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Good afternoon. I'm Bernard Weinstein, director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project of the Holocaust Resource Center. Sharing the interview with me is Pat Wiederhorn. We are privileged to introduce Mr. Leo Laufer. Mr. Laufer.

I would like to dedicate this oral testimony to a very good friend of mine, who I would consider an angel, who was a liberator of Ohrdruf, which is now in East Germany, April the 4th, 1945. Not only did he liberate me, but he has continued to work on behalf of the message to bring to the public about the Holocaust, which transpired from 1939 until 1945. I'm grateful that six years ago, I have met him. And unfortunately, he passed away not too long ago. And also to Ann, who looks like she is keeping up the legacy of Jack Colston.

Thank you.

My name is Leo Laufer. I was born March 15, 1924, in Lodz, Poland, which was the second largest city of Poland, with a population of about 650,000. Prior to the war, we had a population of 250,000 Jewish people. I would like to give you a prelude to the Holocaust, as I remember it as a youngster.

I came from a very religious family, very poor. When I read about poverty now, I reflect back on the way we lived with a family of eight children, four brothers and four sisters, and a father and mother, 10 people in two little rooms, which would measure approximately 10 by 10. And the reason I know the dimensions so very good, I took the liberty in going back to Poland, my first trip in 1983 and then again in 1987, to verify a lot of things to show to my family and really the way it was, the prelude to the Holocaust.

I will give you several examples that I recall as a youngster. My mother used to tell the children, the ones who still remember, like I, to stay home Easter and Christmas, because some of the teachings in the hierarchy were so vicious antisemitic, they were scared that somebody would get hurt. And this was true. But we also had some very good righteous Christian too, not all of them were of this nature.

I never attended a public school, because my father felt that I would not get treated like an average youngster, because I wore a special type of Jewish hat. I had curls under my ears. My father wore a long beard, almost like a rabbi. And he was scared that we would be mistreated, because the identity of being Jewish, even though as a youngster had very beautiful blond hair. You cannot tell it now. But I still got my blue eyes.

So I went to a chedar. Never practically learned the language of the Polish language, except in the street and from friends, but not in school. I think I showed my wife, who was a second generation Dallasite. And I have four daughters, all of them who were raised in Dallas, Texas. They graduated high school there. And as soon as they graduated, for some unknown reason, they never wanted to attend any Texas colleges. And they came East, Boston, Connecticut, all kinds of places, including Columbia.

But they did very well. They graduated college. They also went to graduate school. All four of them I believe are trying to change the world, because they got master of social work. I hope they did some good. And I'm sure they're doing very good. Thank God, God has been good to me, even though I remain the only one from the family. I have five grandchildren, four sons-in-law. Three of them live in New York presently, one of them in Israel. And God willing, next year my second one will move to Israel. So I almost have to fly from Tel Aviv to New York from New York back to Dallas, so I retired now. I'm going to give my all time to my family, my children, and also, as you can see, giving this story about the way it was.

In 1939, as I remember very vividly, on September the 1st, there was a blackout. We lived in a very, very poor neighborhood. It was a four-story building. The landlord was of German descent, which we called Volksdeutsche. Several Polish people of German descent lived in the same building.

As soon as Germany took over the city of Lodz, which was never bombed-- it stayed just the way it was. Warsaw was bombed-- we could see the animosities of a double dimension, one by the Germans and one by own neighbors, who were of German descent. Immediately, they had armbands with swastikas on. And not only this, they lost some of the

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Poles who lost their own country. This was before they formed the ghetto. They used to show to the windows where the Jewish people are living, and they used to bring them out to go to street cleaning, to all kind of dirty works, like small groups in 10 or 20.

As this thing went on, I remember one incident that I've never believed could happen, even in Poland, even though Poland was very known to be an antisemitic country because of the teaching of the hierarchy in the Catholic church. Across the street from us was a bakery. When the Germans took over, everybody had to get a ration card to procure their food. Of course, the main thing of food was bread. We used to go in line across the street and stay for many hours until probably the next morning at 6 o'clock when the bakery opened up, and you allowed your rations.

My mother was very happy she had a lot of children. So we could switch between a brother and a sister to go across the street to stay in line. And every so often, you would see some of our own citizens from our city, some of them our own neighbors, used to pull us out by the arm. He'd say, you're a Jew. You don't-- you don't need to eat.

This is when I first saw the agony of really being Jewish in a country where the people have lost their country and still they hated us. I knew they hated us before. But I didn't realize to the extent. Then as time progressed-- this was in September of 1939-- by May, the starvation between the time of September until May of 1940, until they finally closed the ghetto, was absolutely unbearable.

Let me give you a little outline of my family. I've my older brother, who was from a previous marriage of my father, already moved out of the house prior to the war. He had his wife and his own family, two children. I had an older sister, who was also from the previous marriage, stayed with us. So we had seven children in the house and my father and my mother.

I had an older brother, who was a year and a half older, which came from my mother. My mother had six children actually. He died in 1938. And I remember he was, I would say, the crown of my father. And the reason for it, he was a little different than me. He was taken up the same steps as my father, very learned in the Talmud and in the Bible. He was, I would say, the privileged boy. He was the oldest. And he used to sit with him for hours on end to teach him, to learn.

And I was already a little different youngster. I was maybe, you would say, a little more outgoing. I wanted to go to see a movie. But how do you go to a movie with a long coat like we used to wear or the little hat that I wore, which was considered-- from a mile away you could recognize that I was Jewish. But I had some other friends already. So I was a little different.

My brother, my older brother, unfortunately, passed away in 1938 on a very minute thing now, which is called appendicitis. I think he stayed in a hospital for a day or two. And he died of an infection. And I remember so vividly, we buried him. And a year later, by Jewish tradition, you have to put a stone.

And as poor we were-- I don't know how to describe poverty, but I went back in 1983 to see the improvement. And the toilet facility is still in the back yard the way it was 40 some odd years ago. The water has been piped in. We used to pump water in the backyard and bring it up two flights. We never had a stove from gas. We used to chop wood and coal. Real very, very primitive, but we were a very happy family.

And a year later, my father wanted to put a stone on my brother's grave. And we didn't have any money. And he went to the family, from one to another, pedaling a few dollars, zloty, which we called it. And he finally succeeded in getting a very primitive stone without any marble, which was probably not the best thing to do for an older son, but he couldn't help himself. And in reality, it turned out to be very good, because would he had a marble, the stone would have been broken up during the war or even after the war. And his stone, thank God, is still the way it was in 1983 when I first saw it as it was in 1940, except for the grass growing.

So I became a more outgoing youngster. And when they closed the ghetto on May 31 of 1940, I saw very bleak for my family. My father already had an incident with some neighbors, the Polish citizens, who dragged him down from the house, cut his beard. And this was the biggest disgrace for him. I remember when he came back up, his face, it was

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probably very swollen.

Excuse me, Leo, this was done by a Pole, not by a German.

No, not by German. It was but Polish citizen before the ghetto, when you lived in the same buildings. They usually used to come by some, what we used to call, hooligans. They used to point to the window where the Jews live. And the Germans used to come and drag them down and did all kind of cleaning toilets and streets and so on. And they dragged my father down. And they cut his beard.

And I remember when he came back, he put like a handkerchief, a little towel around his face not to show the marks. And we were scared for my father to go out and procure some food or whatever. So I practically became, what you would call, the man of the house. I was already going on 18 years old. So I knew what should be done. And I decided that time that I am not going to let my family die of hunger.

I had a few friends from the neighborhood that we used to play soccer in the street, like any other youngster. And one of them was a very precious lady by the name of Grabowska. And her son was my friend. She was a very devout Catholic, because I remember during the ghetto when they closed, I decided to go across the barbed wire, take a chance, even if I get shot, to go to every-- with some kind of an idea. And the idea was plain that I would like to start smuggling with us.

And I told her how it would work. I told her that she could get whatever commodity she would have, a loaf of bread or a pound of butter or potatoes or whatever it could be a commodity, that she would probably get 10 times as much as she would pay for it, because across on the Christian side there was availability to go to the farm and procure something. With us in the ghetto, we couldn't do it.

Furthermore, I have pretty good access, because we did not have to move from the ghetto. We were so poor that I didn't realize that I was living in the ghetto before there was a ghetto. So our street became part of the ghetto. Except the street behind our building was already the Christian side. And I had an opportunity to know the neighbors across the street by having contacted them.

My first contact was across the barbed wire. I spent the night at this Mrs. Grabowska's house. Her son was my friend. And she was very gracious. I remember at the time I asked her, where is your husband? And she told me he was in the Polish army.

And I told her the proposition. I said, we can work out a scheme whereby she would come at a certain time at a certain place through the barbed wire and have small packages, like a loaf of bread, very nominal thing, and thrust it across the barbed wire. And I will be there to fetch it. And then I will reimburse her with the money by having a little stone with the money wrapped around and cross it at a certain place across our fence, which was the other side, where the Christian side was. It worked beautifully.

And I might confess that for the first few months, from May of 1940 until around October of 1940, I think our family was the best fed family around the block. I used to get a bread. We had enough. When I used to get a pound of butter, I used to take a little part for us. The rest of them I would sell. Price was no object, because people would give you almost anything for food.

It was such a tragedy that I don't think that I could even now or my family could imagine what it means, sustenance, to get something in your body to survive. It is hard for anybody who has never been hungry to realize what it is. So I had no problem of selling this thing at any price I want. Some was left for me. Plenty of it went to this Mrs. Grabowska.

This kept them for quite a duration until finally I got caught. I got caught, and I was turned over to the Gestapo. To be very honest with you, I got caught by some Jews, by our own. They wanted to be partners. And I was a very stubborn kid. And I said, what did you contribute to this? And I said, I am risking my life. And I guess I was too adamant. I don't know if I would have been better off to share with him or not. I did not. And they turned me over to the Gestapo.

The Gestapo came to the house one day and arrested me and put me-- in fact, when I went back to Poland, I showed my

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wife and my daughters the little place which is across the street from the big church where the Kripo, which is called the Gestapo, held me down there for almost two weeks.

I was severely beaten for almost two weeks. But I guess I was very stubborn. All they wanted to know is not so much what I got across, but who is the one who is the provider. And I was stubborn because I learned the trick before because somebody else was arrested. And they didn't tell them where it came from and they let them out.

And this was my alibi. I don't know. I saw a package coming across the barbed wire. I happened to be down there. And I caught it. And that's all. I didn't deny that I didn't get it. And I did not tell them anything.

It took two weeks. I was beaten up very severely for the two week's duration. I wound up in a hospital. When I finally came home from the hospital, I remember I could hardly walk. Excuse me, my behind was just unbelievable. It was broken to pieces. I had stitches. It was unreal.

I came home, and then I saw what happened during less than three weeks in the house, I had no alternative but go right back what I did before. The furniture-- there was no furniture practically. It was all broken up and used as wood for warming up the house, for cooking, whatever little we had. The whole family look like skeletons.

I finally decided to go back. I contacted Mrs. Grabowska. And I told her that don't worry, I didn't say anything. She knew that I was arrested. And I told her this. Don't worry. We can continue right the way it was. And we did.

But this ordeal didn't last too long. It lasted about two to three weeks. One night, probably around midnight, some civilian men, Germans, knocked on the door. My father opened up. And they asked specifically for me, where is Leo?

Well, I came forward. First, when they came in, they hit my father so hard he felt right across the whole room. Then they asked for me. Finally, I got up out of bed, and I came forward. I told him, that's me. And he said, put your clothes on and come with me. I didn't know what it was, but they spoke German. And you could understand them. And one of them spoke Polish. And they took me. And I thought it was for investigation. They locked me up.

And a few days later, they shipped me, there was a group. That's the first time-- this was actually the last time that I ever saw my whole family. I never returned home from that day.

There was a group. They put me in some kind of internment camp. And there they selected almost 200 people. And we were transferred on train. And this is when I came to the first camp, which is around the Poznan area, which is near Wolsztyn. And it's called Ruchocki-Mlyn.

When we first arrived down there, I want you to know that all of us were very satisfied with the outlook on the outside of so-called farm. Actually, it is not a camp. It was a farm area. Let me try to describe it you the way it looked.

On the right side of the gate, there was a large barn, like you would see in Eastern Europe, like Holland or France or Belgium, which is not made out of wood. It is made out of brick because of the severe weather. And on the left side, there was a little small building, looks like made out of the same brick, like the owner lives down there. And facing us was another barn.

And we saw on one of the barns, on the side to the barn, there was a big mill like you would see in Holland, like a water mill, with the blades and so on. And everybody was so joyful and happy and satisfied. I said, my gosh, this is the best thing we could have done to get out of the ghetto. We will have enough food. We have a mill. There is corn. There is a farm. We're going to have a lot of food.

And the anxiety of food, you forget about freedom. You forget about family almost. You forget about anything as long as you can fill your stomach.

And here we stand and waited. And when we came to the camp, we were greeted by some civilians, who spoke Polish, and some German. You could detect a little accent, which was around like Volksdeutsche, Polish citizen of German

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descent, with swastikas, no civilian clothes, with rifles. They told us to line up. And the first thing they told us to go to this barn facing down there to get some shovels.

So a lot of us went. We got shovels. And they told us to go to this big barn and clean up the manure. Of course, you're under the gun. And you don't know what to do. You do what you were told.

We cleaned up. And we never realized what you really are doing and what is going to confront us later. We cleaned up the manure. And the way it looks, like the cows probably left maybe three or four hours before we came in here. We cleaned up the manure as much as we could. We had no water actually to really clean it up.

And then they told us to go to the barn and get straw. And we lined up the whole big barn with straw. And this became our course for sleeping. We had no baggage with us. The clothes that you had on you, this became your possessions. And we slept, and we thought at the time, well, you know, we could suffer a night or two and so on. I want you to know that this became the lodging for almost six months until around March of 1941.

Did you work there?

Yes, we did. The type of work later-- after the liberation, I was trying to reflect back why they took us? What did we do down there? What did it bring, the asset? And what was there was a river that was running through this area where this mill was situated. The blades were touching the water. And as the water picks it up, it grinds the corn. This water, this river was running crooked. And what we needed to do is to straighten up for a long way all the way down the area this river to run smoothly instead of crooked.

Zigzagging.

And when I went back the first time to camp, I asked the question, why did they put us down there? Why did we work on the river? Because I went to the, presently what you call, city hall to find out what is all about it. And they told me that the only time you could work on this river was in the wintertime. In the summertime, it was like it was sink in. Because I remember when we worked down there, October, November, December, and January and February, you could actually cut-- when you use your shovel, you can cut in the ground, just like you cut into cheese. In the summertime, we wouldn't be able to straighten it up. And this is what we did down there.

By the time we left, we had probably over half dead bodies. And let me tell you one thing. We had enough food. We used to get two big bowls of soup that you practically couldn't finish it and some bread and sometime we got some margarine or a little piece of sausage and so on. But the dead, I contribute, was two-fold. One of them from hygiene, which was number one. And the second was from the severe weather.

And will give you an example of hygiene. For the duration of almost six months, the same clothes we came in is the same clothes we left. We never washed it. We never changed it. We had, I guess-- the lice probably had a picnic with us.

What kind of clothing were you issued?

We were not issued any clothing. The clothing that we came from home, this is the clothing you stayed until you left this camp.

And this was this was warm weather clothing that you came with?

Well, it was whatever you could get a hold. When they took me out from the house, you know, you took whatever you-- probably your jacket, your coat and pants and shoes and so on. This is the clothes we stayed.

But the tragedy was that we never had the opportunity in this particular area to take a shower almost six months. And the lice, it was unbelievable. It was-- you know, when I reflect back and read stories about camps, big ones, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Dachau, I don't think I can compare it with it as far as the hygiene, especially.

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And we died like flies. I remember the skins of all of us were so red all the time for the penetration of the lice that actually penetrated the skin. And you couldn't-- it was dark. There was no lights in this barn. During the day, our pastime was scratching all the time. It was horrible. Food we had.

And the second thing was the frost. We used to bring home boys so frozen that actually the limbs came off. And we used to drag them home on these wagons. And I remember right in the back of this barn, a little distance, not far away, was like a zoned off little, I would say, a private cemetery. You could see like blocks of cement around it, like a zoned off area.

And we dug this so deep. And every day, we took a few of them home. And we dumped them. And we dumped them. And we dumped them. And I tell you, we got so immune to it that it didn't make anything to us. I don't know, I guess everybody was in a zone just to survive another day, and we kept on.

I remember on the latter part of February 1941-- we talk about resistance. I think we had a little resistance, even though not too many of them survived out of this dilemma for the first six months. But we had a little resistance. And let me outline you resistance that maybe you've never heard of it.

The resistance we had, we had some smart kids who were left. And they said, in order to get out of here, we're going to have to do something. So the first thing one of them came up and he said, we're going to strike. One morning, we're just not going to go to work. Let him kill us. And really, we were actually-- we came to the conclusion that life wasn't worth living anymore. Let them kill us.

But from these 200, I don't recall anybody who ever committed suicide, because really you couldn't commit suicide and killing yourself unless somebody else will kill you. So we really didn't commit suicide. There was no suicide.

So one decided that we need to get a doctor. If a doctor would inspect us and see the way we look and the circumstance we are, maybe we'll have an opportunity-- and our dream was the first six months that after we get through here, they're going to send us back to the ghetto. We'll be back with our families. And so we suffered. And everything is going to be beautiful. And this was my dream. This was everybody's dream. So we waited.

So one guy comes along, he said we're going to strike. And the second guy, we finally had a consensus one night in the dark, we're going to strike next morning. The next morning, they knocked on the door to get up. Nobody gets up. We don't go to work. Strike, strike, strike. And we told these Poles that we cannot continue this. And that was it.

And the owner who requisitioned us was a little short German fellow, spoke Polish and German. And he lived in this little building. And one guy said, I'll fix him up. We took some hands full of lice. And when he came into the barn, they threw it at him. The man was vicious I mean, he was ready to kill, but nobody got killed. And we told him, we want a doctor. Finally, we waited a few days and a doctor came.

I remember as today, before the doctor came, a few days before, some youngsters decided to be very smart, which maybe it was smart or not smart. They just said, what are you going to show the doctor physically that we are sick? The ones who were physically sick already dead. The ones who survived looked half decent. What are we going to show physically?

So we had one guy said, he said, let's take some nails out of the barn. And they punched your body. And usually we had some salt from the soup. So they used to rub it in. And you get sores. And then another guy comes along and he said, you know, I've got another idea. They wrapped up some little pieces of cloth, like a small string And you wrap your arms around or your legs and your body, and you swell up if you leave it like this for 24 hours. And we did it like crazy guys. You know, we didn't know. We wanted to survive.

I did it myself. I wrapped my-- I became double the size, my arms and legs. And then here comes the doctor a few days later. And he told us to take off your clothes. He's going to look. The doctor was about 75 feet away behind, because he was a German doctor, civilian. And he looked at us, and everybody let his pants down and take off the jacket and

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everything. And it didn't take him-- I don't think it took him a minute to look at all of us who were left. And he said to this Polish German, he said, quarantine.

And we were so joyful, because quarantine, you know one thing, you're not going to go to work. You'll be quarantined. A few days later they brought some trucks in, and we went to the next camp. And the next camp was actually in the city of Poznan, which is called the stadium. It was a stadium actually. You could see it, big tremendous field.

We were down there a very short time, a few weeks. But what I could remember, one episode in this particular camp, when we came in, you could see the field. The entire field was grass, except the buildings we were in. And within two weeks time, you couldn't find a green grass or blade of grass in the entire perimeter. When we got the soup, everybody used to grab a hold of this grass and rip it up in small little pieces and put it in the soup. So the soup would get real thick. So you can fill your stomach, to fill it up.

And, of course, after that we got all kind of sickness. There was typhus. There was diarrhea, especially. It was unbelievable. There were so many-- you could see in the stadium dead bodies walking around like zombies.

Well, thank God, we didn't stay too long. And we came from the stadium. Then they selected the ones who looked half decent in smaller groups. And, in fact, when I first came to the stadium, I realized that I was not the only one who was incarcerated, because this stadium comprised of thousands of Jewish boys. I thought we were the only 200 who left Lodz, because for whatever reason, like mine, I know it was for smuggling.

Then we saw thousands from different parts of Poland. I said, where did you come from? I came from this city, from this village, and so on. And I said, my gosh, what is going on in here?

Were all these young men are around the same age? Or where they were older--

About the same. I know in the first group that we were, I don't think there was anybody above 25. It was all this age around 17, 18, 20s maybe, about to the 30s. You never saw anybody older.

And they were all in fairly good physical condition.

I guess so because if they were selected for work, they were in physical condition. Otherwise they wouldn't have taken them at all. They would have left them in the ghetto. So this was the labor force that they got up in the beginning.

Finally, the stadium, they selected smaller groups of about 100 to 150 to 200 to different areas. And I remember the first day we went, we worked on a highway. And I remember there was a German company out of Szczecin, who had all the machinery and cranes and so on. And we worked mainly on highways. We were building the highway from Poznan to Warsaw.

And then we worked on a railroad. And we were transferred like every few months, every two or three months to another camp. So from the stadium, we made another six camps from 1941 until 1943.

And, of course, the tragedy was from one came to the other, it was like a domino effect. Wherever you made a friend in one camp, you lost him in a second. Wherever you made a friend in his second, you lost in the third. You never found the friends as a continuation to be steady with you as a real friend to hold down with somebody. Usually somebody got sick and had diarrhea and then he had typhus and then he wound up with another kommando. Or they took him apart. Or they took him to the dispensary. You never wound up with a friend that you can hold on for the duration. And this was an agony, because you needed somebody to hold on to life.

And, of course, on August 1943, they eliminated all these small camps. And the reason I remember so well, because I got the documents from Auschwitz, that 1,140 some odd youngsters came in August of 1943 to Auschwitz, which was Birkenau. Actually, it was not in Auschwitz, but Birkenau which was about three miles away from Auschwitz.

When we came in to Birkenau, you saw an entirely different atmosphere. You saw officers, soldiers, tall, handsome

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German guys with boots, with whips. And as we got off the trains, they were going right and left. And nobody knew-- now, I know what happened. But then in those days, I did not know what right mean and left mean. I guess I was fortunate enough to go to the right side. If it was for the left or the right, I don't know. But I'm here to tell you the story.

So later on, I found out from the documents, that 1,140 some odd people came in from this group. And only a little over 400 went into the camp. So as you can tell, 2/3 went somewhere else. And somewhere else I found out later meant to go to the crematorium.

So we came in, and we were assigned jobs. But the first thing I must tell you, this was the first time in the almost from 1940 of October until August '43 that I got the best shower and the best delousing that I ever had in the entire duration from 1940. New clothes, new boots, whatever they gave me was new, was fresh. It was clean. Every blade of your body hair was shaven off and so on. So this was gratifying.

I failed to mention a couple of instances that I think would be important, because I skipped so many camps-- six of them. In one of the camps-- you know, people ask now question after so many years, why didn't you resist? Why didn't you fight? Couldn't you kill a German and be satisfied and maybe the rest of them would survive? Rebel, react. I told you already one resistance. So where did it get us? To another camp. And then we went to another camp. I'll give you two camps that when we worked, one of them was on the highways. And one of them we worked at the railroad.

I want to show you now, I don't know, now probably, I would be more of an activist maybe even to give my life to save somebody. But I don't think in those days I wanted so much to live, because I did not know where the end is. And especially when I left an entire family at home and I did not know what happened to them. So I wanted to resist fighting and I wanted to keep on living.

But I want to give you now one example in a camp. We had two boys who ran away. They were, I believe, from Bedzin, from some city in Poland. A few days later, they brought them back.

I want you to know that when you were in camp you were identified through some identity that you couldn't really be-- that people wouldn't recognize you. First of all, if they look at your hair, they were shaven. You had special cuttings in the middle with a razor blade, like a Mohawk haircut. So everybody was outside of the camp would recognize that you were at camp. Rewards were plenty by the Germans in order to find anybody who ran away from a concentration camp or a slave labor camp.

These two boys were brought camp. And in this camp, it was a fairly good, I would say. It was hard labor. But we got food. It was very strenuous. It was hard. But it wasn't bad. We were not beaten. We were not really killed.

Do you remember the name of the camp, Leo?

I don't. I think I got it because I got a book in Poland of over 5,600 some odd places of incarceration in Poland alone. And I'm trying to pinpoint certain areas. I think I got one. I do not recall the name. I got at home somewhere. There was two or three camps that I remember because it came to focus after I read through the thing, because these camps were only like two months or three months.

In this particular camp, I remember there was a wagon. It was a truck. It looks like a cement truck with an opening on the top, like a round top. This was called the delousing wagon. Every week we used to take our clothes and put them in this truck on the top. And they used to turn on the steam, so they could kill the lice instantly by the power of the steam. And it was hygiene. It was good.

When these two boys came in-- they caught them. We came home from work. And all of them had to line up in five, like they usually do. And then they took some of the boys from us, from the prisoners, who had to take one boy at a time, put him in in this wagon, shut the top, turn on the thing, and let it run. It didn't take long. And we stayed.

And all of us were so flabbergasted to realize, what is the result going to be now? And then these same kids had to go pull them out. I don't know. I don't think any human being-- really could visualize the person who went in and how you

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looked after they took them out. He looked like a caricature, big head, shrunken arms. It is horrible.

And each one of us had to go through-- of course, this was a smaller camp. This was not over 150 to 200. And we had a walk through. And then this wasn't enough. They had to take the second one in. And we got to go again around. This will show you what it meant discouraging of revolting, discouraging to resist.

Another camp, I remember so vividly, we did not know what happened. This is what happened during the night. Usually, the way the camps were built, you did not have any toilet facility in the same block. You usually had to go to the end of the block. There was the latrine. And this we had to go.

So I guess what happened, one of the youngsters had diarrhea. And he was running from his block to the end and probably couldn't make it. And he went behind the barracks. And some of the guards-- I want you to know when I emphasize this that all these guards were not Germans. We already had Ukrainian, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, all civilians. No German soldiers. No uniforms, all civilian clothes with swastika band and rifles. And they caught him.

The next morning when we got up at Appell, you stay outside. And some boys had to dig a grave. Standing right down, they put them him in. And they shovel the sand back in with him standing about up so deep to the chin. And we had to go through and go to work.

And the agony of the all day. What happened? Did they take him up? What happened? When he came home from work, of course, he was dead. They had to dig a grave behind the barracks, dump him in. And this was another episode.

So when you talk about atrocities, I think they invented so many things and what to do with human beings that I could hardly scratch. I don't think the dogs could be treated this way as human beings were. And as I told you, we went on. We came to Auschwitz. In Auschwitz--

Excuse me, in this camp, there was nobody there who wore a German uniform or there were no Germans there?

No, German uniform. There were Volksdeutsche, Poles of German descent. Some of the guards were Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian. I never saw one single uniform German soldier from October of 1940 until August of 1943. There was no German soldiers with uniforms. It was all civilians, because this was all civilian labor. It was all contracted, probably requisitioned by whoever company they was. And we were the slaves.

In Auschwitz, when we came in, as I told you already, that we got the best cleaning of our body that we ever had. He got the uniform, the stripe uniform. They gave us a tattoo. And they gave me a number. And they transferred us to different barracks and so on.

The first kommando that I worked was horrible, because, you know, you got to understand in the camps even there was a lot of protection if you know somebody. And there was a lot of who the kappo was, who the block Elderste is, who the Schreiber-- you know, each block in Birkenau had a block Elderste, which was the block leader. Then you had a Schreiber, who runs down who died, who, you know, and so on.

If somebody died, the new block, overnight, you got to drag them out, stay at the Appell behind the barracks to count. Everything had to count. It was so methodical that everything had to be on record. Everything had to be-- it was so bureaucratic, that everything that you did was recorded day and so on. In fact, I found later my own records after the war, where I worked, when I came in, because I didn't remember dates. Was it Monday or Tuesday or what day? I have now all the records, when I came in, when I went out, and how I was transferred, and everything.

So in Birkenau, I made a remark to someone-- and I want to make it in here-- is when I came to Auschwitz to Birkenau, I said it was like going from hell to heaven. And I'm sure a lot of people will probably disagree. How could you compare hell to heaven and calling heaven Auschwitz? And I will give you real in my analogy what I meant when I was already a few weeks in Birkenau.

I was assigned to a job to work on, what they call it. I don't know how you would describe it in English. It's called lorry.

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It was real small sitings railroads, where we used to dig and load it and the lorry. And you push it, and they come back empty. And then you load it again. And it was pretty hard work. But I think, I guess I was young, I could do it. I don't think--

Did the work have a purpose or was it just work for--

Some it was purposely, it was purpose, was building. It was all kind of mountainous area and some other area. Some people were assigned to the Buna Werke, which was, what do you call it, with airplanes and so on. There was a lot of-- some of them was just to keep you busy.

And I worked on the-- and every day, and the reason I made this remark heaven is when you went to work and you line up behind each block every morning and they count you and you start marching and you go in with this music going in, with this music coming back. And all this music was all like you would go to the Metropolitan Opera now, you know, and hear classical music. It wasn't any rock or jazz. It was classical music, beautiful music. And here you see violinists and bass and cellos and beautiful. And marched to the music. And you feel like you lifted up.

And then you come back home. And you see all the people mostly like dead zombies walking to work and dead of them coming back. And every day you could see on both sides of the wires, which were electrified, you could see people hanging. Every day, there wasn't a day that I was in Birkenau that you wouldn't see a few people hanging on the barbed wire. I guess they probably felt enough is enough, and they commit suicide.

Excuse me, Leo, we have to stop for a few minutes to change the tape. So we'll continue momentarily.

OK.

OK.

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