

[0:00:00]

Robert Buckley: ... the 30th 1994. And we're doing an interview of one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Would you please give us your name and the place you were born?

Edward Kaplan: My name is Edward Kaplan, K-A-P-L-A-N. I was born in Poland, in Warsaw.

Robert Buckley: And would you give us the date of your birth?

Edward Kaplan: The date is the 1st of March 1922.

Robert Buckley: 1922. I understand you're one of Jehovah's Witnesses?

Edward Kaplan: Yes. I am a Jehovah's Witnesses – Witness.

Robert Buckley: When did you become one of Jehovah's Witnesses?

Edward Kaplan: I become a Witness in 1974.

Robert Buckley: 1974. And so the story you're going to tell us is about what happened to you ...

Edward Kaplan: In 1939 'til 1945.

Robert Buckley: All right. Well, let's go back to your family. We'd like to know a little bit about your family background and so on. Would you please give us the name of your mother and your father?

Edward Kaplan: My mother's name was **Haia**. My father's name was Joseph.

Robert Buckley: And how many brothers and sisters did you have and can you name them?

Edward Kaplan: We have three sisters and two more brothers. We were all six together.

Robert Buckley: And what is your family background?

Edward Kaplan: Family background: Our family was all in business, in iron business, scrapyard business, in factories also.

Robert Buckley: What was it like in Poland in 1933 when Hitler took over in Germany? What was the feeling or the thinking back then? Do you recall?

Edward Kaplan: Yes. We was a little concerned about Hitler came to power in 1933. And we saw many German Jews at work. Hitler sent them to Poland and we was between us, and we was shocked. Although we was not so concerned so much because we didn't – we know what could be hard times, but we didn't realize what could happen to us.

Robert Buckley: How old were you in 1933, approximately?

Edward Kaplan: Eleven years.

Robert Buckley: Eleven years old. So what did you hear in school as a young man, as you were going to school, about what was going on in Germany?

Edward Kaplan: We know that time Hitler's system was a racial system, a nationalist system. And we was concerned because he wrote in 1923 *Mein Kampf*. And we know a little bit about *Mein Kampf*, what he will do in general with Jewish people.

Robert Buckley: What did your father do to prepare the family for what might happen in the future?

Edward Kaplan: Really, we didn't prepare much. We didn't. Sometimes we talk about to immigrate to Israel, later on – not, – around '38 that time, to immigrate to Israel. And I remember, too, _____ [clears throat] some people used to come to our home and encourage us to immigrate to Israel.

Robert Buckley: And that was in what year approximately?

Edward Kaplan: About '38, some close there.

Robert Buckley: So they began to realize –

Edward Kaplan: They used to come for Israel people and they want to take out some – take off Jewish people so they can go to Israel that time.

Robert Buckley: What was the big turning point in Poland, in Jewish people, do you think? What year, what time period?

Edward Kaplan: The time period start in 1939. The war started September 1st. The war started, and the German crossed the Polish border. And they started to bomb Warsaw, and they destroyed houses. And we was hiding in the basements, all our family and other families, yeah.

Robert Buckley: Did the bombers come over to you?

Edward Kaplan: They come over home and other homes. We was – went to book our special places to prepare for the time. And we was laying in the bunkers day and night some.

Robert Buckley: Now, your brothers, how old were they compared to you?

[0:05:00]

Edward Kaplan: They were all older. I was the youngest.

Robert Buckley: So did they join the army, the Polish army?

Edward Kaplan: One brother went to the Polish army, yes.

Robert Buckley: Can you tell us now what began to happen to your family since you were Jewish, if you could just tell us the story of what happened to them?

Edward Kaplan: When the German come in, we have to leave our home. We didn't live in the area where the ghetto was. We lived between the other population, Polish population in different areas. We didn't live in ghetto. And then we have to leave our home, our apartment. We leave everything behind and move in one room where the Jewish people was – have to live.

Robert Buckley: Now, what was the name of that town again?

Edward Kaplan: Warsaw

Robert Buckley: Warsaw, OK.

Edward Kaplan: *Warszawa*. So we went in, all of us in one room.

[Phone ringing]

Robert Buckley: I turned off the telephone. OK, so your family was all put into –

Edward Kaplan: Put into one room where the ghetto was prepared for the Jewish people. The ghetto was not established. We lived there, and we left everything behind in the iron area because we lived between was Polish people there living.

Robert Buckley: You mean you had to leave everything behind?

Edward Kaplan: Everything behind – just suitcases. We leave everything behind.

Robert Buckley: How did the Polish people treat you on your way to the ghetto?

Edward Kaplan: They was not kind to us because they was laughing and joking around and hollering at us when we left, and they was not very kind.

Robert Buckley: I understand from what I've read that some of these Polish people had come to the businesses. They were friendly. But when this happened, they turned.

Edward Kaplan: They turned. We have the business, the scrapyard. They come in. They took all the metal out – German people, German army. They took away this. And my uncle have a factory, a factory, a tool factory, and I worked that at that factory. I was 15 years old. I start to work in the factory, and then a German *komisarz* took it over. He come in. My uncle have to sign the papers and this property, the factory belongs to him. And we still could work there for a few months, 'til 1940. We have a special pass to go in, in the factory, and we all, the uncle and all of us, like I worked there, and we did this. Until 1940 we work. The factory was a known factory in Poland. The factory was Polska **Kryova Vichfornia** [ph] Narzędzie. That's a known factory. We had 50 people at that time.

Robert Buckley: Pretty good size.

Edward Kaplan: A good size factory, and we was in many into German we went. We showed the product every year.

Robert Buckley: What was it like now when you went to the ghetto? What were the conditions like? What was going on inside the ghetto?

Edward Kaplan: The ghetto was – from the beginning was livable, the beginning. Later on, they start to – we have to – they squeeze us in and we have less food. And still food was coming in from the Polish side. We could cope with the living conditions. We could cope yet. And every day was worse practically.

Robert Buckley: Well, what did the Jewish people think inside the ghetto? Why was this happening to them?

Edward Kaplan: Because we know Hitler what he will do. The world, the whole world knew it, what he would do with Jewish people. He want to eliminate it, destroy the whole Jewish race. And we went to all

those things in 1942. We lived there 1942 in hard conditions, very hard conditions. The wall was established. You couldn't go out, you couldn't go in. Only with you have to have a special pass.

[0:10:00]

In 1942, I think in April, they start to – we set – we have placards. We need people to go to an area, and we would work in a factory, the whole families. We work in a factory and make uniforms and shoes for the German army. And the whole family altogether we can go and we be together and living in good conditions and everything would be OK and many did, many did. They give us a bread, two breads, and they send us to the train, to the factories, and we didn't know. That took three months like this to – some of them – one escape from the train when we found out they going to the gas chambers to Treblinka. To Treblinka we went.

And one time, I come home for dinner. The dinner was ready. The whole family was gone. My family was gone. They took them from the place we lived to the *Umschlagplatz* and _____. The *Umschlagplatz* was all closed in. When you there, you complete. You're already dead. And they send those people – they send Jewish people to the Treblinka, and it was maybe three, four hours' trip, and they was gassed there – 450,000 people. We was half a million in ghetto. They took away 1942, 450,000 to the gas chamber to Treblinka.

Robert Buckley: So that was the last time you saw your family?

Edward Kaplan: Family – last time. And I run around. They closing one street, two streets and they put – they took the people away and they put barbed wire. But I used to go on the roofs and escape from the blockade. They call this a *blokada*, blockade was.. And I didn't – they didn't put me – for half a year I was running like this, didn't get me to the train station.

Robert Buckley: Oh, so you were escaping constantly?

Edward Kaplan: Constantly on the roofs I was running around and hiding. And so when they closed a few streets to take the people away, I was another street. And then I come back that street and hide that street where was no free of Jewish people, yeah.

Robert Buckley: Were you alone or were you with a few others that were able to help one another?

Edward Kaplan: Everyone was on his own practically. When I – they took away the whole family. Only one sister was with me.

Robert Buckley: Your fleshly ...

Edward Kaplan: Fleshly sister was with me 'til 19 – in 1943, we said we wouldn't go like sheep to die. So we tried to organize some resistance, organize resistance. In ghetto – we tried to do it, and we used to bring some weapons in from the Polish side. And we tried to – we would try to fight not to go like sheep, so to speak. And I was with my sister and we did all the many things to – I was in the resistance, too.

Robert Buckley: Where did you get the money in order to buy guns or to get guns?

Edward Kaplan: We get money. There was people in ghetto, rich people. And we saw them, let us and they should contribute money because for a good cause. We could fight. We would fight the Germans not to be killed or try to do something. And some people, some Jewish people donate money. We buy the weapons. Some of them did not, yeah.

Robert Buckley: So who on the outside did you buy the weapons from? How were you able to negotiate this?

Edward Kaplan: We have Polish resistance too on the Polish side. We have connection, and we bought weapons from the Polish resistance, yeah.

Robert Buckley: So you had a small little army of resistance?

Edward Kaplan: The young people. I was young that time. We have a little older people, older friends. And we have a few hundred of us, yeah.

Robert Buckley: And how many guns, and what type of guns and weapons did you have?

Edward Kaplan: Yeah. We have Polish guns. We have German guns. Fire barrel they call this. I remember one gun that I know.

[0:15:00] Fire barrel they call it, a German kind of gun. And we did many thing. They want to put – they built bunkers, bunkers in basement from the apartment houses, bunkers. We start to build after the first evacuation, after the first one. They built bunkers and we even took – we know they would cut off the water, the light, the gas. We built pumps, water pumps to have our own water in case they cut off. We built bunkers. We have carbide lights, carbide light like in the mines. In the mines they have carbide lights. We

have carbide lamps. We have all everything prepared. We have food too prepared because we know they would do this. They would cut off.

In 1943, they come in, they want to liquidate the 50,000 people left yet. So then we didn't go like sheep anymore. Some of them did. Me and my sister we was in the bunker laying and then we have to go out because they start to bomb the buildings. It's called gas bombs, the ghetto. Then I said to my sister we wouldn't die here because they throw gas bombs. We went out from the bunker and the SS with the machine guns. Head up, we went out and they said, "OK, I know what to do with them because that's the resistance." They took us, my sister and me and other people, and some of them died there. They didn't want to go out. They took us to Majdanek

Robert Buckley: And how did you go to Majdanek and what type of transportation?

Edward Kaplan: Our transportation we have maybe 180 to 200 people in a train. We were standing like you couldn't move, like sardines. And we went there with a train to Majdanek

Robert Buckley: Just to go back for a moment, what was the emotional climate inside of the ghetto among the people that were there. How did they feel under this type of pressure for this many years?

Edward Kaplan: You can't describe it in words even. When some people was laying the dead people, somebody die, they put them out and cover them with a newspaper until a wagon come and took them away. People was healthy. I have many friends who healthy. In three months they was swollen up with water, and then they die like flies. Thousands the Gestapo come in shooting, and the Ukraines was there and many other nations help the destruction of the Jewish people in Warsaw—not only Germans—Ukraines, Latvian people, yeah.

It's hard to describe in words what we went through there because we couldn't explain really how people can do to other people what we went through. Every day they used to come in, take a few of the people to their jail, _____ and they used to shoot them. And many tragedies we saw, this was true. You know you go die there. There's no hope. We didn't see any hope; only to live for a day. The next day, live again—fighting, hardship.

Robert Buckley: Where did you get the food for you and your sister? Now, was your sister older than you or younger?

Edward Kaplan: She was older, two years older.

Robert Buckley: Where did you get the food to keep healthy?

Edward Kaplan: Still we have bakeries there. The German supply the Jewish _____ supply flours. The bakery was baking. We still have potatoes and bread but not much. And people, some have a little bit more, some a little less. And people was dying like flies in the homes. Children, parents took all the children, lay them in the street. They couldn't take care of them.

[0:20:00] In wintertime you live in a house. The steps was gone because people took away the steps to heat the home or to cook something. The doors was missing in the houses.

Robert Buckley: Just like in Bosnia today.

Edward Kaplan: Yeah. Doors and steps was missing. All like this was tragedies. It's unthinkable. You can't put a book even the tragedies when we went through.

Robert Buckley: Now, you went to Majdanek.

Edward Kaplan: Went to Majdanek. And there was I guess because they prepare to kill us from the Warsaw ghetto because we resist. So then we stayed about 10,000 people in a square, in a *appellplatz*, *appell* with my sister, me. I stay close to her and officers – SS officers come. They need 800 people, young people. And my sister said, "You go." I said, "No. I don't go without you." And she gave me a push. "Go!" and you couldn't move. When you move, you get shot. You stay like up like soldiers. And she push me and I went, and I went to the middle of the square. And other people from the *appellplatz* come to me. They got 800 people selected. They took us a few trucks comes and they took us to a factory to Budzyn, Heinkelburg [ph]. They make the planes—Heinkelburg. They took us there, 800 people, and it was in Budzyn That's close to Lublin.

Robert Buckley: OK so then you were there. Now, what happened to your sister?

Edward Kaplan: Was gassed there. Those people, our transport was all people gassed in Majdanek. I never saw the sister again, and I was in the camp. I was maybe close in 14 camps, in 14.

Robert Buckley: OK so now you went to make airplanes.

Edward Kaplan: We went to Heinkelburg, Messerschmitt to make – to work on the – I have a little trade because I learned this in our factory. So I was there as just a metalworker.

Robert Buckley: So what time did your day begin? What time did it end? How much food did you get? What was the barracks like?

Edward Kaplan: Yeah. The day began 5 o'clock, 5:30, 4:30. We stay – we wash ourselves. You got five minute, *appell*, you went out in the *appellplatz*, and they counted. Took hours sometimes when they miss one. They count again. Then we have a coffee and a slice of bread and they send us to the factory. We worked 12 hours in the factory, 12 hours 'till you go home. It's two hours. You wait for the, again, for the soup. It's two hours. If a person, like I said, is missing, took two hours more. We was on the feet for sometimes 16, 17 hours on the feet steady.

Robert Buckley: Do you remember the approximate month and year that you went to Majdanek?

Edward Kaplan: Majdanek, I went in April '43, in April '43 when they liquidated the ghetto, the second time, '43. We was there – well, I was only few hours in Majdanek because the 800 people survived. The rest went to the gas chamber.

Robert Buckley: So they took to –

Edward Kaplan: Yeah, to Budzyn And then I was there. The Budzyn was the most killer of us. The Commander Feix – Feix is his name. He kill every day people. He was so bad sometimes you talk, "You friends. You be – you survive the war. We will exchange you for American and English soldiers." And the next day he could shoot ten people, the next day. He has a motorcycle. He run around shooting with a shotgun. He was on a horse. He was riding and every day he did. Sometimes he come in and shower and he has a dog. He always said: "Dog, man, bite the dog. Man, bite the dog." He called the dog "man" and the people "dogs." So when he was take from the body pieces apart the dog.

[0:25:00] He was so bad later on they send him to the Russian front because he was too radical already. They didn't want he should be a witness. So then he die on the front, the Russian front, yeah. He has two children, wife. He was 30 years old.

Robert Buckley: You mean he would go up to people and just shoot them?

Edward Kaplan: He was the commander of the whole camp. Shoot them. He tortured, many things he did to us. And we said many times, when we survive him, we survived the war. When we survive him, we survive the war. That's what happened.

Robert Buckley: Now, how long were you in Majdanek?

Edward Kaplan: The Majdanek I was a few hours. I went to Budzyn in the aeroplane factory.

Robert Buckley: Into Budzyn.

Edward Kaplan: Yeah, in the aeroplane factory.

Robert Buckley: How long were you three? I'm sorry.

Edward Kaplan: There we was maybe close could be eight months. Then we went to other factory close by, **Mielec** in **Dusbar** Messerschmitt [ph] factory. We went there because the Russia was not too far away. I mean they still was. In Stalingrad they start to losing the war, so they switch us around. We was specially working only with aeroplanes, the whole group of us. So we went to **Mielec**. We worked there for awhile. Then they sent us to Plaszów, Plaszów. And we was about six weeks in the camp Plaszów. We didn't work; just stay there, yeah.

Robert Buckley: You didn't work?

Edward Kaplan: No. Just the barracks; was maybe close to 20,000 people in the camp and we just wait, and they ship us another camp later. They send us to Wieliczka salt mine, **then the Zendastair** [ph]. And then we went to – we went later – I went to Czechoslovakia town Leitmeritz. Leitzmeritz was a camp we built underground, the tunnels first. We built aeroplane factories. The machines used to call me, lathes and other machines. And I was working and I was welding high-pressure pipes there, yeah.

Robert Buckley: When did you get the –

Edward Kaplan: Yeah. That's I got in Budzyn.

Robert Buckley: Why don't you hold it up for me?

Edward Kaplan: [Showing tattoo on arm] There's only one group have this.

Robert Buckley: OK, that's –

Edward Kaplan: KL, *konzentrationslager* in German.

Robert Buckley: And go ahead.

Edward Kaplan: We have this because on escaped from the camp. If one escapes, we have the hair cut. We have cut in the middle complete the hair, the middle, and put this on. So when you escaped, they could catch you. Polish people could sell you out or something like this. Only this camp we have care, no other place.

So I went there to Czechoslovakia. We worked there. Then they send me to Flossenbürg. Flossenbürg. Flossenbürg was a deadly camp, too, terrible camp. We used to – was high on the mountain, the camp. And when the water pipe was broken – we didn't have water – they used to make alarm. They wake us up in the morning, two o'clock in the morning. We have to go to the valley bring water up. Everyone has two buckets of water. We have to carry a bucket in wintertime top of the mountain. The water was spilling, running, and it was freezing. We lost shoes. We have the wooden shoes. Until we go up. We have only a quarter bucket of water. Then they beat us. That was torture, a night like this. And I work hard there build aeroplanes also. Twelve hours a day we worked – I worked there.

[0:30:00]

Robert Buckley: When you were going through this series of camps, were there other groups that you came in contact with: the Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses?

Edward Kaplan: Yeah. We saw Jehovah's Witnesses, *Bibelforscher*. We didn't know about exactly because everybody has their own trouble, and we didn't look in too much with other nations, with other religions or anything like this.

Robert Buckley: Were you a very religious person at that time?

Edward Kaplan: I was a religious person because we used to go to the temple, family. And we couldn't understand how God can allow such atrocities. We was talking every day and save looking for a miracle. We couldn't understand how God can allow deaths happen or tragedies beyond comparison.

Robert Buckley: Did your belief in God begin to wane a little bit. Did it begin to –

Edward Kaplan: We – that’s the only hope we have, the only hope we have. And we was standing by the world, a world going into fear every day. They let this happen. That’s why I cried beyond our imagination. Here people gassing, killing. We was like tools, like a tool. We work in the factories, a few thousand people. The people three, four months later when you work hard, you are like a skeleton. You lose weight. You can’t work anymore—done.

You used to have a selection they called it. SS doctors used to come in from the main camp and we stay naked without clothes and they select you. And they put on a mark. You go left. They put one, or two, three. You get the mark. And those people—they didn’t know about this practically. And some went to the gas chamber. They send them into Auschwitz or the other places. And we were still a little healthy, they send them to the factory. So every three months they have a selection just like tools. You call up. You need new tools. Send us tools. So they send new people.

Robert Buckley: Okay. So after this camp, now where do you go to?

Edward Kaplan: I went to Flossenbürg, right. Then we went to Dachau. I went.

Robert Buckley: Dachau.

Edward Kaplan: My number in Dachau I remember was 118,547; 118547 the number. And we went to Dachau, and Dachau was a main camp from many camps around the area in Munich. We stay at – they gave us new clothes. They send us to other camps like Mühldorf, Landschut, Kaufering, and many areas like this. And I come back again to Dachau a second time, and they send me again to other camps there close. I work in Dachau when I was – I work maybe two months in BMW factory in München-Allach in BMW factory.

Robert Buckley: And what type of work did you do in there in the BMW?

Edward Kaplan: BMW, I was grinding the camshaft, grinding the camshaft for the trucks, for the army trucks.

Robert Buckley: OK. Now, what were the conditions like in Dachau?

Edward Kaplan: Yeah. Dachau was not – at the time I was – not the worst camp because that was a model camp. Dachau was a model camp. When the Red Cross come in or the other diplomats, they show them how, the good Aryans how we live. The cover-up was Dachau. And you have to sing when you go out, the music. You

[0:35:00] come in you sing **in all the states**, you know, to camouflage was Dachau.
Yeah, they have killings there, too. They have gas chambers. They have hospitals. They used to give you shots. They used to give the people shots to kill them. When you couldn't go to work, you had fever, you lay there, you don't go—comes in a doctor and give you shot and then you're dead. Dachau, like I said, was a model camp. The Red Cross used to come in and that's why the – the world closed eyes. They are not so – they are not living so bad, yeah.

Robert Buckley: Now, from there you went to where?

Edward Kaplan: From Dachau, I said I went to many camps, Kaufering. In one camp they evacuated us. They took us away. We lived two weeks in dirt in bunkers. We dig holes, and we stay in the holes. They – 50 kilometers from Dachau – no kitchen, nothing. We eat the grass. We eat the leaves two weeks—no supply, nothing.

In the one camp, I was by the end, '45, when they took us to the mountains. They want to take us to liquidate us; was maybe 4,000 people around to liquidate. So the train stopped 20 kilometers from Munich. And the American aeroplanes come and they drop bombs. So the SS opened the door from the trains, and they look up. They was afraid. We was praying. For us it was a relief when we say the bomb dropping.

So me and my friend, we look out because the SS didn't do much to us that time. We look out on the step from the door, look out. And then we saw a little lake we saw, a little lake down, downhill. And my friend said to me, "Let's go jump." So we jump and roll down. We roll down the hill to the little lake and people start hollering, the SS, "Halt! Stop! A few escaped." So the engineer in front couldn't – didn't hear nothing. The train went, and we stayed there a few hours by the lake.

Then, when it was dark, we went in, that's farm land. We went in in a barn, and the barn was full of hay. We dig in. We dig in maybe six, eight feet deep in, took the hay out. We couldn't breathe because the hay was old with all the dust. We covered. We was way down to the floor, to the ground. And we stayed and seven o'clock night we couldn't – we was thirsty. We went out, knocked the doors, knock on door by the farmer. And we had the uniform, the camp uniform, everything like this. We knocked the door. He come out, I remember. "Please give us water," we said.

Oh my god, he was scared, so he give us milk. Then we went back to the barn. For five days we did this. And then one day, one night we went out. We knock on door again to the farmer, and a woman comes. She was so scared. She said – she was a good woman. She said, “Come in.” She took us to the barn, and she cover us with straw. In the kitchen the SS come back from the front, from the Russian front. They have a party there. They was drunk, singing. When they have to go to the restroom, they went to the barn. We saw them. We was laying under the straw. And just imagine how you feel. You got the SS drunk here and laying in the barn. And we laid there like this two days ‘til the American army come and see what’s going on.

Robert Buckley: How did you feel when the American army came?

Edward Kaplan: We feel like newborn, relief, naturally, and then I remember too was anarchy practically there at that time, the first days in Germany.

[0:40:00] You have many different nationalities and they used to take some – they went to people and took away some goods from people. And here two people come in crying. They was talk that they want to take away some cows in there. We said, “You don’t touch here nothing because she saved our life.” So we protect her for few days ‘til it was quiet.

Robert Buckley: I understand that you had mentioned before that you met Oscar Schindler or you worked for Oscar Schindler?

Edward Kaplan: I didn’t work for Oscar Schindler. I didn’t meet him. I was in this camp on 11 or the thousand people worked there. These were select a group to work Schindler’s factory. I was in Plaszów in the camp for six weeks, so we didn’t go there. You got 20,000 people. He need only 1,000, so not everybody worked there.

Robert Buckley: So the man really did live.

Edward Kaplan: The man, like I understand, he was a righteous man, yeah.

Robert Buckley: Interesting. As you look back, I wanted to go back to the beginning again. What were the names of your brothers and your sisters, if we could just go back to the beginning?

Edward Kaplan: Yeah. The sister was one Torsha, one Hella, and one Getel. And the brother was Lauren, Michael.

Robert Buckley: I see. And what did your family like to do when you were young? What were some of the activities you learned about?

Edward Kaplan: We have a good life. We – the whole was in business, and I learned a trade in the factory, and I want to learn this trade. I want to be in there. We lived good. We was good life. We used to go in theater, in operas. We lived a normal life, not poor. We enjoy. We used to go all in parks. And many good things we have life was cut off just the one night.

Robert Buckley: When it came to your mother and father, did your mother work or she was taking care of the family?

Edward Kaplan: She didn't work, no. Women didn't work at that time like today, no.

Robert Buckley: So as you look back over your experiences in life, what did it make you think of?

Edward Kaplan: When we look back the experiences, it's just like a dream, like a Broadway play, so to speak. When you see a scene, they go around. Every stage was different—good life. Now this comes in and everything was lost, particularly people. We lost lives. First they took us – they took our wealth, what we have. Later on, they took our lives.

When we look back, we was thinking can a God allow such things to happen? Many things go through your mind. Where is God? What we saw – when I saw Jewish religious people with beard put the match on and light the beard. You know what kind of pain this is? And the wicked, the Nazis were succeeding. When I look back, they took friends. They took Belgium. They took Holland. Every day, every month we see new success going out. And we have some information in the camp, a little bit the situation, world events. We have some.

And I saw how they succeed in **Russia**, and I heard about many things what they did till Stalingrad. That's the turning point. Then we saw a little hope. But the hope was only a dream because we was in a real bad condition. We couldn't survive like to think that the – we see the tunnel, then end of the tunnel, but how will we be there? That's not possible but we still. Without a hope, you're lost. The hope we had was every day.

Even I have the hope. I have the uniform. We didn't have brush the teeth we couldn't, right. We didn't have nothing.

[0:45:00] I took the uniform and every morning I rubbed my teeth. I think when I survive, I want the teeth survive. I want to preserve the teeth. So that's the hope. But without the hope, you couldn't survive death. The only hope was we want to see Hitler's regime destroyed. That was the hope, and that keeps you alive, yeah.

Robert Buckley: What did you see in the camps that was possibly the worst conditions that existed among people who were prisoners, the depths to which people –

Edward Kaplan: Some people was nice people. They help other people. Some of them – people can be like animals. In a situation like this, even one day life you do everything, harm other people to live one more day. So the situation was very bad situation. You get people, they voluntarily took jobs there, and they have to harm other people. I always was laying in the corner. I didn't take no foreman jobs, no copper jobs, no anything. And I keep my energy not to use it up. I like things so much I can't because the food was fewer calories— 300, 400 calories. And you run around and looking for food and looking death, and people get shot sometimes.

So I would lay quiet and some people was – other people suffer from some of. I could mention many of them, you know. Some Polish people did some things to Jewish people, too, in the camp. Even when we was in the same condition where we was. And they still have this in their hearts to offend us. This is just like you have a little pond, so to speak. Pond, you have fish. And the pond closed. And one fish lives from the other, right. And so we, too. We was closed in. And one person live for the other one. The other one did atrocities on our (sp). So it's terrible conditions when you – when people come in a condition like this. Some animal wouldn't do to each other like what we saw there. Selling out, talking, just terrible things happened, yeah.

And some was good **coppers**, good people too, you know. Some of them help you and good helpful people you have. Not everybody was like this.

Robert Buckley: Were some of the – I heard that some of the German soldiers once in awhile had a little compassion, once in awhile.

Edward Kaplan: Yeah. One SS I know he was not – he was good, so to speak. He used to light a cigarette, took two puffs and throw away this so somebody could pick it up, yeah. And I have one foreman, a German foreman at the factory. Every morning he put two little

pieces of marmalade, bread with marmalade and put it by my bench where I was working. He put it there so I could pick up, yeah. Not every – majority was bad. But you still have good people in every nations, every groups.

Robert Buckley: How did you become acquainted with Jehovah's Witnesses? Did you find out that they were in the camps?

Edward Kaplan: In the camp, I didn't find out much. After the war, after the war, I saw two people in this village I lived, and there was two Witnesses there. They got baptized, and they talked to me.

Robert Buckley: Were they Polish or Jewish?

Edward Kaplan: No, German.

Robert Buckley: German?

Edward Kaplan: Yeah, they talked to me. And I was sometimes, was not all the time prepared to listen. I know what – I was not interested because I had my Jewish faith, and I was not interested in other faiths.

Robert Buckley: So then you started to study with them after a while?

[0:50:00]

Edward Kaplan: No. Then after a while, I look in and I saw that's the only group of people, Jehovah's Witnesses, didn't participate in any armies, any killing because Jehovah's Witnesses didn't go to German army. They was persecuted just like the Jewish people. They was in the camp I found out, too, later because they didn't way Heil Hitler. They didn't went to army uniform or anything. So what kind of group of people in the world at that time or today have to die rather than and not to participate in any atrocities or the killing or the fighting wars like the world is fighting? Well, there have to be something behind this when you have a people like that.

So I look, and I find out. And then when I come to United States, then I took the literature from them, the *Watchtower* and the *Awake!* And I saw and then somebody comes to my house, and I start to study. I start to study the book, the *Truth* book. The *Truth* book didn't appeal to me because the *Truth* book shows there you shouldn't have blood. You shouldn't eat blood. You shouldn't have images. Talk about Trinity. I didn't do all those things. My Jewish faith was all against this, so was not appealing.

Then I told this brother, “This book, I am doing all those things. I am a Witness already.” You know, so I said – then I stopped studying. Then a year later, they come to me again with a book, *God’s “Eternal Purpose”* book. That’s a little booklet. In this booklet, I saw Abraham’s promise through his seed all nations would be blessed. I saw this. And then I saw from Abraham’s line that who’s the seed. This book explained because I didn’t believe. I could not accept Jesus Christ because all the atrocities, all the pain, the pogroms for 2,000 years was in Christ’s name, in Christian. For me, Christian was all Christians. Baptists or who they are, Lutheran, they was all Christian, and they all have blood on their hands for the Jewish nation, so I couldn’t accept.

Then I saw the line from Abraham to David, King David. Then I saw the line Jesus Christ. All prophecies fulfilled in the Old Testament point to the Messiah. And we, I know we wait for the Messiah, Jewish people. I grow up the Messiah would come and redeem the Jewish people. So I saw something good here, saw something good. And I was thinking, too, I was learning that God created the earth here or this planet to live forever in a paradise condition.

OK, this paradise condition and I believe before we go in the heavens. And then I learned God created the heavens for heavenly – for the angels, I learned. Created from elements for heavenly material, angels invisible, beautiful between them. They see each other. And he created mankind from dust from elements from ground. So when he give us so beautiful earth—the flowers, the mountains, the food, the smell, the eyes—what is it? For what reason? For have to be a reason, a purpose in life. So I see a different purpose in life. I say I saw as God created a man to live forever. He’s the God of the living.

And then I learn about the Kingdom. The Kingdom, how can be a Kingdom established in heavens without people? A kingdom have to be subject. The people has to live.

[0:55:00]

And this Kingdom I saw a reality as Christ Jesus is the King of this Kingdom. When all the prophecy look back for the Jewish system, 607 God loved the Jewish nation so much he punished them to straighten them out, took them back many times like a father punish the children. I saw this in the prophecies I saw fulfilling. I was reading in the New Testament, in the Old Testament that point to our time. Killing – nation would rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, crime, violence, children wouldn’t

listen to parents. All those things when you look, I look and I see the truth coming in our time, you see.

The Jewish people missed the point. I still in my heart, I was very Jewish, but there is something better here than Jewish. There's no future. It stops here and goes no more. And only this Kingdom arrangement is a living hope for mankind. No killing, no sicknesses, no – God created us. We have the ability to live forever. Then something – we get cut on the hand to us. We heal itself. Why? For what reason?

All those things is something we have to. I saw the truth in this. I saw the truth. That's not a fantasy. I saw reality. That's why I took this in because there's no other place to go in this world. The wars go on for thousands of years killing each other. And now when we look on all of Europe, in Africa, each one is killing every day.

So we – and here's a group of people, five million people, they are neutral. They love each other. They are all, in all over the world live in peace and harmony. In country of South Africa they live together, the black and the white. Where you get this? Then I was thinking many times the world could learn something when they look in what kind of people they are. There is no other people like this.

You know, you see this. And so I took the step, the hard step. I didn't [take] it overnight. It's a hard step to take it because I grow up Jewish religion. To make a decision like this I was taking 20 years. I didn't take overnight—20 years. I stopped. I learned. Then I didn't do nothing. I didn't study anymore until I got this book *God's "Eternal Purpose"* book. I saw why we are here, what would happen. I saw a resurrection to life, too. All the dead will be resurrected. That's a positive hope because without the resurrection, there would be no fulfilled God's purposes.

This has to be together because when God created the universe, the stars to beautiful, the whole—all the earth beautiful. Everything is in this place. He created beautiful people. Why can he we live 80 years, then cut us off? And one generation going, coming, new generation. What is the meaning for life? There's no meaning in life to live 80 years and then go forgotten.

Robert Buckley:

So you don't seem to have any bitterness even though you went through a lot of heartache and you lost your family. You don't seem –

Edward Kaplan: I don't see bitterness because – you mean now the bitterness? The bitterness I don't see because God is a God of love. He has no part of this. The bitterness, I couldn't do it because the system, the Devil's system today exists. He's controlling all governments. He's controlling every facet of mankind's life. He brings Hitlers, many Hitlers. Stalins or the Hitlers, that's all his job. And the people are not guilty in general. They grow up like this. They learn from the home like this, and they stay like this. And what they are doing, they have to go in the army. They go and get killed or _____. And I didn't – I don't blame the people. I feel sorry for people.

[1:00:00] I don't blame them because they don't know better. That's why I don't have bitterness, no, because I live for something better. This life is all momentarily, like a dream. You live. You're 20 years old, 40 years. You learn a trade. You live good. You have a house. That's all passable. You have to leave everything behind. The real life will come through Abraham's promised seed, and that's the real life.

Robert Buckley: What is the name of your wife now?

Edward Kaplan: **Santa.**

Robert Buckley: And how many children do you have?

Edward Kaplan: One son.

Robert Buckley: One son.

Edward Kaplan: Yeah.

Robert Buckley: And where does he live?

Edward Kaplan: He lives not far from Milwaukee, 20 miles from Milwaukee.

Robert Buckley: And so you enjoy your family.

Edward Kaplan: Very much, yeah. He's married. He has a son, too.

Robert Buckley: So you're a grandfather.

Edward Kaplan: Grandfather.

Robert Buckley: Oh, very good. You must be thankful. We have a picture over here.

Edward Kaplan: Yeah.

Robert Buckley: I would like you to describe it. I'm going to have you go over towards the picture. And maybe you could describe the picture. We could take this off a minute, and maybe you can hold this in your hand. And I'm going to turn the camera, and perhaps you can describe what's here and if it's true or not, what you see here. If you can't go too far, we're good. If you want to get up a little closer to the picture, you can. This is a picture of a barracks scene. And can you describe it a little bit?

[Showing large framed picture]

Edward Kaplan: The picture is accurately made because we have barracks. We have three, four, four, five rows, and we was laying like sardines there. When one was turning, everybody has to turn. Sometimes everybody has a cover, a blanket. Sometimes one lost the blanket. Other prisoner went up in the night, pulled the blanket. You run after him. You couldn't see.

We was laying like this. We come to lay down. It was eight o'clock, ten o'clock night after hard work. You fell asleep and just like looks like a minute you wake up. It's already 4:30 and you get up to the *appellplatz* so this was you wish you could die there. You wish you wouldn't get up, just lay there and fall asleep and be over. That was our wish—that we could lay there and sleep forever.

This is accurate. This is exactly how people, mankind can see this how look, just the look of the faces. This is our reality. We saw those faces. My face was like this. Then I escape. I am 70 pounds only—70 pounds. And God create us to live a life, this life and live forever in here. But people – but nations or the groups or the religious can do for each other.

Robert Buckley: I understand that the people sometimes on the top bunks would lose their control of their body and their fluids.

Edward Kaplan: Yeah, their fluid. You was afraid to go out the night to the restrooms, so they did it here in the bed. When they dispose all those things, the smell was there. Ticks was breaking out in every area. All those things really is a tragedy when you see this. And

that should be when we look of this exactly in the barracks was like this, exactly.

Robert Buckley: Well, Mr. Kaplan, we want to thank you very much on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for telling us your story, and we appreciate it very, very much.

Edward Kaplan: I appreciate too people should know what we – what people went through in lifetime. So I did this because I know life will be different. I know all those people will be resurrected—all people because God is a God of the living, not of the dead. They will come out and everything will be erased from our mind—all the pain mankind went through. Is only one God's Kingdom will provide this relief. No nation, no government, no leader can bring this back—only Jehovah God.

[End of Audio]