

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Thomas Blatt
September 6, 1990
RG-50.030*0028**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Thomas Blatt, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on September 6, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

THOMAS BLATT

September 6, 1990

01:00:26

Q: Would you tell me your full name please?

A: My name is Tomasz Blatt, B-L-A-T-T. And I'm born in 1927 in Poland.

Q: What's the town in Poland?

A: In a little town, Izbica. This is in the Lublin district.

Q: Tell me about it. Tell me about your parents and what they did, and your childhood.

A: This town was a very interesting town, because...uh...it's a hundred percent Jewish town. In...uh...in 1870...uh...a Polish aristocrat...uh...did receive a permit to build a Jewish town. And...uh...in a place close to the river Wieprz, he established this...uh...Jewish...uh...town. In the beginning, there were about four houses according the... the what I discovered in the town....

Q: Tom, what we need to do...excuse me...we need less of the history. We need your story.

A: Okay....It's a typical Jewish town, a shtetl, hundred percent Jewish. The Christian population lived around the town, on the foothills. About 3,000 Jews used to live there. Uh...And the...this town was built in a valley surrounded by hills, or mountains, and this the Germans later used for the purpose which we will come to it. We had..uh...one shul and about three, four Beis Medresh [**NB:** Beth Midrash]. Very deeply orthodox. As a matter of fact, I remember there was next to it a town, Zamo__, and one Saturday, some Jewish or free...they called them "free thinkers" did come with bicycles. On top of it they were without caps, without a hat. And I remember the...half of the town they chased them out with sticks and with stones because they come on a Saturday and...um... Saturday, Friday in the evening and the next day Saturday, the town was quiet because it was a holy day, like nobody in the town except in the evening. I remember Yom Kippur. You could feel it in the air. You could see the people moving by to...to the Beis Medresh...or to the temple, to the shul. It was deeply orthodox. There were a few which did try...uh...to reach out. For instance, my father.

01:03:38

In our town everyone had a name; on top of it, he had a special name given. For example, if he does...he didn't have a leg, they called him [Leme Yoine (ph)]. [Yoine (ph)] was his name, because uh...my father, why I'm telling him was because my father was already what you call "free thinker." He did try to move out from the orthodox ways, so they called him [Leibele Goy (ph)]. It was..., my [**NB:** his] first name was [Leibele (ph)], he was Goy

because he did...uh...smoke cigarettes sometimes Saturday. They did know it. You can't sneak...you can't smoke cigarettes in Izbica but when the...the shutters in the the home weren't closed, all the peoples in the neighbor did know that my dad was smoking cigarettes Saturday because of it. I remember mine...if you talk about my childhood. I will tell you a story which will give you an idea. Uh...For example, my father had a Polish friend, a Christian. He send him out to buy pork meat usual; because...uh...nobody could see my dad be going into...uh...to buy pork meat, of course. So he sent this Christian friend. And I...once I remember and my father told me, "Try it." And I tried it and I liked it. But in that time they used to live in so-called, in a [Urisha (ph)]. You know what [Urisha (ph)] is? [Urisha (ph)] is a house because it was built maybe 50, 80 years ago by my grand, grand, grandparents and later when the children did get grandchildren, they get married and so on, they divided this house. So...uh...finally when I...was already over there, when I was about 10 years old, this whole house was divided with partitions that everybody could hear everybody across the wall. So mine...mine aunt did hear me...did hear the conversation with my dad and she noticed by listening in that time, I'm eating pork meat. So what...the next thing I remember she opened the door where my father lived and said, "Tom." "Toivi," not "Tom." Not Tom. "Toivi, you eat pork meat?" I said, "Yes, Mimi, I ate." "You know what [Streicher¹ (ph)] is?" "Yes, I know what [Streicher (ph)] is." "You will go to Hell." I know about Hell because my uncle told me stories, how they burn people and everything else. "Promise me, you wouldn't eat any more." So I say I wouldn't. And she left. And I was such...so scared about Hell and everything else that immediately...it was a shock to me I remember...what I remember is I...I was in a high fever and laid down the sofa and my whole head was just like a...like a mill. And I was sick for about two days. They called the doctor and that time, you know, the doctor...doctors used to come to the home, and he said, "Give him aspirin. I don't see anything." And finally when my Mimi did come to visit me, and I remember the first thing what I ask her was, "Mimi, will I go to Hell?" And she probably understood what the problem is; that I simply, that I'm that scared. I'm sick from being scared. And she said, "Oh, Toivi, you know, don't worry because when your Bar Mitzvah will come, God will forgive you everything." Now, this...this had a fourfold effect because I wasn't afraid anymore. I was okay, but I again I did...when mine...the next time my dad did ask me if you want a piece of pork meat, I said "Yes," because anyway, in about two, three years God will forgive me. So anyway, I just tell you a little picture it was. Some people they tried to get out from the circle of...uh... orthodox behavior, but it was very...it was trying. But...I otherwise, actually it was a deeply Jewish town... uh ...with a very big respect for the Rabbi. The Rabbi was our authority. And...uh...Friday, with the shochet and everything else. And so it was 'til 1939, when the war started.

01:07:58

Q: Tell us about that.

A: Uh...I remember the town...you know, we didn't have...uh... radios in that time, so any news

¹ He may be using the Yiddish word "treife" here.

was...uh...transmitted by person who had a big...uh...drum...uh...Jewish guy. His name was [Hydel (ph)], and he did go to the middle of the town to the marketplace and drummed up until all the people had come together, and now he said, "Hello, hello. This is the news..." and so on. He did say that a war started. Hitler invaded Poland, and a mobilization is in order and...uh...he was the latest news from the Burgermeister's office, Mayor's office, I would say. And he advised to glue in strips of paper on the windows so they shouldn't shatter if the bombs fall down, and that was the news. So people start to pick up newspapers, cut it in strips, and glue in and some people did prepare dry bread; and so it was in our place too. And later I remember planes coming. I remember Polish plane shot down, and the next I remember my family was moving out from the town, hiding in a village from the bombs. We were afraid that Izbica will be bombed because there was a big factory, a military factory in Izbica uh producing material for fortification purposes. So I went to this village, Panska-Dolina.

01:09:57

Over there, I remember Polish soldiers and I remember when the news arrived that the Soviet Union is fighting against Poland, too. I remember the speech from the Polish officer, that they have, they are stabbed in the back by the Soviet soldiers and now they will fight to the last drop of blood. And ...uh...later I remember the rumor, the Germans are coming, and now we are a group of people about 25. We don't know what to do, scared in the forest. The young people say, "Oh, we will run away from the Germans. We are going across the river Bug to the Russians." The older people, mine parents included...my father, "No, we're going back to Izbica. Germans. Of course, they're anti-Semites, but they're also people." And I remember we split then. It was in the night. I remember the stars and could be about maybe 12 o'clock in the middle of the night, like a...like a film, like a movie, we departed. And the sons did walk to the east, and some parents did go back to Izbica. And I went back with my parents. We come to Izbica and now...uh.. (chuckle) interesting news. The Germans are leaving. So I said, "The Germans are leaving. I didn't see a German soldier. I must see a German soldier." So I went down looking for a German soldier. "Oh, there're two German soldiers still in the bakery buying bread." So I went to the bakery and I seen in front of them two German soldiers with bikes and talking and they...they sound like Yiddish because German is pretty close to Yiddish. So I was wondering...take a look, they're speaking my language. (laughing) And...uh...I did say hello to them. We did talk a little bit. I Yiddish and they're German. There's nothing wrong with it. And they left. Uh...A day later the Russians arrived. What it was in the beginning, that the Germans simply did go too far and later did...did come to agreement about the...the demarcation line, and they moved out. And the Russians arrived. In that time the local communists organized their own militia and they were in power for about two weeks and later again, it's a mistake. The Russians are leaving again. The Germans are coming. So again what should we do? My mother told my father, "Listen, Let go out. I know Russian. I know the language. Let go out from here." And my father said, "No." Actually he bought a horse and carriage already. And later he said, "No, I was born here. I could die here."

01:12:49

And my father for some reason, which saved me later in my life I could say, he was in a way a Polish patriot. He was a volunteer in the Polish legionnaires, so called Pi_sudski's army...uh...uh...in the First World War. He was wounded. He was a invalid. And...uh...which was, you know, a very horrible in that time. So he...and he said, no, he will stay here. He was born here and he...he could die here. And he stayed. And this was...and this sealed our future, our destiny. So I've seen the Russians going, and a lot of Jews did, runned after them close by the...the regular army soldiers, everybody going east. And I was a child 12 years old, but I felt that something historical happened, that something...I felt something is wrong. We should go. But we didn't. The Russians left and Izbica was a no-man's land. No Russians. No Germans. The Germans did come. But they stopped about 12...12 kilometers before Izbica in a district town of Krasnystaw. Izbica was nobody. So two...the third night, sitting in my room I hear a big explosion. And suddenly screaming, yelling, "What's happened?" A group of Jews stood on the street outside talking, and some Poles throw a grenade at them. And they killed a few and they wounded a few. So we start to be terrorized by the Poles. So people were scared to go outside the town and there's another legation did form, a Jewish delegation, under the leadership of Miss Roetenstein. Still I remember her name. By the way, this is the same, this is my Mimi (chuckle) which she told me I shouldn't eat...I shouldn't eat unkosher. Under...under her leadership, they went to Krasnystaw. Actually, to invite Germans to come to Izbica because it...it is no law in Izbica and we are afraid and that they must come in. So Germans did come into Izbica to protect the Jews.

01:15:18

No, you must understand that there were no Gestapo in the first days. There were simple Wehrmacht soldiers. And there was also called an Ortskommandantur Wehrmacht, a local command...command of the soldiers arrived and they patrolled the streets so they were pretty quiet. As matter of fact, the Jews used to do business... uh...with the soldiers. I remember a...kids did go out and buy from them cigarettes and sold...uh...different stuff. It...it was rather peaceful with them, until Gestapo arrived. There were two of them. Ludwig Klein and Karl Engels. Both survived the war, and I was a witness against both of them at Hamburg. They both committed suicide in...in Hamburg after the war, being in jail. Well, anyway, these two SS were a terror in Izbica. Every day, before breakfast, they went out, killed five, ten Jews; and later they ordered breakfast. It was unbelieve...unbelievable and we realized, finally, that we have no rights. And many times we wished that if the first Germans which arrived, if they would kill a 100 Jews, if they would terrorize the town, it would be a blessing because everybody would escape with the Russians. You understand? In the beginning! But, unfortunately, for us the first Germans were good Germans, so- called. So...now it was too late, and we were in a trap. In that time, again, compared to the future, it wasn't so bad. There were still families. Some people were killed because of Engels, but otherwise it was possible to live. There were...uh...there were labor camps and Jews were forced to go to work in labor camps. In the beginning, they were forced to work on the streets from 8 o'clock in the morning til 7 o'clock in the evening, and they were released home. Later, as I said,

there were labor camps where they went out for a month or for a week. They worked. Later they...they were exchanged. New Jews did come and they were let home.

01:18:06

Uh... Now on that point, I must tell you that the Germans in that time established Jewish Councils, so-called "Judenrat." And through the Judenrat, they were able to execute their orders, so the Judenrat sent people to work in the labor camps and the Judenrat also after a month or so sent new people. The old ones...the first ones should be released. So it wasn't a order. Now, everybody, according...according the rules, everybody was supposed to go for one month to the labor. But again, if there was a rich fellow in the list he was able to pay the poor...to pay the poor fellow, and he did voluntary go. But as the time progressed, it was worse and worse. We heard about beating. We heard about torture, and people refused to go. In that time the first so-called "Aktions" happened. "Aktion" is a roundup. It started with roundups to the labor camps. They would come in the morning and told the Jewish Council to deliver 500 men or 200 men. If the Jewish Council wasn't able to deliver through their own police, they started indiscriminate to go from house to house, beat, shot... Ukrainians, which worked with the Nazis together. And they...they caught...they simple caught people on the streets 'til they get the amount of 500 people and they took them away.

01:19:48

Q: What were you and your parents doing?

A: I was a goy in _____ the picture and later got to the _____. So in that time, I was already in danger. I was, of course, 12, 13 years old, 13. So my father looked for protection. What about my family in that time? My mother, of course, was a housewife. My father lost his business, He had from before, as a legionnaire, he had a liquor store business, so-called "monopol koncesja" in Poland, uh...as a veteran from the legionnaires. Lost my [NB: his] business, but still he was able to make a living. He was very well known. He has done some business with the Polish farmer, even if it was illegal; but he did look to protect me. So he made a deal with a Pole of German origin, Mr. [Platow (ph)]. Mr. [Platow (ph)] had a blacksmith shop. He made with him a deal that I will work for him. So I should be employed in case the Germans are looking unemployed, because in the beginning they took so-called unemployed Jews. I went to work about 8 o'clock in the morning til 5:00. It was hard work because in that time we had a lathe, I remember; and the lathe, it's not like now--you put in an electric motor, and the lathe is running. I did need to move everything by myself, and many times I thought I...I will collapse but then my boss said, "You turn. Just turn." And I thought I...I must turn because this is my protection. I must turn the wheel even if I wasn't able to breath anymore. But I managed. (Pause) When the Gestapo arrived, they went...they had two motorcycles and a car and they...and they need a repair shop. So they went to another mechanic, blacksmith. His name was [Solecky (ph)]. And the motorcycles were over there, always, for the night to be cleaned or the car was over there...the Gestapo car. And once in the evening I was going by, the boss, Mr. [Solecky (ph)] from this...uh...repair shop

told me, "Tom, would you like to help me? I have a lot of work; stay overnight and put together a motorcycle." So I said, "Okay, I will just tell my dad." Told my dad that I will be a whole night working in Mr. [Solecky's (ph)]...I will call it from now on "garage," because Americans are familiar with what a...what a garage is. And while I was working next day, he said...[Solecky (ph)]..."Listen, why don't you work with me. Leave Mr. [Platow (ph)]. Come to me."

01:22:55

And I thought it was a good idea. First of all, I will be protected by Gestapo, clean the motorcycles, and I agreed. And from that time on, I started to work...uh...for Mr. [Solecky (ph)] and it was dangerous because the motorcycles of the Gestapo need to be cleaned, you know, spotless. And I worked very hard and I done a good job. And as I see it now, it was a good choice because later when the death camps did come, I was protected practically...practically the last minute, and I was able to see how town is sinking down, myself being protected. I didn't need to hide like another people that hide in that time. I've seen it. Okay. Going back to the labor camps. Suddenly, transports arrived from...uh...Pozna_...from west...from the western part of Poland...Pozna_, Ko_o, Konin, and lot of Jews arrived; we divided...the Judenrat divided the people to different houses and that time I did get very close with...uh...[Jussik Bresler (ph)], who was...uh...a dentist's son from Ko_o. In our place used to live a man, his name was Kohn, with his wife. Once I remember...it was the evening...I still remember my mother standing close...close to the window with Mr. Kohn and his wife, and discussing a letter. And I listen: "gassing people, gassing...." And my mother I remember saying, "It's impossible. It's a fantasy. Can't be." So a lot of time parents don't even realize how much children could listen in, pretending doing something else. And I did. What I understood, and later I find out more is Miss [Mrs.] Kohn, received a letter from her son in Ko_o, which was still in Ko_o, that in a place called Chelmno, they're gassing people. He wrote about this. But, as I said, it was dismissed.

01:25:24

By the way, her son who wrote the letter survived and he lives in [Holland (ph)], in Israel. And I later talked to him when I went to Israel. And I was in the South, reminding him about this letter he wrote. Anyway, so this was a bad signal, but later quiet down. At least I didn't hear...at least I didn't hear anything. But once was some "Akcja." The SS arrived in the morning, did...uh...asked the Judenrat to deliver 2,000 people to the marketplace. And the Judenrat did go home to home and delivered, but a lot of people already were afraid about the torture, about the beating, and hide. So the Nazis themselves start to look for them and collected them in the marketplace. After such a "Aktion," after the...uh...the desired amount of Jews were concentrated in the marketplace, everybody else could go out and uh...town was like normal. The people were over there, then later they were taken to the station, there were already wagons for them loaded and taken away. Like they took them away before to labor camps close to Zamo_...was a labor...labor camp, [Mokre Zdanow (ph)]. They left. But usual, in a case like this, they took away some family...family members, and the family

which was left usual...usually sent some Poles, Christian Pole, a friend, to go after the train to see the destination. And so after this transport left, some people...Polish people went after them with a bike or with...uh...either way, with another train tracing this train. The same night...uh...I...a day later, I remember I was at home and I heard some knocking in the window. It was already after the curfew...curfew time. But nevertheless, many times I did sneak out after curfew time. But I hear some knocking, and as I go to the window and...uh...there was a knock like I had...uh when I went to my friend [Jussik (ph)], I knock the same way...three times long and three times short it was. I recognize as my friend [Jussik (ph)] from...from Ko_o. So I opened the door, go out, sneak out, you know, because Jews are not allowed outside, and hidden behind this house I say...I noticed [Jussik (ph)] standing by. I said, "[Jussik (ph)], What's the urgency? What is so..." "Tom, I must tell you something. Tom, you remember [Ruza (ph)]?" I said, "Yes." "She was taken before yesterday." "Yes." "She's dead." I mean, "What do you mean, she's dead?" "I mean...you remember the transport which left with the trains...the last transport of 2,000 Jew? All of them are dead." "What do you mean, all of them are dead?" "Tom, you don't know?" I said, "No." He said, "There's a place call Belzec, and I have a friend who just come back and he told me that all the Jews, not only from Izbica, every day, thousands of them are coming in to this camp Belzec, and this camp should be overflowing but nobody comes out. Only people are going in. And night time is a big fire, and they're killing people there. I don't know how. They say by elect...electrocuting them." Because in the beginning, they didn't know the method. "But they're killed." I said, "[Jussik (ph)], you are dreaming." "That's what I want to tell you." He left. I didn't tell this my parents because I didn't want to scare them. But the next time the whole town did know, that there's a death camp, Belzec, 35 miles from Izbica, and they're killing people over there.

01:29:52

So everybody start to build hiding places. Before the...we had hiding places before too, but they were primitive, only to...to hide themselves in case they..they want to take them to labor camp. But now the stake was life, and they...they start to build very elaborate hiding places. In that time the Mayor of the city...in that time was a German Mayor of the city, a Polish German, "Volks..."--so-called "Volksdeutsch." He decided to move to better location. Before the war, he did live in some kind dingy, a little rundown house, but now he want a better house, so he moved exactly in the same house where we....we did live. It was like...you would call it in...in America, apartment house like on the _____. In Poland, it was really a little house where few families lived together. So he did become our...our neighbor. In this particular house, which was a long building...we...we had about eight families, but by him moving in, we did join the same attic. The attic over this house, part was on his...on top of his apartment and part of our apartment, so what we have done...we ask a mason to take a part of this attic, build a double wall. We made a hiding place over there. The entrance was from...was from our room upstairs. They build a little opening, a little door, maybe three feet by two. We squeezed in, went into the attic, and we were actually on...on Mr. Schultz, which was the mayor, on his..on his property; so when we put against the wall our little cabinet, it did cover the entrance and we were safe, and this was our hiding place. The drawback was

that we did need a guy from outside to...but this I have done because when was...I was already protected. I told you which way. So I have done run back to the...uh...the garage. Anyway, now the second Akcja did come, and the third. Izbica was empty. Soon transport from Nuremberg, from Czechoslovakia, from Slovakia.... Why I say Czechoslovakia separate and Slovakia separate? Because the Czech Jews, they're completely different...uh...than the Slovakian Jews. The Slovakian Jews looked more like the Polish Jews. Same type of people; and... uh...(pause) from Berlin...some people. In...from, practically, from a low population, Izbica did grow to about 15, 20 thousand; so it was even people...even the street was ...were too many people to move around. So again a Akcja and again did go down to 10,000...

Q: What is your point? What.... Describe you...

01:33:31

A: I will go to it. I will go; I can't describe every akcja...I will describe one big one...one where they took me to Sobibór. I will tell you about one Akcja. If I will describe, if I will try to describe everything, it will be miserable, terrible, and would take me a long, long time and probably you would be exhausted and I would be exhausted. I will tell you about the typical Akcja. It always started about, about 4 o'clock in the morning with a shot in the air. They had some shooting [shooting] and the whole town was surrounded. As I said, Izbica was in a valley. It was like a...a trap. You didn't need too many soldiers on top of the mountains so anybody should be visible...the whole town should be visible. Nobody was able to go out. And another group of Ukrainians...Ukrainians that cooperated with the Germans, went in the town and they dragged people out. First, as normally before, the Judenrat call out to the Jews to go out to the streets and called, "Jews, Come out. You're going to labor." Uh...sometimes, even they lured them..."Everybody will get a half a bread...a half a bread on the...on the way." And so on. "Come out. Nothing will happen." That's what the German told him to say. And when then this didn't help because we did know the truth, the Germans and the Ukrainians dragged down the houses. When I heard the first shot...not...not only me...all over...all in the house heard the shouting, we immediately concentrated in our apartment. In that time we had a connection to the whole house. If there was no door to the next apartment, we made a door or opening so everybody was able to pass, to come to our ...and we went to the first floor into the attic and I put this against the wall and did run back to the garage. Oh, my boss, he was, of course, a Volksdeutsche; he was so happy because now he could make some money. He put on the red arm band with the "Hakenkreuz," with the swastika, took his rifle and went out with Germans to look for Jews. The Aktion was a whole day. When they had a group of about... about thousand people in the marketplace, they used to... uh...take them to the train station, which was about a mile away through the whole city, the main road. The main road was lined up on both ways by Poles, looking.

01:36:16

At least, I talk about mine town. And I was standing between them. I was...I wasn't afraid

because the Mayor of the city had a car. I was cleaning for him. The Gestapo wouldn't take me because I was cleaning their motorcycles, and the policeman did know him because they did come to salute him. Everybody did know I worked for [Solecky(ph)] ...for this Volksdeutsche. And even if they were...by chance somebody would take...take me, they would take me out from the circle. I was...I was sure about this. So I was just standing with the Poles looking. And once I've seen...I've seen many times cases like that, but this particular day was a kid, maybe...maybe seven years old which did run out, because not too many Ukrainians did guard this column of people. But maybe every...every hundred feet maybe a Ukrainian. It was easy to run out. But the problem was a different problem. This boy run out. Three minutes later, he was taken back by Poles, and pushed him back in the column. The point is this, that in mine dreams I don't dream about the German peo..., about the Germans. I'm not afraid of about the Germans. The Germans didn't know who I was. I was afraid about my neighbors, the Poles. They were living...you see, the Germans...they didn't know Jews. Their vision of Jews was from the...Rosenberg's²...Rosenberg? From his...from the propaganda. A Jew must have a long nose, and so on and so. But the Poles are my neighbors. They did live with Jews for hundreds of years, and I was afraid of them. Anyway, I was sitting back and observing. Nothing I could do. Transport finally...all the people were moved to the train station and they were...they weren't still enough people. Two trains already left for Belzec so the Aktion was, they take another night. And that time I told [Solecky (ph)] that I want to hide my brother. I want to take him away to a safer place. Mine brother was together with father in this attic, but I...I was afraid about...uh...this place. So I took my brother out. I went over there. Took my brother out, and I took him with me to the garage. A whole night was going on screaming. I remember I...this...this [Solecky (ph)], my boss, locked me in the garage, and in the garage was a Fiat, uh, the...the mayor's car, and I slept in this car. And that's a terrible sight. Outside was the screaming, shouting, "Shma Israel" and so on. I turned on the radio, and the radio...I still remember...the song. The radio....there was a station from Vienna and I remember the "Lily Marlene" song. And this was singing, and the screaming...it was a...a terrible...I just turned on the radio to...to...should take over, but was impossible and I'm sleeping with my brother. My brother in the back seat, and I in the front and my boss had a...a sense of humor, and every so often he did come and knock on the door. He did know I'm over there because he allowed me in the garage but he knocked, "Jews, Raus! Jews, Raus!" Just to scare me. Just for the fun, you know. And later, of course, he said, "Don't be afraid. Stay over there." And he left.

01:39:47

Early in the morning, he opened the garage and I told mine brother to go in the...to hide between the junks and that in the corner. It was a little partition. And Ukrainians did come in, cleaning their rifles and cleaning their pistols, and here one of the Volksdeutsches, of the German collaborators, did come in...a guy who I know very well, and I cleaned his motorcycles always. And so I told him, Mr. Krauser, I did...did want to know my family's

² Alfred Rosenberg was a leading ideologue of Nazi racist theories and served as the Reich Minister for the Occupied Territories in the East.

still intact...I told Mr. Krauser, "Would you like to go with me to my home to see if everything is okay? They did...they didn't rob us or whatever?" So he said, "Okay. Come." And so I went with him and come into our home and, of course, the door is smashed open and in there was Ukrainians trying on socks, changed their socks...I remember still. He did find a pair of socks he was changing. In another room was another Ukrainian looking in there and the...Krauser, said to them "Raus!" He had a nice Hakenkreuz, you know, on his..uh...shirt, the swastika, and he told them to get out. He was our authority, so they left. So while Krauser was down...uh..I did try to sneak in upstairs to see the hiding place is still intact. He noticed it. So he said...so he said, "Tom, do you want to go upstairs?" So I said, "Aw, forget it. No. Let go back." I didn't want to take the chance. But he felt something and he said, "No, let go upstairs." I said, "No, Mr. Krauser, no let not." "Let go." He went up and I went after him. He looks around and he said, "So, Tom." I said, "Okay, everything is okay, let's go back." But he felt something. He wasn't so stupid. He looked around, knocked on the floor, knocked on the wall. And later he goes to this little cabinet and wanted to move it. And I grabbed him by the hand, "Mr. Krauser, please leave it." "No, Tom. What is it? Don't be afraid." "This is a hiding place. My parents're over there. Don't go in because you will scare them." He said, "Don't be afraid." He moved away. And he found about hundred...over a hundred Jews over there. He goes in, comes out, moved back this cabinet and told me, "Tom..." They called me, that time they didn't call me Tom. "Toivi, don't be afraid." And he didn't betray it.

01:42:33

Later, when the Aktion was over, the...and I did come to remove this cabinet and told them everything is over, and everybody went out, they made a collection of money to give him. But it was after...after that. So this was the Aktion. Later were another Aktions, basically similar. I remember my aunt from Krasnystaw _____ was running wild on the street, breaking ...breaking his finger. She had one little boy, also called Toivi. And they took him away. He was hiding...he was...I don't how come, but they took him, they left her. And she was running wild on the street, breaking her fingers. "My Toivi, they took him away..." This I remember. And this was a typical Aktion. When Aktion, when they left there were windows broken in the Jewish houses, people did look for gold, and there was a lot of down on the street from the cut...they cut bedding to look for money and everything else...was like a ruin everything. And I just...I just went house to house to notice that my friends [Srulek (ph)] is taken, this guy is taken, mine...mine friend, a girl was taken, and nothing you could do. After each Aktion, we were promised this is the last time. Only unproductive Jews were taken. You see... hope. Hope could kill, and hope could save. If I wouldn't have hope, I would kill myself. So I...but a lot of people, because they hoped, they didn't fight and they did go to death practically without...without resistance. Anyway, (sigh) that's another Aktion, another one. Later, we hear about Sobibór. Another death camp, built this time north, on the north side of Izbica. And again a Aktion. I mustn't talk yet.

01:44:53

There is something which I could dwell on. In Izbica there were lot of Czechoslovak...Czech Jews, from Czechoslovakia. They considered themselves, probably with German inspiration, that they are better than the Polish Jews. So they made their own Judenrat... Czechoslovakian Judenrat. And the next Aktion, the Czechoslovakian Jews did chase the Polish Jews. And there was special Czechoslovakian militia...Jewish...Jewish militia, which chased...that time being a Czech Jew or a German Jew was a permit to live. That was a Akcja. When this was over, the Polish Jews would get together...not the Jews, the Judenrat Polish. How do I know it? I know it because my uncle was in Judenrat. He did come to my home and talk with my father and I always had a...and it was public knowledge too. The next...and so what's happened the Polish Jews did get...get together money and the Judenrat did bribe the Landrat, because Mr. Landrat is district officials--the German, you know. And when it was next roundup, before closing the wagons, the Landrat, the district official, told all the Czech Judenrat and the Czech militia to go on the wagons, and [they] take them away. And this was the revenge from the Polish. I just tell you...uh...uh...uh...you could take it out. But I just tell you the...the interaction, what it was. (sigh) So they played one against the other. (Pause) In 1942, so I was working in this garage for a long time, watching, seeing everything. Unfortunately, what...not being able to do anything. Once I think I helped, in a way, because there was a Aktion and like usual, in a Aktion...after the Aktion the Ukrainians, the SS, did come to Solecky's garage to clean the...the guns. So I overheard...uh...one Ukrainian, he said to Solecky, "Listen, prepare for me something...some kind of, I think it was a tire," because Wednesday, we coming back. So I was sure that Wednesday would be again so I put out the word that Wednesday will be again...again a Aktion; which was true. It was a Aktion next Wednesday.

01:47:50

Uh...up til now, my family was still intact. This hiding place was perfect. He didn't betray, Krauser. (Pause) Uh...me, as a boy, in the evening...uh..I used to go out after curfew to my friends and we had girlfriends from Czechoslovakia and we did get together in a hallway and we talk and...I, like any boys my age, 15 years, I did want to have my girlfriend. I was very shy, extremely shy, so finally, I...I met mine counterpart, a shy Czechoslovakian girl. And we were just standing...nothing, just standing pretending to be grownup and later, I remember after Aktion I went to her and...uh...I went to the hallway, a dark hallway which always, there...when I did come to her place and she did come out from her room and is talking to me in the hallway, her mother...and every few minutes opened the door, looking what we are doing. And I come to the hallway's empty, the window's broken, and she's gone. They took her away, so I thought about her mother being so protective of her, and now is gone. And...uh...so slowly all my friends...kids are gone. And now comes the time when we know that we can't escape destiny and my father calls me and he said, "Tom, Toivi, you must leave." Says I, "What do you mean, 'leave'?" "Toivi, you see what's happened. The next Akcja will be Judenrein. That means no Jews could be. And this hiding place will not help anymore. So you have prepared Christian papers, so-called Aryan papers, and you will escape to Hungary. Your brother will be hidden here. I arranged everything by a Pole. Your mother has also false papers and she will go to Warsaw. And I will hide someplace here. But

you will go...you will...you must leave tonight." I don't want to go into any particulars about...the...false papers, but about 2 o'clock in the night time, I received my papers. I was...my name was Waldemar Ptaszek, and my mother's name was [Leukadia Stankewicz (ph)] and so on.

01:50:44

It wasn't much time to learn the new names because a half hour later, we suppose to go to the train station. Now, my mother was still...soon...soon came to my parents...I remember, a...some gold coins. And I had about 100 mark in my pockets and a few Polish zlotys. And we eat sardines...I remember me and my mother and little brother and was another boy, [Velvole (ph)], from another family. He's supposed to go with me. We eat, and later I kissed uh my mother, my father, my brother; said goodbye, and...uh...I should go...in that time, it was agreed that I go to my neighbor, Schneider, wherever everybody who want to escape is concentrating. What it was was a group of about 12 people, Jews, with false papers and a Polish Christian guide supposed to lead them until the Hungarian border. Close to the Hungarian border, another fellow, Christian fellow, should take him over and try to sneak him into Hungary. Now...now we say, all going to Hungary...you know, _____. To understand the desperation of the time, you must understand this. To go out from the ghetto...first of all, to go out in curfew time, death sentence. To go out from the ghetto, death sentence. To be in a train, a death sentence. And you come to...to the (chuckle) to the border you can't go through. You must sneak through. On top of it, there were rumors that the Polish guides, they take you to the border and later they rob you. They make you first write a letter that you crossed nicely, to lure everyone, and later they rob you and they kill you. Now you understand this desperation that still my parents agreed to let me go. So I went out from this...from my parent's house to go to the Schneiders'. Half way...I still can't understand why, but half way to Schneider's house, I turn around and go back.

01:53:08

I...I don't know...I think I was so much attached to my little brother...I think I did want to see my brother again. Went back and my father was angry. I think he was superstitious, and he said, "You shouldn't come back. It's not a good sign." It's some kind of superstitious. If you...if you go back, it's not good. Anyway. So I felt bad that my father was angry. I turned around and went back to Schneider's house, and there about four girls and was some men called Rappoport from Zamo__ dressed as Polish peasant. Time comes close, and we are sneaking out slowly to the train station, watching that no German patrol should see us. By the way, the Germans they...they walk so loud that we could hear them a half a mile away, but still it was dangerous; so we sneaked into the train station but we are not...we can't go into the train station because there are lamp post and it's a little town. They would immediately recognize us. So we're waiting in a ditch till the train comes. The train arrives and before moving out, we did jump in in the last wagon. And this way we were on...on our way to the Hungarian border. By the way, tickets were bought by our guide beforehand; he did give us the ticket for riding the train. On the way, I encountered...already in the

beginning, but the first 20 miles past Izbica a problem which I don't feel is so important to dwell on it, so I will skip it. But finally, after about an hour's drive...uh...on the road, I see people closing the windows, starting to lit cigarettes. I hear some talking to themselves quietly. I see something change in the atmosphere. And suddenly, there's a train station and the train slowed down and the left side...as if would have been a big fire, and I could feel the smell. It was all over. And I understand, they're talking...they was talking...there's been Jews, "Spalenie _ydow" [**Translation: "Burning Jews"**] and so on, in Polish. And I look and there's Belzec...passing by Belzec . Not knowing that a year later, we'll be in a place like this. And I...I was starting to shake. We passed Belzec. The train did not stop.

01:55:58

In the middle of the way, close to Lwów [L'vov], something happened. All eight Jews, they're sitting in the same train...in the same wagon, and there was one fellow, Rabinowicz, who was always moving between us. Next to us were sitting, next to me, [Velvole (ph)], Polish farmers were sitting. And I heard one woman talking to another one that this one which is roaming, which is going around must be Jewish. And I was already scared, but so happens, this Rabinowicz comes to me and tells me, "Tom, [Guyosh (ph)]," which is our guide, "he wants more money. Otherwise, he's leaving us." So I told him, "Listen, Rabinowicz, you must run. Now we have really problems because next door is the woman who is suspecting you are Jewish. Now you did come to me, and there's problems." So he immediately told that...told another one, and in the next station, it was night time, we all left the train and we managed to go, mingled with lot of people go to the front, and we went on the same train except on another wagon. And we managed to come to close to Lwów. Now it was agreed before we left Izbica not to travel through the main station in Lwów, because there are rumors that the Gestapo is searching terrible this place. And they're checking everybody. The best place to go out a station before Lwów, go through Lwów by foot, and later the next station, pass Lwów, and go on again to the train. And the guide will be waiting already this station past Lwów. So we go out and the...place called Kleparów [**NB: Polish spelling**]. And I remember they were building some roads, so we need to go single file; and over there had a problem with a Ukrainian guard who stopped me but he asked me if I am Jewish and I said no. Why did he...he didn't actual stop me. We were single file in a...in front of us a Ukrainian militia man was riding a bicycle. And while he was passing our line and he stopped. And he was yelling, "Eh, you, come raus!" I wasn't sure if he yelled at me or he yelled somebody else. But...but nobody did go out from this...from the people moving, so I turned around and went to him. So he asked me...looked at me and asked me, "Are you Jewish?" I said, "No." "Show me your papers." I showed him the papers: Waldemar Ptaszek. In the train, I had already time to repeat "Waldemar Ptaszek, born here and here, and my father's so and so." "So what do you have in your rucksack?" So I said, "I have something...I have uh... food which I bought to...to take to my parents. I am just smuggling. If you want to give me a fine, I can't help it but I don't have money." He looked at me and said, "Okay. Go." Later...uh...I realized our mistake. I realized why...the... the...the Christian Poles recognized us as Jews on the train. You know why? We went into a train for smugglers. And everybody was dressed like smugglers. And now the few Jews are coming

dressed in their best because we are going for a trip. In the best...I had my shoes polished. We were...we just stand up like a sore...like a sore thumb how they say it in..in English so this was our... and probably this the reason he called me. I was nicely dressed. We did stood out from the rest of the people.

Q: Okay. At this point...excuse me...we need to stop and pause and change tapes.

A: Yah. Okay.

01:59:54

TAPE #2

Q: Okay. Continue.

02:00:27

Q: So, after the Ukrainian let me go back, I was walking. We were all together but basically mixed with another population walking the streets of L'vov [Polish: Lwów] in 1942. I was walking my friend [Velvole (ph)], farther with him, 10 feet behind us was Rappoport and farther, mingled with another people. And I remember passing the street Janowska _____. On Janowska street, there was a concentration camp. And I remember looking through the wires at the Jews working, and their [eyes] because you could see it. I didn't know. I heard about Janowska lager, but I didn't know it was right in the middle of the town. So I...I start to shake in that time too. I mean shake, being that scared. And...uh...later after walking along the...all the way through the town, I arrived in Skni_ów [NB: Polish spelling], a station past ...past L'vov. Now I must tell you something. I was a very naive child. I had a big fantasy. I always fantasied. Even being in that train, I fantasized. You see, I did read a lot. A lot of Jack London and all the books; and I was always dreaming of traveling, of adventures. And for some reason, I'm even ashamed to admit, I felt like I'm there...adventure. It was a mixture, being some hero of mine...from some book going to borders and...and feeling as a Jew, it's...it's a deadly game. It was a mixture. Anyway, when I come to Skni_ów, I...I didn't even understand that now the biggest... the worst part is coming now. And I spent all my Polish money because I'm going on a train and we already close to the border. I spent...I had 500 zlotys, and I think it's 10 for something and...uh...I went to going to the toilet, looking on the mirror and looked at me myself and thought, "How do you look, Tom? Face not bad. The nose, maybe a little bit too long, but also not bad. The hair, reddish. Not bad...." Everything was...in my opinion, I give...myself a plus...for...for the Aryan look. And...uh...the only trouble was...was with my Jewish accent, and I talked Polish.

02:03:04

Go back to the train, and now we have a big city street, and we suppose to go out in a town past the [Lsitvov (ph)] Street, and later go to the border. They're suppose to lead us to the border, ...our...our...our guide. Anyway, while the train is coming close to the gate...to the [Lsitvov (ph)] Street, something happened. There was a Jewish girl with us. Langer was her name. She was...she didn't have typical Semitic features cause none of us who did try to go on Christian papers had the Semitic features, but she was nevertheless dark, dark eyes, so she always did look out to the window when the train was moving so nobody should see her face. It wasn't as much as Semitic features than the look of a Jewish person in that time. This care look, and so on. It was difficult to get rid of. And the German conductor did come to her, checking the tickets, like to anybody. And when he asked her, "Bitte, die Fahrkarte," which "Please, where is your ticket?", she did turn over and she said, "Bitte, Ich habe"-- "Yes, please, I have." If she would talk still German, it wouldn't be so bad. But later she understood that she should pretend that she doesn't know German. And she started to back

off...she was a pretty girl and he did want to talk to her and she start to talk half German 'til she learned a few words in school. Anyway, she convinced the German that she doesn't know German much and so he left. The Germans weren't so really sharp, but she arose the suspicion of the Ukrainians. We're traveling with those. And soon Ukrainian militia man did come asking her for the papers and I have done a basic mistake. Up 'til now, if I say a lie, I start to get red. I start to stutter. Even now, I start to stutter. And when I was a kid, I was very shy. In that point, when they start to look for more Jews because they discover this girl, instead to...to look around like another my neighbors did look, you know...the passengers, I start to sweat, perspire. My face did get...my face did get red and I didn't know what to do so I took a newspaper, pretend like I'm reading. And this was even worse because then everybody was looking around and here's a guy reading a paper. And didn't take long when my paper is taken away and I see in front of me a Ukrainian militiaman. "What's your name?" "Me. Waldemar Ptaszek." And I remember I added, "But in home they called me 'Waldek.'" I told him this to make it more...at least I thought so, more truthful. He took my paper. He asked me for a document with a pictures which I don't have because I'm not full aged. I'm under age. I have only my birth certificate. So he didn't know if I am Jewish or not, so he told me, "Come with me to the toilet." They had a proof...to check and see if you are circumcised because in America everybody practiced. In Poland, only a Jew. So they took me to the toilet and told me to pull down the pants. ____ pulled down the pants. They are looking. Still can't find out. Something is wrong here. What was wrong? Why weren't they able to find out? Because two weeks before escaping, I did try to correct what my Rabbi or shochet, Who's doing the circumcisium? I don't even know. A rabbi?

02:06:56

Q: Usually. Rabbi or [mohel].

A: Whoever it is. I tried to correct, what 13 years ago, 14 years ago, what somebody did do to me. So I did...I did try to correct it with a string and with a tool and tie it. The only result was in that time that everything was swollen and so they weren't able to...to recognize and it hurt me. I wasn't able to urinate. But..uh...it was...wasn't able to see, but obviously they had seen that somebody was manipulated over there, so they started talk to each other. And after the professional...the professional result, the diagnosis was that Jew or not Jew, something is wrong, and he took me. They took me. Pulled back the pants. The train stopped. I went...they told us...they told me to go out and now I noticed they caught practically everybody...every one of us. The...the whole group was caught, except one little boy. [Velvole (ph)], he wasn't caught. I don't why. But he...he was caught later.

02:08:02

Anyway, they took us to the...uh...uh...SS office where Gestapo is over there. Stryj [Polish: Stryj] is a big city and there was one Gestapo is there and there was about five Ukrainians. They told us to undress. We undressed. And at that time one Ukrainian hit me in my throat with the fist and I was start to choke and when he want to hit me again, the Gestapo man

start to yell at him, forbid to hit. Yah. It's true. So he didn't beat us anymore when he forbid to beat us. And after they checked our clothing and discovered some money, told us again to dress. And they led us to...uh...like a little jail. We went in. Locked the doors. It was dark inside. They didn't say anything. Sitting up about an hour, the door opens a little bit, and you see a Ukraine...Ukrainian guard in front and he said, "You know what? If you will give me some money, I will give you good advice. I know, no matter what still something...he said, you still hide some money. After all this...." Which was true. I had some money (laughing) still hidden where they weren't able to discover in...uh...but anyway Rappoport hearing this, had a glass case. Opened the glass case and he put away this little lining and picked up about 50 marks or so hidden behind the lining of the glass case...eye glass case. And did give...give it this Ukrainian. Now the Ukrainian's giving us the advice. He opened more the door...a little bit more, so the light did come in. And he said, "Look behind you." Behind us was...was a window...a bar window, with bars. And something was hanging from the bars. He said, "You see it? This is long underwear. Yesterday, they arrested a Jew like you are now arrested, and he hanged himself. So my advice is you hang yourself. One after another one, it will be better than this what is waiting...awaiting you when the boss will come." The big shot. Anyway, he closed the door. And we didn't take his advice. In the evening they told us to go out and...uh.. we were about 12 people, and after a warning that we will be shot if we try to escape, they led us through the town of Stryj [Polish: Stryj] to another jail. People seeing us reacted different. Some did laugh. Some did joke. Some did spit. I've seen some faces which did maybe feel for us. And finally, they took us to another jail for criminal police. This was...another jail was a jail which did belong to so-called "Kripo." "Kripo" is Kriminalpolizei. Because they were the people arresting us, which I found out later.

02:11:42

And...uh..over there, the same Rabinowicz who on the train... uh...was talking with me, was moving back and forth...he was a hyper always. He told me and another friend, [Velvole (ph)], that if you have some still money, we should give him, he will bribe the guard. Maybe we could sneak out. And we have seen him a few times going out through the door with a guard and coming in so I did give him some money. I still had some hidden money, and I cut off the seam and took out. I just mention it because later it will come up again. Being in this jail for a couple of days, they again transferred us to the big city jail, big four-story building. In the city jail, we were in that time about eight people. The woman they took someplace else. And was in the third floor, cell number 27 or 37. I think 27. And...uh...who was in this cell? Were about four Jews...one...two Ukrainians, one person we didn't know he's Jewish or not. Weren't able to discover, so he was...uh...he did get soup...Red Cross soup. Because the Red Cross helped us with food, but only for the Christians--not for Jews. So he received it. Some people recognized...some from the jail...did hold him for a Christian, some not. Anyway, he had...he wasn't established, not there...not there. He was sick. He was laying in the corner. And there was a German. I'll tell you about this German. It was big cell, pretty clean. We had four mattresses from straw, stacked a whole day one atop of another one. In the night time, we did lay it on the floor, and we slept. (Pause) And it was...it was also...it was there a lawyer from the city of Stryj [Polish: Stryj]--a Jewish...Jewish lawyer. He...I

remember he had a talent...uh...he took a...a...a...comb. He was able to play a comb. And when he played the Ukrainians would listen in especial; night time they always asked him...knocked on the middle of the door, "Play a little bit." And because of it, they next day they did give us more soup or whatever. So he has done it.

02:14:38

But...uh...later, we had a custom...especially, the first days to tell stories of our past. And everybody tell...told his story. When it became my turn, I told him. I didn't have much to say. I was born Izbica and I am out from Izbica. But Alvin Lippmann had an interesting story to tell. Alvin Lippmann...uh...he was about...over 50 years old, very straight. I mean he kept himself straight, slim, always his...his...coat, had a coat was buttoned and every day, he get up in the same hour and he was really...could be a military man. Now at that point...I hate even to tell the story. I hate to tell my whole story, to tell you the truth. I must again interject something. Why do I hate to tell? Because there's so many unbelievable scenes and situations that if I tell everything, my whole story be...becomes unbelievable. So this is one of these...of these stories which I usually hate to tell, but I will tell it to you. You know what? I wrote my story in...in...in ghetto. I wrote it in the forest. I wrote it in Sobibór. It was many times lost, discovered. When I went out, I wrote again. They promised my story to hide pages so I could recover after the war, which I did recover about 30 percent of it. In 1952 from the 30 percent I...I did special...applied a job I should have a lot of time. And in Poland I used to work as a social director. In the months of...uh...uh...November, October, there wasn't...there was really quiet in the resort places. So I...I did fill in mine diary. And later, Poland...they want to publish it. But they did want to make so many corrections that I didn't allow it. And later when I went to Israel. They made me...let me go but this manuscript should stay in the country, so I managed to smuggle out a manuscript to the Jewish...uh...consulate in...in Poland, and I later picked it up in...in Israel. But why I am telling you this story. Now I have a diary which I've written, in the dangerous, places my whole life. What should I do with it? So I go to a Jewish survivor from Auschwitz. Actually, he was the Secretary of the Jewish organization of the Auschwitz people in Haifa. I go to him and said, "Listen, I would like you should look it over, read it over and tell me what you feel about this." Three weeks later I visit him

02:17:32

and ask him, "So, what do you think?" And he looks at me and said, "Oh, Yah. Yah. You have a fantasy. Never heard of Sobibór. Revolt? Never heard." I was beaten many times in Sobibór. Beaten by the SS. It didn't hurt me as much as if he was. And what as if he was done? He done this: that for another 20 years, I didn't touch it. So, if he didn't believe me, who could believe me? But later, I come to understand that people being in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, they were actual limited. They have seen only their own circle. And in many cases, ours like hiding in the forest, hiding and hiding was much worse than...than...than a camp, than a concentration camp. Depends which kind. So anyway, but nevertheless it had such an effect that I put it away for 20 years. I didn't do anything. Still in America, when the

Holocaust film did come out, I felt maybe I should do it. So I started on it. Now, why also...I hate ...I hate to...to publish it or whatever, because it's so...a story like this. It's hard to believe which I will tell you. Alvin Lippmann, his story. Alvin Lippmann was a German officer, a Hauptmann [**NB: Captain**]. He fought in the Polish campaign, '39. He fought in the Russian campaign; but unfortunately, he had a Jewish wife and two children. His wife in the beginning of the war--this his story--in the beginning of the war, was under the protection of the Wehrmacht because her husband was a German officer. There was a time when the families were under protection. So later the Gestapo told him, "Either divorce your wife. It's okay. Or get out from the Wehrmacht." He decided to get out. They let him from the Wehrmacht. The moment he went out from the Wehrmacht, his...his family was not protected anymore. And when they resettled the Jews to Poland, they settled his wife and children to Zamosc. And he left with them. He didn't want to leave his family, and they let him go. In Zamosc, they made him a commandant of the Jewish police, militia. Until...and he did survive until the last Aktion. The last Aktion was, they took away his wife and children, but they let him go. He was a German. So he wasn't able to protect either his wife or his children. That time he did try...he didn't want to go back to Germany. He did want to go to Czechoslovakia, and he did try to make his way to Czechoslovakia. Anyway, he was in Stry when they arrested him. And he told us this story. Not only this, now the point--which is all--he taught...when General Ludendorff made this "Putsch" with Hitler, you know this story, ...he took with him a company of German soldiers. Who was in this company? The jung Leutnant [**NB: Lieutenant**], Alvin Lippmann.

02:20:55

So after the war, when Hitler was in the power, he did send a letter with his signature, probably wasn't an original. It was a stamp. It was from the headquarters of NSDAP, the Nazi organization. A thank you letter to...to the old fighters, all the Kamaraden. A thank you letter for his work for the Nazis, so he did get this letter. So he tells us this story, and the Jewish lawyer was immediately excited, said, "Listen, well, we have the documents. He has all the evidence. He has a Iron Cross. He has everything!" And so he...he told him, "Listen, you better write a letter to General Governor Frank in Krakow and you should be ...first of all, you're a German." Second, he explained...he explained away this. And he wrote a letter. Now, I must go back a little bit. While we are...in this...while we are in this jail, in this room, we were very hungry. We didn't get much food, but it was quiet. Nobody did bother us. No...no... nobody did beat us. But once a nighttime, we heard a scream. Outside. So I went to the window and looked down and right a big jail was another...uh...uh...house, two-floor house. And I observed once in awhile that some people are brought in and...uh...and there was a rumor that they are Jews caught on Aryan, Christian papers or otherwise. And...uh...til...til except when the jail would be full, when there would be Aktion to Belzec, or to another place, they take them out. So the scream was exactly from...when they tried to take them out from this jail to the...to the yard, some woman started to scream. And I was looking down and I was wondering, "Oh, God, Why we are separate? I'm a Jew too, but they keep us separate ...God forbid they should take us...they should attach us." They took all...all of them away, but our room. Our cell wasn't touched. Now I'm going back. Now,

Alvin Lippmann's letter goes out. Not long, about three days later, we heard some steps in the hallways of the jail. Even this jail, we talk only Polish or Ukrainian. There were no Germans personnel. Once in awhile a German showed up so the whole jail was under guard. And we heard....we could... we could hear some changes. Everybody "Achtung! Achtung! Achtung!" in the hallways and we understood some big shots are coming. There are steps and steps and the steps stopped in front of our cell. Cell's open, and there are two tall guys with the...uh...death head on their caps. You know it's SS, or Gestapo. And they opened the door, look at us and immediately "Herr Lippmann. I understood immediately that there's something...they don't talk...they don't say to a guy they want to kill "Herr." "Herr Lippmann," so he immediately stood up and they told him, "Take your stuff and come with us. Please take your stuff." And so he took whatever he had with him and another look around

02:24:29

and they asked Mr. Krewl (ph) ...Krewl (ph) was the head of the jail, Pole. They asked him, "What are the other people doing here doing?" And he explained that this cell belonged to the criminal police and...uh...they are two Ukrainians and one, we don't know who it is, and there are four Jews and so on and so. So the SS immediately put everything in order. They told the Ukrainians to leave them and this guy who was not a Pole, not a Jew, they tell him he's Jewish...they didn't care. If they kill....even they kill a Pole, what do they...what do they mean. What do they care? They classified him as a Jew, and they told all of us to go to the...they should transfer us to the to another building which in between time was again collecting some Jews. And you wouldn't believe it. When they took us in, me and [Velvole (ph)] and another one to the other cell. It was terrible. I remember it was one room maybe like this. Full of people. Dirty. Was no toilet, but there was a barrel from herring. Empty barrel. And this used...this was as a toilet. I think it was a couple dead bodies laying by it. I still remember if it was...it was a Christian. I don't know if it was a Pole or a Ukrainian. I think so, a Ukrainian. It was already the winter time and he was with this peasant coat, and he was praying to "Matka Boska [the Mother of God]," to Mother Mary. And praying and praying. The whole day he was praying. He was treated with deep...deep respect. Uh...We had people, strong men, in our cell. When lunch time did come and they threw in a sack with bread, and the strong man, he's supposed to divide. He didn't give everybody what belongs to him, a quart...of loaf of bread, but he put in his hand and right he broke up at least half. But he can do anything. He was the law of the fist. But this man, the Christian man, he was so much respected because he helped the Jews that he...he didn't even need to stand in line for this bread. It was delivered to him. Uh...uh...He wasn't biggest. I mean, we respected him because he did help us. Try at least. Now he's in the same... Well, I remember this. Now, I didn't tell you this, but back still in the big cell...in the first cell, I did become very friendly with a person called Zellinger. He was a very rich fellow from the ghetto of Stryy. He was arrested. I don't know from what reason. But he received packages from his wife in ghetto. And he helped me. When he...ever he received, he did give me...the package. And we became very friendly. His wife bribed the [Ogelobo (ph)], [Ogelobo (ph)] is like the guard...the Ukrainian guard, and he received many times letters. The guard called him out,

give him the letter...called him outside. Anyway, he immediately...they let him come out...when...when they took him out, they did give him a better room, a better cell. But me, the rest of them, the rest of us, were in this particular, miserable room. Next day, they called my name. They called [Velvole's (ph)] name. We were called outside and pushed into another cell where Zellinger was. What happened? Zellinger did give a bribe to them.... The other cell was already a cell for people which had the means--doctors, lawyers from the ghetto--and there was no hunger over there. It was clean, and there was some business going on with the Polish prisoners. We put in a...a...a pot with the string down and the Polish prisoners put in some...uh...meat or whatever, sausage, and we threw out the money. It was some business. So it was a different atmosphere. So Zellinger helped me. Once I remember a fellow in this particular room. We were waiting for a next transport. We know that the next time will be we will be killed the moment the transport is ready.

02:28:52

Q: We need to keep moving a little.

A: Yah. Okay. So, I will skip this story. The point is this. Once Zellinger received a letter from his wife through the guard that...uh...tomorrow a doctor will come asking for sick people. What's happened? We did get sick...sick on the...typhus that broke out. But we were afraid that if we tell the doctors that some people..., the Germans that some people are sick, we...we know what kind of medicine they have for us. So we were afraid, but we notified the Judenrat. And the...the Judenrat bribed the...the...the Germans...it's look like, they should allow to take out a few people from jail. Anyway, Zellinger did received a letter from his wife that when the doctor comes, he should not be afraid to say he's sick. And Zellinger told me that. And when the next day, the doctor did come, I did go to the doctor time, and told them that I am sick. The doctor looked at me and he said, "Oh, there's more sick than you." Up 'til now, the Germans they didn't know, because when there was a roll call in the morning, everybody was able to support. Was sort of a tight room, anyway. Uh...So I pushed my way...I took a thermometer and rubbed it in my shirt and I knocked it down [up] to about 41 celsius; I should be dead in that temperature, but was so scared to start to get it back and anyway through my manipulation the silver inside did break down in a few places. So...but, I was...very panicky, but I managed to put put it at 38 celsius, and I go back to the doctor and the doctor still didn't want to accept me so I went to his helper and I remember I had 20 zlotys. I did give him 20 zlotys. I remember punching my chest to make red spots because I know my brother was sick of the typhus in ghetto that the symptoms for typhus is red spots on the chest. Anyway, the 20 zlotys helped me. He pushed me outside. They were allowed to take out a certain amount of people, about 20 people from that jail. So I was, Zellinger they didn't accept him, but they accepted me. And now they were going to take us out. The gates from the jail opened, and they take us to the hospital. Now, the...the jail didn't have a hospital. But the ghetto had. And while the ghetto was shrinking, the Stryy ghetto, the hospital was out of the ghetto. So they took us to that hospital. In one room or two rooms, they did...they restrict only the people from the jail. And the rest was...uh...locked up and guards were standing around now, too... Jewish guards, Jewish policja. So...but now we're

going outside and it was winter. I remember going through streets of Stry and thinking, "Should I run now? Should I..." because the Jewish policia...they were only guarding. There was no Germans. But they were in front with the Jewish...uh..nurses, and they didn't give a damn about us, thinking that we are sick. And was a ideal time to jump out and just go. But I...I did look for a partner. I didn't have a penny and didn't know where to go. So I noticed another fellow who I thought maybe he is simulating sicknesses too, and I told him, "Listen, do you want to run?" And he told me, "Don't do it now. Let go to the hospital. My father's in the ghetto and my father will come. He...will have money and everything else." So I...I listened to him. So now we're in this hospital I explained, this room.

02:32:32

Visitors from the city were able to come in, but we weren't able to go out with the Jewish militia... uh... uh ...watch us. It didn't take long. He was really sick. So I wasn't able to go along later. I was sick. I don't want to go into any particulars, but I was sick. (Sigh) Now, one evening at 4 o'clock, the doctor comes in without his hat. I still remember. And he said, "All prisoners from jail should go out from the room and go across the yard to the next...uh ...next apartment...next house...___ house. So I wanted to get up and I did get up and this was about January 8, 1943. And I go out and I...I don't remember now what's happened, what's make me to turn back. I had a big white skirt--shirt, long shirt--and go out and it was cold and I remember I felt my feet were...my sole was like burning from snow, from the frost. Either this make me turn back or I notice a German soldier standing next to this next building. Anyway, I turned back, went back to my bed and hide under the bed. Hide under the bed; takes maybe three minutes, I hear somebody comes in. I looked from under the bed, and I see a Jewish policeman. Now it's a Jew, no matter what. I did move out and said, "Listen. What's happened here?" He told me, "You here?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, then, don't be afraid. You will hear some shooting, but be quiet." He went out, and later was some shooting, screaming. And nobody did come back; except a couple of hours later, I see the doctor comes back. And like a...before the doctor come back, I was ready to escape. What's happened? When we were in hospital...in the hospital, everybody was forced to give up the clothing to the dis... disinfection, but I managed not to give up. I did give up a shirt, but the rest was hidden under my mattress with...uh ...my idea to escape. So while...shooting was finished and nobody...uh...did come in, I did dress myself slowly from the stuff under the mattress. It was no militia now watching us because everybody's supposed to be killed, and I want to go out, but I was so shaky that my movement...I still was sick, that I...I've seen that I wouldn't go too far. They will recognize me immediately, so I went back under the bed. Later, I see that the doctor comes in. So I move out and say, "Oh, Doctor." And he asks...sees me and said, "Oh, How...what are you doing here?" And I told him what I have done. And he said, "No, it's...it's impossible." Because they killed everybody from jail. There were 20 people. They killed everybody. So he started to check. What's happened? When it's the high point of the typhus, there's a time when people run like in high fever. They lose their conscious. They just run. I think it is about the tenth day of the sickness when the crisis comes. And many times while we were in this...uh ...in this hospital, from the neighboring rooms because neighboring rooms was Jews from the city, they did try to run in.

Many times they did run in..in our restricted room, but the Jewish policija pushed them back. Probably every day happened something like that. They would start to run so when the doctor was checking, he noticed that a bed from the adjoining room is empty because he counted the bodies. There was 20 bodies. If the Germans would kill only 19, they would look for me. But they were 20. So what's happened...what's happened is this..is the doctor figured out....that cell...this guy, Ledermann and I...we didn't know...he...many times he did try to get in the last few days to our... everybody's gone. There was no guard. He's gone. And he took my place. So he told me, "Tom, you go in Ledermann's bed, and from now on you're not Blatt. You're Ledermann."

02:37:15

So in this way, I managed to go out from the jail, and not be a prisoner. Later, I don't want to go into details again, I was healthy already and was ready to go out from this hospital and the moment I did go out...I was ready to go out, the Jewish policeman did come. He practically see me every day that I can go out from the hospital. I must give him money. I says, "But listen, I don't have money." "No. You don't have it? Try to steal. Do whatever you want. I need money. Because I saved you." I said, "How did you save me? I did see you and did come out for help to you. You didn't save me." Anyway, this policeman, this militiaman was my tormentor. And...uh...I wasn't able to go out from the hospital. And the doctor told me I must go out. You...you can take...we need the place for somebody else and I tried to avoid him, but he took away this bed from me and he took away the food from me, so I was stealing in night time. Finally, they caught me. They grabbed me and they simply threw me out from jail. I didn't even go 200, half a mile when a militia man, another militia man I didn't never know...a Jewish militia man did run after me. "You dirty...you go go back. What do you mean? You will escape from us?" And (laughing) took me back to this hospital. Not only they took me back, but listen. They had again a group from jail. Separate. He put me with them, where I was in the beginning. Anyway, as I start to cry, and the doctor comes to visiting and he noticed, "Listen, I just threw you out. What are you doing?" So I start to cry, "What's will happen, will happen?" And told the whole story. Told the whole story, so he called up Mr. Stark. He was the head of the Jewish...this probably you could check with any sources.... He called out the Jewish militia, and Mr. Stark, the commandant, did come and I remember he called in this...this tormentor of mine, the Jewish policeman who didn't let me out, and he beat him up over there. Yah. And they told me I could go. And I...then when everything is legal. I asked him even for my jacket which I...which the janitor used to wear. Okay. I went out to the ghetto and was a free man in the ghetto. I mean free, I was not anymore a jailman.

02:39:35

Now I find out that Izbica are still Jews and my parents are over there. So I wrote them a letter. I find this out while...when I was still in jail. I wrote them a letter and give the address to the...the hospital. And there was a answer. Even when I was in the hospital, there was a answer. But my name wasn't that time Blatt. It was Ledermann. And I forgot to tell this my

parents. Anyway, I wrote another letter, another letter. In that time the ghetto of Stryy was half empty. And I did live with that Czech boy in one apartment. I didn't need food because if some reason even in that time was so many food in empty houses..., it was an Aktion in between time which I survived by hiding in somebody's hiding place. But I did want some money to buy a ticket to go back to Izbica, and I didn't know how to get the money. So I did go to the Judenrat, and told one official over there if he could help me. My parents are alive in the ghetto and I...I need some money. I need 20 zlotys. "Why do you need it?" "I want to buy food." He went in. He came out with a paper that I could have free food for two weeks in the hospital. Now, I wasn't able to...I didn't tell them I want to escape. I took this paper. I never went to the hospital. That particular...I have a strong intuition always. That particular morning, and I'm a long sleeper...that particular morning I did get up...I remember 7 o'clock in the morning and said, "I'm going to the hospital." I started the foot go...and I didn't even wait for a Jewish militia man to take me to the hospital because the hospital was outside the ghetto and you were not allowed to go alone, only on the assistance from Jewish militia. I went alone. Come to the hospital and looked for some people which I will get...get friendly before.

02:41:45

Q: Let's stop [and pause please. We need to stop anyway. Let's take a break for a moment.]
[NB: text in preceding brackets not apparent on videotape]

Q: Okay. Let's pick it up now where you left off.

A: Yah. So I didn't receive any money from the Judenrat but... uh..this...uh...paper that I could eat, if I want to, in the hospital and in that particular day, I had some feeling I must go to the hospital and went to the hospital to visit my friends which I know from before. And I...going toward a office to ask for somebody and I notice over there some people, I notice a woman sitting and I'm going out. While I'm going in the hallway, somebody is behind me, running behind me..."Mister! Mister! Wait a second!" I stopped and this was the doctor who in the beginning, who changed my name to Ledermann, and I told the story. I said, but he didn't remember already my first...my true name. He said, "Aren't you...what's your name?" "Blatt." "Oh, yah. Blatt. Aren't you Blatt?" "Yah." "Oh. How are you son? Listen, go to the office. Somebody is waiting for you." So I go to the office and he said, "The lady is waiting for you." I look at the lady. I don't know her. And she looks at me. She doesn't know me either. So she told me to sit...sit down and she said, "You know who I am? I'm Ola. I was your nanny when you was a baby...milk nanny...nanny. I mean, probably my mother didn't have milk or whatever. And I remember as a child. I remember some Ola, Ola, they mention in our house. "I'm Ola." So she said, "uh...First you must prove to me that you are really Toivi." So she start to ask me how is Izbica look like and how my mother and my father look like and I passed the test, obviously, and she said, "Toivi, you sent a letter, and...uh...from the hospital. Your mother answered immediately, and the hospital answered immediately again that 'Tomasz Blatt died January... January 8, 1943, in the Jewish hospital in Stryy,'" because this way it was written in the... in the books. "And later, you wrote

another letter and another letter and your parents were sure that somebody want to...to get some money, blackmail. But your brother was so sure that you are alive that he didn't let your parents in peace. So your parents decide to send me out to find my...find by myself. And while I was sitting here, asking the doctor told me that he remembered something about Blatt... Ledermann...something, and later you walk in and you walk out and the doctor was running after you."

02:44:50

So this is another of these stories unbelievable. But I tell you, every survivor has unbelievable story because it was un...unbelievable circumstances, the survivor's life. Anyway, so she had some money she did give me immediately. And she did give me a watch which my brother had. And this...this was his treasure. In fact I can remember the watch. He wouldn't even let anybody touch, but he'd give it to her she should give it to me. He was sure I am alive. So she says, "Now, we'll tell your parents and your parents will be in touch with you." And she left. The same day I went outside, the watch was taken by the Jewish policeman. He met me. He said, "Oh, you have a nice watch. Give it to me." And I did give it to him. I didn't ask. Now I was waiting. I...I was sure that something will be done and it didn't take long. Some middle...not the middle of the night...about 10 o'clock, a knock in the door. Somebody comes in. Who comes in? Krauser. The same... (laughing) Volksdeutsch who once didn't betray us. He said, "Toivi, Toivi. Oh, how are you doing? Toivi, listen. I did...I'm coming to take you to your parents." I'm sure my parents paid him a lot of money to do it. And he had actually a paper from the Landrat, from the district officials, that I'm allowed to travel with the train. Everything was legal. So I, he...and they let me out through the gate to the main gate because I was with a German. And we went to the train station. I was with the star...the Star of David and while I was waiting for the train, hidden in a little house close to the train station, the shadow...uh...he went in to buy the tickets. Soon he comes out and says, "Listen, Toivi, there's a train leaving in a half an hour. A regular train. He stops in any stations. Some little Ukrainians, but I don't know if I will be able to protect you if something happened. You were paid. You could travel the train, but nevertheless. Now, there's another..." I mean this was a train was leaving in about two hours. "But there's another train," it was leaving in about 20 minutes, "which is a German train from the Eastern Front only for Germans. If you want to go, just throw down you Star of David. Come with me." And he said, "It's actually more secure in the den of the lions than it is..." And I said, "Okay." Threw down the Star of David and went with him in, and a lot of hundred soldiers from the Eastern Front...must have been 1943...we went in a compartment.

02:47:46

I still remember a woman. She was from the Todt Organization. And there was two gendarmes in the green uniforms...I know the gendarmes and the SS...I did know by the skull on the hat. And they were sitting and talking and the woman did talk about...one guy was from Essen. I know they did talk a lot about from the city of Essen. But very shortly, and later they switched to the...to Tunis, what there was in that time...they did win some territory

in Tunis. Anyway it was still going on...later the woman asked me if I want tea. And he told me, Kraus[er], "Don't talk much." So I said, "Danke schön." And he was angry I even said "Danke schön" there. I mean in the eyes of Krauser.... But "Danke schön" was okay. They didn't notice anything. Uh... Until later, they...across me, the soldier did pick up a piece of chocolate he did give me, and everybody fall asleep. So as a German I arrived, because this was a fast train. He didn't stop in any station. He didn't stop in Izbica either, because it was a small stop. We stopped past Izbica 12 kilometers, Krasnystaw. Over there we went down. And here the...Krauser said, "Tom. Now here we must part. You must go by foot 12...12 kilometers and I can't be with you anymore...anymore because everybody knows me there." So...but he forgot to tell me that my parents moved. So I went to Izbica night time, come to my home and knock in the door and there's a voice, "Who is it?" I say, "It's me. Open." I didn't recognize in the beginning. Well, inside they recognized me and said, "You dirty Jew. Run away. You don't live here anymore. Go over there." So we were living in that time in a rundown place, so I come to this place. It was everything night time. It was very dangerous. Knock on the...there was some shutters, so I putted my finger behind the shutters because it was everything dried out. You know the rundown houses; knock slowly in the window. I didn't want to scare my parents. And heard a voice, "Somebody's knocking." Later, I've seen light and later, I say "It's me. Toivi." And hear mine brother screaming, "Toivi! Toivi!" and the doors open in the back and I go in, and my mother kissed me. My brother jumped on me. He didn't want to let me...but the next question was whether you have your watch. (laughing) "Give me back my watch." And...uh...my father, he pretend...uh...he didn't...he...he was rather a hard type. He pretend he didn't cry but I..but I've seen him...I've seen red eyes. And now the story was going on a whole night.

02:50:45

Their story, to tell in a few words. After this, after I left, they made Izbica "Judenrein;" by that time my brother and father were hidden. My mother was in Warsaw, also escaped. Soon after I escaped. Later, they made Izbica again a "Judenstadt." And actual when I researched the German document...there's a document which Izbica... there's a nation...Izbica is to be a "Judenstadt" again. And...uh ... first my father returned, later and other people returned and again, I don't want to give...there's a few interesting stories about this, but they will drag on so I will miss it. Just tell you that Izbica did again become Judenstadt. My father returned. My brother returned. My mother returned. And...uh...of course, now I am back. More people did come back. My mother had a beautiful job as a...in a German company as a bookkeeper in Warsaw, as a Christian girl. She was blonde, thin, short nose. Very Aryan-looking. Unfortunately, they told me later that my little brother wrote her a letter that my father is going with another woman or sounding like that, and they told me she returned. She was jealous or whatever. So now I'm in Izbica. In the morning, I go out to my Izbica, I'm back in my town. Go out and the first guy I see is a good acquaintance of my family from the...the coop...cooperative [spó_dzielczo__or_landszo__(ph)] and I say, "Oh, hello. How are you?" And he looks at me, "You dirty Jew. You are still here?" I can't believe it. I met another one good. He said, "Oh, your time will come soon." And I feel it's not my Izbica anymore. Maybe it never was. So I go around into houses. There were 200 Jews and they live about 10

Jews to one room in a little area. There was a tannery where most Jews lived. And...uh..I felt something happens. Something will happen and I want to go to the Partisans.

02:53:05

So I go to the Partisans. They told me, "You can't go without a gun." They wouldn't take you without a weapon. So I went to buy weapons. I don't have money. But I have a friend. [Izick _____(ph)] And I tell him, "Listen. Let's buy a gun." He didn't have money either. So I told my father, "Listen, I don't want to sleep in this room. There's too many people. I want to sleep in the attic. Could you give me a blanket? And could you give me a coat, a winter coat?" He said, "Okay." So I took it and sold it. I still didn't have enough for a gun. (Laughing) So finally [Izick, Izick _____(ph)] did have the money, bought a gun and he hid it. He hid it in the...in the straw, in a place over there in the tannery. In the tannery was a horse who did work in this...this...in this towel I hid the gun. One day...but I was so in love with the gun that many times I kept it in my pocket. Once I go with my...once there was a rumor that the Germans asked how many Jews are in Izbica. And that time my father was the Judenrat, the head of the Judenrat. The 200 Jews, were three people in Judenrat...my father was...another one was Blanck and Kornfeld. So I did know immediately. So I remember walking with my father to a Polish lady...was in Kovin, and I still remember the road, and I said to my father...that...they asked for the Jews. "Isn't that something dangerous?" He said, "God knows...knows." I said, "Dad, Let's buy a gun." He says, "No. You can't buy a gun." I said, "Dad, I have a gun already. In fact in my pocket." And he looked and he could see this...uh...outline and he said, "Be careful. Be careful. Don't...uh...we could get killed." But the way he said it, I've seen that is really the tragedy. Another time...maybe a half a year ago, he would say, "Tom, hide it. Throw it away." He didn't say this anymore. He let me keep it. He just says, "Be careful." The gun didn't help...help me anyway because when the time did come, I remember I heard a big shot, jumped from the attic down. I hurt my back. Until now, it's hurting me. Did run to the hiding place. As I said, Izbica was in a valley. A lot of houses were built in the hills so one wall was actually a built in the...in in the hill. So one wall of this tannery was built in in the hill, so what we have done, we moved a panel and digged a very big cave for about a lot of people. And was so nicely done nobody did notice this entrance and we hid over there. We heard the Germans coming in, looking. They went out. They can't find us. We so happy. Next we hear again coming. Polish voices. "No, they must be here! They must be here! They are here!" And the Germans start look again. And these...the Polish helpers start to help them, rip out the...the panels. And I still remember being over there sweating. It was hot. And while they were pulling the panel, flashes of daylight did come in in this cave. And the panel was like a spring. It didn't want to give in, like she would like to save us. Unfortunately, crack! The panel went up, and they told us to go out. I remember I went out and I had only one shoe. And I was asking the German if I could go back to this...uh...to pick up another shoe. He allowed me to do it, and now they took us outside.

02:50:55

And outside was many Jews already con... congregated and they surrounded by a few Ukrainians there. But by being covered I managed...I actually managed to sneak out from this...from this circle group, and I went outside and I had the knowledge that I cannot go out...I can't go outside from the town because on top of the hills is a ring with soldiers. Izbica's surrounded. I had a notion that I must hide on the foothills where the Christians' house are. Izbica...himself...the valley was...down was only Jews, but in the foothills, where they're going to the top of the hills were Christians' houses...uh...farms. So I went into a blacksmith's shop and he said, "Tom, Go out. Go out. I'm afraid." I went out. I went up farther. Look happened and I met...I met my schoolmate, Janek Knopczik. "Janek, hide me. Please." "Yah, sure, of course, Toivi. Go into the barn. Fast." So I went to the barn. And he went...and he left. Well, I got to the barn. There's a padlock. I can't go in. So I start to look for a place to go in, and there's a Polish Christian woman asked...yelling, "Tom! Over here! Run away! Run away!" So I asked, "Why shall I run away?" "Because he's coming...coming." "Who's coming?" "[Knopczik." So Knopczik will come. He will open the...the...the padlock. And I didn't run away. And here's Knopczik coming with a Nazi. "Take him. He's a Jew."

02:58:24

Q: Stop. Perfect. Let's change tapes very fast.

TAPE #3

03:00:27

Q: Okay. We are ready.

A: So where am I.

Q: Alright, you had just been...

A: So he had... so he said...so he said to this Nazi, "Take him. He's a Jew." So I said, "Janek! You're mistaken! He's joking." "No, he's a Jew." So, and the Nazi said, "Come." So Janek Knopczik also said, "So, okay, I will see you in a shelf in a soap store." Because there were rumors they are make soap from...from Jews. So his goodbye was: "I will see you in a shelf in a soap store." Okay, and I left and to make it short, I can't tell you more because there's still some going on; but finally, I find myself with the rest of the Jews on the marketplace surrounded by the Nazis. There was a woman I remember. While we were sitting on the marketplace, on the cobblestones, there was a woman crying and running from one Ukrainian to another one. "I am not a Jew. I am not a Jew. I am not guilty. Please, I'm a Christian lady. I'm not a Jew. Is I'm not guilty at all." And they let her out. She was a mistake. They grabbed her, too. So she was not guilty being a Jew. I remember my school teacher, Steidel (ph). Very fine Pole. He...he was there, the head of the school. I remember while I was sitting on the cobblestones, I remember him walking...uh...uh...on the sidewalk, and he didn't want to look at us. And I felt...I still don't know why, this a little thing. So many other things to remember and I remember him. I remember his face. I remember he was feeling for us. When another Pole did stare at us. Talking ...he did walk by like we didn't exist, and his head turned away. And I remember this picture. And I remember it was a beautiful April day, April 28, and I was sure I will die. Finally, two trucks arrived. They told us to step in. We went in the trucks. The trucks were covered with canvas. It was dark inside, and the trucks started eastward and now there's hope. Maybe, it's not so evil because in the road from Izbica, there's two concentration camp. There's Trawniki [**NB: labor camp for Jews, subcamp of Lublin**]. There's Zawada [**NB: labor camp for Jews**]. We passed the turn off to Zawada and our hope is down. People are praying. They passed the turn off to Trawniki, and now we know in front of us is Sobibór, and we know what Sobibór is. And some people...and everything is in the dark...uh...uh... in the truck. It's dark. And I hear voices, "Let fight. We will die anyway." I know the voices. "No, we will die anyway. Let's die together with the families." But they mood is that we will...when we stop, we will throw ourselves on the Nazis. Finally, the truck stopped.

03:03:41

And I remember still a voice. Somebody cut the...I remember still while driving... my... my...in fact, my father's face...he was sweating terrible. I remember wiping my father's...wet forehead. It's wasn't completely dark. It was still...from the front some light coming. And I

remember the voice, and finally the truck stopped....stopped and I hear a voice. Somebody cut open the canvas and noticed...looked outside that and said, "Ist schwarz von Ukrainen." "It's black from Ukrainians." Now this meant Ukrainians...the Nazis...they walked with...because they walked with nothing...they had black uniforms. When he said, "It's black," he meant it was so many of them. It's no use. And he told us to go down. And we go down and really, there were many Nazis. We were surrounded very tight with machine guns and everything. Probably the Nazis did...had experience. They did know that this a crucial time when people coming and seeing there in front of Sobibór. So we stood up. We get out and we stood in front of the gate. What did I see? I see a big fence camouflaged by pine branches, braided in...in the barbed wires, and a gate. On top of the gate a big sign, black and white, "SS Sonderkommando." "Sonderkommando" meant special command. The gate opened. We go in. They told us to go in. I go in, and I can't believe it. I...my dreams and my nightmares...what I had about Sobibór...I imagined Sobibór's a Hell. Belzec's a Hell. Sobibór a Hell. It looked like a Hell. And how's a Hell? I have it from my...my aunt's descript...descriptions. Dark, and people running around with tar and with whatever. It's miserable. What did I see? A beautiful, little place. Lawns, beautiful flowers. A nice train station. Nice little houses. "Schwalbennest" was the title of one house. It means...uh...uh... "Schwalbennest" [**Translation: "Swallows'Nest"**]...uh...how is it in English? Anyway, and...uh...they told us to stop; and I think, "This can't be a death camp. How could such a place be a death camp?" Birds are whistling. Nice trees. I still will remember the shape of the...of the sky...of the...uh....(pause) Oh, what is in the sky?

03:06:26

Q: The clouds?

A: The clouds! And I didn't want to die. But I've seen the fire. From...there was far away, farther, there was a...where they burned the people. I've seen the fire from behind...was again a fence camouflaged. And I could feel the smell. And I thought and strange enough, I wasn't afraid of dying. I was afraid of being burned. And...uh...suddenly a voice, "Men right, woman, children should go left." And then I was always now with my mother when we went down from the...from the truck. And that age when you are 15, you could pretend to be a...a child or you could be a man already. But instinctively I felt it's better to be with men, so I kissed my mother goodbye. I said a few foolish words. [I still regret it, trying to figure out why did I say it?] It's still bothering me. I will tell you. I said, "And you didn't want....you didn't let me drink the milk yesterday." And she said, "That what you have to say in that minute?" And this is bothering my whole life. Why is it...? You see a day before, we had a little wooden... uh... box with ice, and the milk was over there. So I opened...I was first opened, I start to drink the milk. And my mother opened the door from the room. She said, "Leave it for tomorrow. Don't drink everything." And...and now I...in this moment, I did come back to it and said such a foolish thing which is still bothering me, and left to mine father and mine little brother left to my mother. We did cross each other. (Sigh) (Long Pause) (sigh) Now (sigh) the German...when everybody went to their way, the German Frenzel [**NB: Oberscharführer Karl Frenzel**], with who I after the war I had a interview. He

told the woman and children go the direction of this fire. He left. And now he start to ask the men who's a carpenter. Who's a mechanic? And I was no mechanic. What could a 15 year old boy be? But I did want to live so much. And wherever the Nazi moved, my eyes went after him. And I really believe...(quavering) I really believe that...uh...my strong...I believe that people could be influenced, that something is between people, some interaction. You don't need to say it. And I felt that actually I influenced the German. When he was moving back and forth and our eyes met and my strong will said, "Please take me inside." He stopped, looked at me, and said, "Come out."...the Ukrainian. I should come out. And I still believe this was my strong will. I... something was which emitted from me to him. I still really truly believe. And...uh...he told me to go out. My father did want to go out. He beat him, and later when he assembled about 40 people, he told the rest to go in the same way that woman and they left. In this way I started to work in Sobibór. Now Sobibór story.

03:10:13

When they made a film, "*Escape from Sobibór*," and I was a consultant, I was accused even by people knowing the history of the Holocaust ... even in Poland by Poles...I wonder how should survive in ___ Auschwitz. A Buchenwald survivor told me, "What a horrible film. A typical horrible film. Look, the prisoners are going with the woman. Take a look how they look like. We know how prisoner in a concentration camp did look like. Skinny, emaci... uh.. worn out. Take a look there here how they look. It's...it's not a true picture of a...a Nazi camp." Unfortunately, it was. There's a difference between a concentration camp and extermination camp. I don't want to go in anymore. No.

Q: Just tell us where you were.

A: Yah.

Q: Don't worry about the film. Don't worry about...

A: Yah. That...that what I want to tell you. So I remember I lay down. It was...in the barracks, there was a fellow called Josel (ph). He did come write down my name, everybody's name, and told me to pick a place to sleep. From...all the...the three lines are free for you. I didn't know that the day before they killed 72 Dutch Jews because they did try... supposedly try to escape. So I immediately picked on the third floor right in the corner far away from the door. And ...uh...soon as I put away...I had a little bit in the hand which I took from the home...I don't know what I had...a piece of bread or whatever, I put it away in my place. I did lay down for a minute. Later I did go out to the yard. And I didn't know what it was, but my whole feelings about my family, I just lost them... they were probably burning in that time. I didn't think. I didn't think at all. I didn't think about mine parents or myself, later; about my family until the end I was in Sobibór. Maybe this was from the nature some kind of shield, but I didn't. Must admit. I didn't see anybody cry in Sobibór either. It was a different...people changed, with _____ changed. Everything changed. Go out. Try to look. They have singing. Sobibór, singing. Happy songs. Gate opens, and there're groups of people marching in.

Young people. Good dressed. Then again in front of them, I find out later it was a Kapo--a man dressed better with a big whip--and he commanded "Abteilung, Halt!" which means "stop." Everything was in military fashion, and later they dispersed. While looking around I hear a voice, "Toivi."

03:13:22

Turn around and this was [Jussik Bressler (ph)] from Ko_o, my friend, who was caught a year earlier. Now I have a friend. He was taken out as a dentist, not here but last Aktion from Izbica when they took. It was...uh...half a year earlier. And I go with him and he tells me about Sobibór and later, we go behind the tailors' shop and there's a group of Jews playing their harmonica and playing the fiddle. And I'm shocked I hear music. "How could you play here in this place? Take a look at the fire." They said, "Tom, we are dead anyway. You know how they...they call...the Germans are calling us here? '[Nassersecker (ph)]'." "[Nassersecker (ph)]"--"bed bugs." "You're only a bed bug. And...uh...we will be dead anyway so you will get used to it, you see? Fires burning, you don't cry even now. You see, your parents are burning over there." Yah. Different people. You wouldn't wonder. Some of the first day maybe. And I didn't wonder later what I was seeing...the...it was couples, even Sobibór, uh... girls and men connecting. As a matter fact, one...one couple lives here not far from Washington...survived both together. And...uh... this way I started to work. This...uh... The same night in the morning, about 2 o'clock I hear a whistle. "Everybody out. Everybody out." I go out with another people from the barrack because they're yelling...the kapos with whips. They're chasing out, we go out. It's a night. Stars. The moon, ___ night. And I hear something, "Friseurs, here!" "Friseurs" means like barbers [**Translation: "Hairdressers"**]. And the...as a group they call themselves "Friseurs." And later they call a group "Gepäckenträger" [**Translation: "Porters"**]. The kapo called. I see another group goes to another place, assembles. The kapo looks at me. "Go to the Gepäckenträger," because I didn't know where I should go. So I go to the Gepäckenträger, the people carrying luggage back. They called them "Gepäckenträger" in German. And now...and the rest...well went back to the barracks. Well, later they led us...they led the barbers, the Friseurs so-called, someplace else and my group is led to a big, huge barrack with two gates, entrance gate and an exit gate. The gates are open and while we're waiting inside with other boys. I was told to call in Dutch where the handbags should be left. And here people start to come in. Very well dressed. There was...uh...uh...uh...a transport from Holland. And they didn't know where they are coming. They did come in passenger trains, and no idea. And they left the big luggage on the train station, being sure that they will be delivered. And now the handbags. But here I notice some kind...that they had a strange feeling, because a woman...what does a woman have in her handbag? Most precious things. She hate to part, and now they tell her to part with this. But there was a German immediately. She resisted, she was beaten. And one person said...have seen she was beaten, volunteered to give up the handbags and they led them out to the exit gate, and later they went to a yard where they were told to undress.

03:16:58

And we...our group was still waiting in this barrack, even when the people went through. But five minutes later, the Nazi calls us to the yard where the people undressed. Were undressed, but now there's no people; but heaps of clothing. They told us...the Nazi tell us to...told us to pick up the clothing and take it to the storeroom. So I picked up the clothing, took it to the storeroom. It was a special storeroom. And now another transport, another group is coming ...another 500 people. So I must run again to the first barrack. Take the handbags, and later again to this. And later when the whole transport went through, the SS Frenzel told...took a few of us...need to, "Now, come with me." He led us about five meters from the gas chambers. It was a barrack where woman were coming in to cut the hair. He...he did give us those scissors to help another one to finish up cutting the hair. I didn't know how...first of all, I never seen a woman nude. I was...even that situation, I was very ashamed. I didn't want to look. I looked down, but I did get once a whipped so I picked up my head and took the...the shears and he told me I don't need to cut close. Just...uh...uh...If I have somebody has a pigtail, cut the pigtails off. And there they was suspicious because the Germans told them, when they undressed before the Germans told them that they are going for a sanitary reasons to a barber to...to..., but...uh...some suspicion. But still they didn't think they were killed. As a matter of fact, I am sure when they were in the gas chambers they didn't believe it. When the first gas did come in, probably they didn't...under...understood what's happened to them. After I finished cutting the hair, they told us to go out, and...uh...while I was still on the way back to my...to ...to the camp, the barracks, I heard already the motor, the gas motor working with a high.... You know, at that time, the gas motor...they screamed. They started...they started very loud like "Ahhhh....," even louder than the motor. They had a big motor there. Later about 15 minutes down...down and until quiet was. This was Sobibór.

03:19:17

I was working over there for 6 months. I could...I could tell the story of...uh... one ... one escape and another one. It will drag on too long. Because while over there, I...I survived a execution. Two people escaped and the barbed wires were cut, and the kapos immediately notified the Germans and the Germans did come and Frenzel made immediately a roll call and he picked up every 10[th] person to be executed. So this was story. I could go on, so let's stop here. I went through this. Later a group working so-called "Wald"... "Waldkommando," working outside the camp cutting wood for the pyre, for the cremation. They escaped. They made a revolt. And...uh...later...uh...they caught a lot of them. They brought them back, and I was witnessing their execution. Things like that which I could talk a whole day and night. But I will go now to the revolt. Or a little bit about myself. Being in Sobibór, I always did want to escape. And I...for...for some strange reason, I always felt I will survive. I had always something in me that I will survive. But I was looking. Once they did need people to go to W_odawa to take apart some bakeries. They did need fireproof bricks. So the...the Germans asked for volunteers. Who wants to go? So I did go. Thinking that maybe in W_odawa I will be able to run away. But W_odawa was a situation that even the fellow prisoners did...did watch me because they did know if I escape or anybody else escape, they would be killed. So one watched another one. We weren't able...but what's happened over there...there were about 150 Jewish girls working in the ghetto, sorting some stuff. You

could see them from far away. And while working, when we were able to get closer to them, we showed them that we are hiding money for them. So we...we have done it for about week, leaving money in the ruins of the ghetto to help the...the W_odawa girls. Nevertheless, most of them were later brought to Sobibór. This didn't help. Later was the...the barrack...Waldkommander thought maybe I could work over there. In the beginning, it was very nice because I had a method. I noticed that the Germans like clean people. They like people going straight fast. The moment you see a run..rundown Jews, broken-down Jew, they killing him. So always I kept myself clean. I put even my pants under me when I slept. They should be ironed with my body, straight. I didn't need to do this too because clothing, I could go any day change shoes or shirts or... because I was working sorting, and so on and so on. But I always looked a open area. So I did go to work for the Waldkommando.

03:22:39

The foreman...the Kapo, was a good acquaintance of mine, and I asked him and he said, "Okay. You could come me." We cut the wood. Later, ...uh...they're building a road over there. And the German noticed me, Dachsler (ph), old German. And he said, "Listen, Kleiner, take a...take this group of people and go cut straight trees because we need it for the road to put on top." So I had a group of people and...uh...and this was a good place to work because this German didn't beat. So anyway, going farther...so my way of surviving was stay away from the German. If you sleep in the barrack, take a...a...a...place far away from the entrance door, right in the corner, on the top floor even if you need to crawl...to...to it's difficult to get up, do it. Keep yourself clean. Keep yourself straight. You see a German, go somewhere. And...uh...and...uh... a lot of miracles. And this way I was existing Sobibór. Uh...What also it was, I made a deal with a guy who sorted luggage. Because you sort luggage, you could make labyrinths. And I was sorting food. So I told him, "Listen, I bring you some food. You let me rest in your labyrinth to eat." So I was ...uh...taking a few canned food to him, and I was eating; and later he was happy and I was happy because I was always tired and sleepy. Over there was a chance. I will skip little stories like this, but why I mention about this guy because he will come up again. Once in the middle of the night, my friend shaking, "Tom. Listen. Listen. What's happened?" What's happened, he...he had a big barrack. And the one part was...uh...uh...sectioned off for the kapos. And the door was open, and I heard some talking inside, so I did get up. I've seen something is going on, and I did go to my friend in the [bank (ph)] kommando. And I go to him, and it was dark in the barrack because what I know in which bunk he is, and I tell him, "Listen, Shmu[el], Hear what's going on? Something...something is happening here." So instead to answer me, he hit me in my face with a...with something...some kind of metal, I know. So I thought "If he knows and he doesn't care, it's okay." So the next day there were rumors that the Kapos did plan to escape, but more people find out and they did...uh...want to go too. Anyway, I told you. But again, by working...in that time I used to sort clothing...uh...I've seen the whole Kapos, a whole group of kapos being taken to the crematorium. So I was wondering what's happened? But again, a little bit later, I see this Berliner, the guy who used to...uh...the Lager, he used to sort luggage, has the uniform of the head Kapo, and did become the head Kapo and it was obvious that he did betray the action. But to make it short again, we killed him later. Before

we made the revolt. He was...uh...killed by...uh... prisoners.

03:25:51

Q: Tell us about the revolt.

A: Okay. Now, the situation was, of course, we were sure we will die. When...uh...even if the...the war would stop right now and then the concentration camp could be free, we will be killed. So this was a terrible feeling, there's no way out for us. Everybody did want to escape. I think that whatever I was thinking to run away always, everybody had in his mind. Although some people were resigned. They were Orthodox Jews, which nevertheless, even with this terrible situation did pray. I remember Yom Kippur. And they did fast, and they did say all the prayers and...uh...they were very observant Jews, and they still had their trust in God and their tradition everything else. Now, there always was...I wouldn't say organization...there were a few people, influenced people in Sobibór...respected people. It was a Hazzan, I remember. I don't remember his name. And was Leon Feldhandler. His father was a Rabbi and he was...actually he was a member of the Judenrat in Zolkiewka, in this town. And there were some talks...talks about the revolt. I was close to Feldhandler because he was a friend of my father in Izbica. He was in Izbica ghetto. He was taken to Sobibór from Izbica ghetto in the time when I escaped to...to Stryy, and they caught me in jail. But it wasn't until a transport from the Soviet Union arrived. When the Eastern Front was coming nearer, the Germans eliminated the ghettos, Minsk and so on. And that time they took all the Jews from Minsk, and from Lida and they brought them to Sobibór. I mean not all of them. A lot were killed on the spot, but a lot of...some transports come to Sobibór. And in that...in this particular transport they included quite a few Jewish prisoners of war. Soviet prisoners of war, Jewish. Because they recognized as a Jew. In that time we had a lot of work and the Germans picked up another 80 people to help us from this particular transport from Minsk. Unfortunately, for them they picked up a few former POWs trained in the art of fighting. Former soldiers. And they picked up a man called Pechersky. He was a officer in the Soviet Army, and ...to work with us.

03:28:38

Pretty soon, Leon Feldhandler recognized this potential material and he contacted, Leon Feldhandler, and Leon Feldhandler contacted Sasha Pechersky and...uh...again, I don't want to dwell much on it, they formed a organization. From that time on some concrete things happened. I find out about a week before about the revolt. Uh...That time I was working as a Feuermann. How did I come to be...to get this job? Feuermann is like firemeister...master. All the documents, heaps of documents, passports, pictures, books, soiled clothing was burned. While they were burning it, when I was sorting, I put the papers in a big blanket. Later with the blanket was still full, I put it on my shoulder and take it to the fire. Taking it to the fire, I started to get familiar with the guy working over there. Did bring him some food. And slowly by slowly, I start to helping him; and later, when they built a bigger oven, I was working over there as a steady personnel. My idea was to work in a...to be enclosed, out of

the view from the Germans. I could see them. They can't see me. From the window, I was able to see. But once I wasn't able and there was a terrible beating. But anyway, so...they planned to kill a German in my place. So this way...but I did need to be contacted. Otherwise, I would...some stranger comes into this place, I would chase him out, being afraid myself. So he calls me in the evening and tells me, "Toivi, I must tell you something. I know you. I know your father. I will tell you something, but keep your mouth shut. We need your place to kill a German." I was shocked. Later, I find out about what's happened. And I was informed on the purpose. I...I understood that something is going on, and I was informed about Sasha. Especially I was a guy...I was a guy in Sobibór which always did run around. You know, I didn't keep in a place. I was always hyper and would just run. I did want to know everything like I would be...go out and I'd write book, which I've done, actually. (laughing) I was always a very...boy who...I want to know everything. So in this way I did become, I was involved in it.

03:31:42

So I know the first plan was...there were different plans. The first plan was to dig a tunnel from the blacksmith shop through the barbed wires to outside. But when they analyzed it, it's did come out that we need to work many, many days, nights to dispose of this very dangerous dispose of the soil. They need to find a way. And when...let's assume everything is okay. Six hundred people should go through the tunnel single file without quarrel will take a whole night. Isn't practical. They threw it away. The next one was to poison...to kill all the Nazis while they're in bed, because there was a group of young kids like me, they called "putzers," which each morning 4 o'clock they're allowed to go out from the barrack to go to the Germans and while they are in the bed, clean their shoes, clean their belts and so on. This time to smuggle in instead a such a young boy should go a little bit older, at night and kill in bed and get their weapons. But they did...they discon...they disregarded because they didn't...they weren't able to depend on young people doing such an important job. Anyway, a plan was accepted...the final plan, to kill all the Germans in a matter of one hour, between four and five. We based our success on the German punctuality...punctuality. Discipline. And the plan was that the heads of the workshops because besides the people working in conjunction of the extermination, there were workshops. Tailors, shoemakers working for the Germans only, because there was...so much... they had a labor force. Why not? So they established a few small workshops for themselves. And always a German have something...made something for himself, a uniform or shoes; or the...heads of the shop should make appointments with the Germans to come on that particular day, October 13, for appointments between 4 and 5 o'clock. And over there there would be some people which will... which will kill them. So I know about this plan. And this should happen between 4 and 5, and the whole lager should look normal. We should not...we should not use the weapons which we get when we kill Germans so not to...before the time.

03:34:07

I remember I was in that time waiting and mine fire place...in mine place...where I burned

...where the oven was. I pushed all these papers against the window so nobody should be able to look in because in, because in the sides when did people did bring me documents, papers, we threw in in the sides, and the the oven was in the middle, and I just later burn it. So anyway was a window so I blocked the window and was waiting. And..uh...now I see a group...uh ... because they were divided. The organization had about six fighting groups of three people and located in different places in the camp waiting for the Germans to be lured over there. So I see the group is supposed to come to mine place coming to my direction, to my oven, but they're passing me. They're going in a different way. So I was panicky, but pretty soon a Jew called...from _ód_, Sender, comes to me and said, "Tom, they decide not to do anything to your place because the guard...the tower guard was very close." I was very close to the fence and he could notice a German comes in, doesn't go out and could be suspicious. "We rather...we'll kill him in the men's storeroom." Then he told me to go over there, and over there my job in that time was to stay guard on the...on the gate leading...connecting Lager 1 and Lager 2, because also we was connected...was divided in so-called four lagers, like 1, 2, 3 and 4. In Lager 1 were the building where they used to sleep and these workshop. Lager 2 we sorted, and Lager 3 we did burn, and Lager 4, we were building something over there. So anyway I was suppose to stay guard and because this gate was very close to the storeroom I just seen them both coming in. He was called in..in to try on a leather jacket, because it exactly his size. And he did go in and suspected nothing. While he put his hands in this...now this I haven't seen. This...the moment he was killed, he did come out...the guy which I know and he told me that while he was coming in, the Jewish prisoner said, "Achtung!" immediately. "Attention." And start attention, took this leather jacket and he immediately...he hold it for him and while he put in the hands in the leather jacket, his arms very immobilized like...like in a straight jacket, and he was killed with an ax and we had a first gun. I was scared up to that point. I remember when he was killed and the guy who killed him did come out. He's a little bit blood on his shoe. He patted his pocket like to say, the gun is here. I...my whole ...I wasn't scared any more. I did want only to know what will happen to me a half an hour later. That I did want to know. And I...I...I did know there's no way back. This is it. They killed...as long as we didn't kill the German, everything could be.... And later they called Beckman, and Beckman I remember he went to...to the door over the barrack and like whatever feeling he did turn around and went back and they killed him anyway in the office.

03:37:24

And to make a long story...and I...and I at that point, I remember there was a little train, like a miners train, for the miners. Little wagons with a little electric engine. And the German who was the head of this little train which connected all the Lagers with Lager 3, was already killed. But inside I notice there's canned food. So a few cans, put into my pocket. And I remember I had friend, Linda Karoten (ph), Linda _____. And she said, "Tom, you're preparing like for a picnic." And I said, "If we will survive we will need it." And later I...I...I eat. I ran in the forest. I reminded him this, that he said I'm preparing like a picnic because we used it later. We're so hungry and I had it. Anyway, now I remember the foreman was a French Jew...Jacov Dunietz [NB: Joseph Dunietz], and the foreman from the

group did come to me, "Tom, maybe you have some money?" Because many times when I did burn in my oven the soiled clothing...when the clothing was burned or books, some money did come through in the ashes. And when I cleaned the ashes, I find some gold always. It did lose the luster, but it was not.... So...uh...he did know I could have it, so I did give him some money. And the Germans were killed. Nobody did know. I was wondering that...this was like normal. First of all the Kapos...the Kapos which were...there were two Kapos in the organization...and they were instructed to use the whip to beat us like everyday. And they have done it. And I remember like every day, singing. We went back to Lager 1 for...uh...supper. And now the biggest shock. And this was I think was the...the most important ingredients of the success was so few people did know. There were...we were about 600 people. And this was the time before the roll call when we stand in line in front of the kitchen to eat. Believe it or not, practically the whole camp was still like every day standing in the line. Maybe about 50 people were missing, the people which did know. But soon one told another one, "Listen, forget about supper. Something is going on. Let us grab an ax. Grab anything and be prepared." Now the dangerous moment did come because up 'til now...the...the Germans were free to go and come. Each German has a place to watch. The sorters, where clothing was sorted, there was a German standing. But he was allowed to go for a cup of coffee or whatever he want. And another German ...let say...from the shoe sorters, the place they sorted shoes, did come by and he didn't notice the German who's suppose to be by sorting clothing. He wasn't suspicious. He thought, "Oh, maybe my friend went for a cup of coffee." But now, 5:30. Well, the...the time did come close when all the Germans supposed to be in this place, Lager Ein, to...they witnessed the roll call. And now if a German is missing, they will look each other. So we did know that the crucial time is coming and... uh...uh...the line in front of the kitchen start to...to dwindle and I remember a shot and I remember Sasha Pechersky jumping on a table. And why I...now...a one Kapo whistled a whistle, like for a...like for a roll call. Normal. And made it a little bit earlier. The original plan was actually to march...

Q: Stick with what happened.

03:41:20

A: Yah. The original plan was to march out to the front gate, but we heard a shot and the plan was disregarded to march out to the front gate because probably the...the guard wouldn't know what's happened and we could go too close, very close maybe to them also. But I heard a shot, Sasha jumping on the table and he start to talk, "Listen." Something in this sense. "Listen to me." I remember only one sentence from the whole talk. It was very short. "The time did come that we will take revenge. We killed practical all the Germans. Now let's stood up and fight our way out." In this sense...but the sentence I remember exactly what he said was: "If someone, if you will survive, he should remember to told...to tell the world the story of Sobibór." And that what I did never forget, and that what I am doing. And suddenly...I don't know if this was arranged, prearranged or not, but while he was still talking somebody yelled, "Hoorah!" from the people standing. And another one picked up, "Hoorah!"; and the third one, and suddenly everybody, "Hoorah, Hoorah," and start to run. I

didn't want to carry an ax, so I picked up a knife. I prepared a knife from before. It was easy to hide a knife. Was a knife somebody probably from some...somebody brought us...to Sobibór maybe a rabbi or so...or so, because had pearl handles and the on..on the handle was written Kusheshov Paisach (ph) [NB: **Kosher for Pesach**]. It's some kind traditional knife. Was big, so I took it. My knife in the hand and start to run with it and biggest group to the gate leading up to Lager I, and over there I remember one Ukrainian did come by accident...did start to drive in with his bike, and he was thrown immediately from his bike, and I remember the bell was cut immediately with the gun. And while running through I know...I remember and on the left side, a Ukrainian guard with his rifle standing like that...like a...like a fixiated and just turning around himself. He could use the rifle and shot, but he was handling it like a stick, like somebody hold...hold a can...cane, and just turning around. He didn't...he didn't know what to do. And I was running to go with the people to the front gate and half way I heard some whistles...shot was all the time, but I heard whistles like from bullets whistling and I noticed and I, on the left side behind a barrack is a German with a machine gun shotting at us. And here two my friend fall down, another one third. And I started to back up. I did run back. While everybody was running...running to the front, I did run back. And...uh... some way I find my way to a little gate in a hallway for the guards, because between the fences guards were walking, this time empty. Probably I went into that gate. Luckily, I had behind myself...I left one barbed wire fence and another barbed wire fence. Now I had only one barbed wire fence in minds. Come to the fence, the last fence...the freedom is, only the fence. I can't go through because I had a knife. If I had a ax I would cut a hole. Instead, I don't know what to do.

03:44:37

And here close me was Sasha Pechersky and Shlomo Szmajzner [NB: Stanislaw Szmajzner; surname also spelled Sjmyzner]. Now, Shlomo Szmajzner had a rifle, and I remember what...this a minute later. And Sasha was with a knife only. And sudden, and suddenly a man appeared with a...with a ax and start to cut. He made a hole in...in the fence. Now...but more and more people come and they don't wait in the line when machine guns are shotting at us to go through the hole. They start to climb on top of the fence. In that time exactly when I was halfway going through the hole, the fence collapsed from the heaviness of the...of the...from the weight of the people which actually I thought that time...and it was over me, and that time I thought this is the end of me. But actually, this saved me. Because the first few went through I could see why the people is depending on me. The mines exploding and bodies flowing there. And finally when...when everybody when through at least at that part of the fence and I can't go out...from ...from the fence because the barbed wire did go in in the clothing. So I left my coat. By the way, I had a leather coat from...I took it the last minute from the storeroom. It was also maybe lucky because the...the barbed wire wasn't able to go in too deep to the...my shirt or whatever. Anyway, I just slid out from under my coat and start to run. I fall down a couple of times. I thought I'm shot and I wasn't. I start to run until I reached the forest. Now, I'll really speed up. Come to the forest. We are wandering about the day, the next day we come to a point and we under...I already understood that it's not good to run there. We are about 50 people. The next day we met another 30 people. So, and I've seen

that we are too many and must...something must be done. But...uh...we still kept together until one...until early in the morning. I remember we stopped out of the forest and Sasha said that we must go out to check where we are, and they need money. So whoever had the money to give money to buy food. And all the men with rifles did left. Nine people with weapons left. We were against it. We understood that something is wrong. Only Shlomo Szmajzner was left, only because the rest of us surrounded him that we must have a guy with a rifle left. And he promised he will come back. He did never come back. I talked with him later after the war. Or maybe I shouldn't go into this. He said when I met him that this was his soldier duty to go back to...to the army. Anyway.

03:47:33

So when he left there was real tragedies because groups start to form. The weak people did want to go with the strong ones. And it was unforgettable...unforgettable scenes, which I won't even to go in it. Finally, I took two boys and we left. Shmuel Wycen [NB: **Samuel Weitzen**], who used to work with me as a fireman, and his friend, Kostman, Fredrick. We eluded the guards. We eluded the...the Germans and we made it to mine hometown, Izbica. Over there, I thought I have a Polish friend who was a good friend of my family who will hide us. The two boys didn't want to go into the town. They were in the forest. But I left to the town in the evening, hoping that nobody will recognize me. It was sort of dark. I come to the Polish lady. She didn't want to hide me. So I left back and told the guys, "Listen, it's no way. We must look for another place. But you know what? Let go first eat. We're hungry. Come." Not far, we have seen light from a little farm. And we go to this farm. We were afraid to go in the villages. But these were farms..were little farms...little houses ... uh...single houses. So we were not as...not as scared so much. We went into this little house, little farm, we have seen from the forest. We come. There's light. We go into the kitchen. There's food on the table, but no people. We call...I call, "Farmer, Farmer." In Polish: "Dzier_awca." Nobody answered. Finally, we go back to this room and start to eat. We go back out again and finally, I see a little boy. We asked him, "Listen. Come here. Where your father?" And he comes. He recognized we are Jews. And he said, "Oh, my father and mother are scared. They thought you are...you are bandits. And they're robbing so much here." So he called the parents. The parents did come down with his sister. I recognized his sister. I used to go to school with mine... with...with me. And the atmosphere start to get warm, and later I told him, "Listen, Mr. Bojarski, what would you take to hide us? You are far away from the town. Close to the forest. No neighbors. We will pay you good. And I have a house. After the war, I will give you this house we have in Izbica." "I will think about it. Go back to the forest." To make it short, in a couple of days he agreed to hide me.

03:50:11

We did put in so much gold and diamonds, and he was excited. His wife took a ring. His daughter, earrings. "Take it. Keep it. Fine." He built a hiding place in the barn. In the corner in the barn, he put in a table, covered it with a lot of straw. From outside, you had a panel which he opened to give us food. (Sigh) Okay. We were...I will skip also my adventures in

this hiding place and the way I did try to go out because I recognize it's late. And I will go to a point where once in the nighttime, we hear some...the dog barking. People screaming. Finally, we heard people coming in in the barn and yelling to him, "Tell me, where do you have the Jews?" Show me the Jews." And he...we recognized the voice of the farmer, "There's no Jews here. No, there're no Jews." "Yes, we know there're Jews." "No, there're no." "So tell me...where do you have...so nice, from where do you have so nice clothing? You go to church nicely dressed, and your wife..." Well, I understood. We were so happy that he didn't drink. Because a lot of Poles are drinking. He didn't. But what he has done, he [loved nice] clothing always. Shoes for his sons, pants, sweaters; so this was noticeable. So anyway, and they start to look for us in the straw. They didn't find us and they left. After they left he did come in in the hiding place. "You see what's happened? What would happen," he said, "he did discover you? They would kill you. They would kill me. And the worse is that...what a shame would be to my family when they...they did find out that we're hiding Jews." Now I...I didn't have formal education, as I said, but I did read a lot. And he had a big cross on...on his chest and asked him, "Mr. Bojarski, why are you ashamed? Why...why should your family...should family be ashamed? You know Jesus Christ was a Jew." For him it was the biggest insult. To accuse Jesus Christ of being a Jew! And probably when I told him...on top of it, I told him the picture, "Last Supper," he has in the kitchen: All 12 apostles are Jews. And the...it was that a insult to him that I accused the apostles being Jewish. Anyway, he went out mad. Couple of days later he comes, "Guys, I have for you guys a hiding place. Because I find out that the Germans will search for Jews in any farm which is close to the forest. So only for 3 days I made another hiding place." And one evening, he did come. He told us to go out. And I expected hiding place if he's so afraid he will do it, he will make it some place far away from him in the forest, I mean. But he made it right out behind the barn. It was already suspicious, but I still didn't suspect.

03:53:07

We didn't remember he.... When I went behind the barn, I noticed ...uh...a little carriage with two wheels. Two wheel carriage. No? Like a platform with two handles. On top of it was a big millstone, a stone we'd make flour with it, in the old type mills they have grinding stones. Anyway, a big stone. I didn't know it. It was standing.... Later, I connected it. Now, he picked me up here by mine waist and pushed me in that hole, and later he pushed in another one and later we did ask him for a kerosene lamp which he did give us. Put in...have the kerosene and looking. We're were in a hole about a meter and a half, a square meter and a half. The roof was...I've seen it from inside, a 2 by 4 long and across were pine branches and some straw. The opening was a round opening maybe a square foot, a foot round or maybe a little bit more. We barely squeezed in. Was now pushed in straw on it. And so on. We are sitting inside and later we hear and that they're pushing something hard and something fall...very heavy on top of the hiding place. And what's happened, the 2 by 4 break down like a letter V. So we said, "Oh, God. Is broken down. Must go to him and tell him that everything is breaking...is breaking down. So we tried to push out the straw. Kostman was actually over there pushing out the straw. He said, "I can't push out the straw." Now the lamp start to flicker...flicker, flicker and goes down. And what is interesting. I didn't feel

shortage oxygen, but the lamp didn't want to burn anymore. I put in a match, start again to burn for a second, and out. Later, even the match didn't want to start and I start to feel, you know, [not] enough air. And all the time the third one--Wycen, Shmuel--was holding with his arm the 2 by 4, it shouldn't break down. He was supporting it. So (clearing throat) Fredrich was, so Wycen screamed, "Pull down the straw!" So we pulled down, still no fresh air. He said, "Something is blocking the entrance." Finally, we hear something sliding and...and this breath of fresh air comes in. And he opened it. And now we are going out.

Q: Tom, we have about 4 minutes and what I need quickly is what happened and how did you get liberated.

03:56:00

A: Okay. He did try to kill it. He didn't make it. He did give us...still we didn't believe it really. We did go to the old place. And one...it didn't take much, but three days later, he did come with helpers. Shot at us. Shot at my two friends. Shot at me. I pretended to be dead. Later when he took the...our clothing, and saying, "Now we will check the Jewish clothing for money," when they went to the house, I did get up and run away. After I run away, I was in the forest for awhile. Later, but he was...he didn't know I'm alive and if I'm alive he'll be in trouble. Later and so he always watched us. I was always a step in front of him. And finally I did run away in a different area where a few Poles did...did know my father, as a Polish...what would I say? Patriot...and helped me into...go into a Polish partisan organization called "Bataliony Chlopskie," peasants battalions. And I worked over there as a courier until the end of the war. This the whole story.

Q: Tom, thank you very much.

A: You're welcome. How long did we talk?

Q: It's three hours.

A: Good. I did good.

Q: Yah. Yah.

03:57:25