a clearing in the woods. We had no bath, toilet, facilities, or any water at all.

Let's continue from where I started. We had to stand at attention in front, and so the old and the sick just collapsed, passed out, or just dropped dead. Now, if anybody would try to help them, that was already cause for punishment, because the order was, stand to attention. So for an infraction like this, they had tracks. You were strapped on that track. And you were lashed on your bare back, and maybe 10, 15, 20 lashes. But each guard would only administer two or three. They wanted to make sure that each lash was at full strength.

Or they had cubicles. They were so tight, a body couldn't move. And they had openings above those, where the prisoners would get periodic floggings. And people would come back after a day or two, and they would lose 10, 15



pounds or more in a day or two. Of course, many never came back from there. Or they would suspend you, from the armpits, from a tree. And these guards would pass by and poke their truncheon and their rifle butts in your groin, or wherever they fancied, wherever they-- they had such a sadistic sense of humor that anything went.

And the only water for washing or drinking we ever got while we were in there-- I was there 10 days-- was that, well, we were even lucky that it was raining the water that we caught in our tin dishes as it ran off the roof. There was no bathroom. There was a big latrine, which was a big hole in the ground, probably the size of this-- no, probably double the size of this platform. And there were poles supported by trestles. And there we sat, just like birds, taking care of the needs of nature.

And every once in a while, these guards would pass by and just give somebody a little shove. And the people literally drowned in shit. And they'd leave them in there for a day or so. And eventually they'd take them out with a pitchfork, then leave them lying around the latrine for days at an end. Then their bellies would bulge. Some of them even popped open. And if it wasn't that cold, there for sure would have been some kind of epidemic.

So this is what we did, stood at attention for about the first three days in front of the barracks. On the fourth day, they announced that, you stood long enough. Today we'll sit down for a change. So they marched us out of the parade ground. And you had to squat. But pretty soon, we knew very well what the idea was behind that. Apparently, they'd put some laxative in our food. And let's say 98% of the people had diarrhea. I was lucky. A few others were lucky. I was constipated. That was nothing. And people got up to march in groups, to go to the latrine. They were beaten back with rifle butts.

Next to me was a doctor, who came in with a fur coat. And just to show how imitated people, where he turned his fur coat inside out, so the fur was on the inside, so it wouldn't be seen that it was a fur coat. But he took his bare hands to scratch the cement off the parade ground, the hard top, because the diarrhea was running down his leg, so it wouldn't be seen that he soiled the parade ground. That's how scared people were. But anyway, eventually, in the afternoon, as we were marched back to the barracks, we knew, and we found out what the idea was. The guards were selling underwear.

And I must tell you another story, though. And this is something that I always felt very bad about, very disgusted. Then on that day, some of our own people, just by chance, happened to have some newspaper in parts. And they cut this newspaper into small squares and sold it to them, meaning that in the situation, I got I sold it for money to my fellow inmates. I always felt very disgusted. There were very few, but there were some of them. And they, of course, are in the same category as these Austrians I described earlier. These were not the Austrians, because they weren't involved in this. They were in charge of us, and they did not take part in our activities. Whatever they had to do in between, I don't know. But this were our own people who did this to us.

Anyway, the next few days were routine, the same as the other two, and talk about punishment, like, for instance, these tracks were on the side where people got beaten on. And the guards would say, you, you, you, you, bring out the rack. If they just hesitated for one second, didn't run right away, they were also due for that punishment. So at the slightest excuse, they would just methodically beat people up.

Anyway, on the 10th day, in the morning, roll call. My name was called, among those who were due for release. And the reason I was supposed to be released because, as I found out later, I had been registered for a children's transport. And the children transports at that time were organized by various relief organizations in different countries, Holland, America-- not America, but in England, many European countries, I think Canada too, to save German children from the Nazis. And my mother had a cousin in London, who left in 1924, and he was a British subject. And he registered me on a children's transport. So I was due for release.

So we had to go to the Kommandant's office. There was about a group of 20 that was released on that day. And we went to the Kommandant's office, and we had to strip, because nobody with any beating marks was allowed to leave. So when you get out, you had to be clean, so whatever you say can be said is a lie.

So we stripped, and they asked us, how are you going to get to Weimar? See, Buchenwald is maybe about eight or 10 miles from Weimar. And we had to go to Weimar to report to the Gestapo. And then he suggested, well, I'll call the taxis

for you. So he passed the hat around and he collected money. And, well, I didn't have any. So, well, I didn't know what to do. I was on the verge of crying. So the other people said, well, I think after we paid our own fares, we've got nothing left to get you home. So you have money? I says, no, I don't have any money, but I can get it. I'll get home, because if you don't have means to get home, you're not released, either.

Then he passed a plate around for the Winterhilfswerk, the German Winter Relief Fund. So of course, anybody who had money didn't dare not to give. So it was that.

But of course, nobody's released in the daytime, because we were there-- I was there 10 days, some there a few more days. But our heads were shaved. We hadn't washed in a week. In those 10 days, we never washed, except a little water on our hands. Oh, yes, I forgot to mention that. See, at the latrine, at night, were big barrels the used to push into the barracks at night. And every morning, they would ask volunteers to carry out these barrels. And always, everybody wanted to do that. Know why? Because the people, the barrel-bearers, the people who carried out those barrels, were allowed to wash their hands. These were the only people who ever had access to any tap water. So everybody always wanted to take out the latrine in the morning, because that gave you the chance to wash your hands. That's how bad it was.

Anyway, that's how we looked like. We were up to the knees in mud for 10 days. We were shaved. We had not only what happened to some of them, but in my own case, what I had seen, you have this hollow look in your face, like you just came back from hell. So nobody was released at daytime, so you always were released in the middle of the night to catch the last train. And there were very few people at the railroad station, so you are seen by as few people, Germans, as possible.

So about midnight, they told us to walk to the end of the forest, and the taxis will meet you there. Of course, when we got to the end of the forest, there were no taxis. So he had a little business for himself the Kommandant . So we started walking to Weimar, 18 miles, middle of the night. And everybody pooled their money. And of course, everybody took care of their own, the people from small towns, took care of their own people from the same town. So it turned out there was no money left for me.

So when we reported to the Gestapo in Weimar, the official says, well, of course, you all have money get home. I had no choice. I forgot to mention this, one of the things the Kommandant told before we leave. They warned again and again and again that, you're released now, one time. If you ever talk about Buchenwald, you will come back here. And absolutely nobody gets out a second time. And that is what's drilled into every prisoner.

So when we got to Weimar, I tell this Kommandant, well, I'm sorry, but I thought I had enough money, but I don't know how to get home. So he right away starts yelling at me and says, by the law, by the rules, I have to send you back. And of course, what goes through my mind is, nobody gets out a second time.

So I must have looked something awful. But even he took a little pity on me. And he says, look, I'll give you one chance. There's a Jew here in Weimar, who himself just came back from Buchenwald. I'm going to give him a call now and tell him about you. I'm going to tell him about you. If he says right away he's going to help you, I'll send you there. But if he hesitates only slightly, back you go. Now, by this time, it was 4 o'clock in the morning. Of course, we were released midnight. They didn't hire the taxis, so we had to walk those eight or 10 miles at the Gestapo headquarters for a while.

So he gets on the phone. And he dials his number, and he says, this is the Gestapo. Can you imagine the terror in that family? This guy just came back. Well, I didn't hear, but he said, right away, yeah, send him over, send him over. And I went there, and it turned out this guy was released. He was deathly sick. The guy was about to die.

So anyway, his wife and his daughter were there, and they were very nice. I had my first bath in 10 days. And they gave me money, and I went back to my uncle's house, because I dared not go back to my hometown, because I was persona non grata. Anyway, my uncle came back a couple of weeks later. And I stayed with him till February '39, when I went to England in the transport.

What was your uncle's condition when he came back?

Well, I think he came back in comparative good shape. I mean, he wasn't-- I guess he had-- it's hard to tell. See, especially right after this, after you've been through all that, you don't talk about it. And as I said, people are left there, even if they're due for release, a week or so longer till any marks heal up, because nobody gets released if you have any bodily marks on you. So I don't know that. But I don't know what he told his wife. We didn't have to discuss it, because we'd seen the same thing.

In all this time, your parents didn't know where you were?

Yes. Yes.

Were they--

My mother knew. Well, my mother had found out on the commuter train, when two of my former schoolmates were joking about it, that I was rounded up.

Well, we were allowed to write a card. Yes. We were allowed a preprinted card. Everything was arranged like for instance, All the people that died there were beaten to death, that had drowned in the latrine, they had standard forms. They said, we regret to inform you that so-and-so contracted this sickness, and despite the heroic efforts of the camp doctors, your loved one succumbed. Oh, it was all so phony. They had it all down pat. Yes, we were allowed to write a form card-- I am here, so-and-so, barrack number so-and-so, this madness, because you did have to write for money or clothing if you stayed longer. You couldn't have survived otherwise. But she had found out where I was on the train ride, on the commuter train.

Anyway, my uncle and the [INAUDIBLE], my grandmother lived with him. She was, I think, 93 or 94 years old. She was a frail old woman. And she was taken to a deportation train on a wheelbarrow. See, I know that because, well, another uncle of mine lived in the same town. He was very lucky that he wasn't home on the 9th of November. He had children in Italy. And he had been visiting there, and he happened to be on a train back from Italy that night when the Jews were rounded up. But none of them came out.

Do you know where they were taken?

Theresienstadt. And what I'm saying, the reason that I found out what happened to my grandmother is because of this uncle's son, who had lived in Italy. After Mussolini instituted the racial laws, they went to Sweden. So Sweden was neutral. So they were in contact with his parents almost till the end. And through them, I know how they were deported. As I said, the 94-year-old woman was taken in a wheelbarrow.

Anyway, my parents-- my father came out. Well, I don't know. He was in Buchenwald quite a while, because after a while, they had an epidemic of typhoid fever. So nobody was released, because he was sentenced to nine months for defamation of the Reich after he had said, you still have today. I don't know if you'll have tomorrow.

So he eventually was released, and he was a nervous wreck, He had to report to the Gestapo every day. I mean, I wasn't there anymore, but from what I hear from my mother. And he used to shiver at night in bed because he's scared of having to report the next morning again. And they survived in Mellrichstadt until-- and they got some support from some old friends, like I explained before. They risked their own safety to feed them.

And apparently, in 1941, half of France had fallen. France fell in 1940. Apparently, Hitler let one last sealed train go through occupied France. And they were on that train, which ran through France into Portugal. And they were stranded in Portugal for a few months, two or three months. And eventually they got a boat while in North Africa, Bermuda, the United States and arrived here in August '41, because after America entered the war in December '41, nobody got out anymore.

So I was in England. And after France had fallen in 1940, of course, the British also were very nervous, expecting an

invasion by Hitler. So they rounded up all foreign-born-- or as many. They were not as methodical, nor as efficient, as the Germans. And a lot of people fell through the net, but they caught me again one day.

Well, when I went to England, of course, I had to support myself. The first job that was offered to me happened to be in a bakery. And of course, that was also the end of the Depression in England. And foreigners were not allowed to work. The only conditions under which you were allowed to work was that either you had to take a job that English people wouldn't do, like a domestic butler, and if it meant many people, especially people who would never have dreamt of doing work, but doctors, lawyers, would go as couples, as household help, to support themselves in the-- or you could train, because at that time, I was only in transit, because I had affidavit to come to the United States. I was only in transit in England, of course, which became almost permanent once the war had broken out.

And so I got a job in a bakery, and I was a trainee to be a baker. So after France had fallen in 1940, one day the police came to the bakery and told me to go home and pack my things, and they would pick me up, or report or whatever. Of course, compared to what I had rounded before, this was a picnic.

[LAUGHTER]

So I spent from May '40 till September '40 on the Isle of Man. And then I was released, because I got my visa to the United States. But at that time, of course, there were no transatlantic flights yet. And that was during the U-boat-- the submarine-- warfare. And of course, you couldn't get any more passenger ships in the United States because everything was reserved for the war effort. So I stayed in England all during the war. And eventually, I became an air raid warden during the Blitz in '40, at the end of '40.

We're going to continue with this story in a few minutes, which is going to stop for a moment.

OK.