

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Michael Diamond**

**March 20, 1990**

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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Michael Diamond, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on March 20, 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 interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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## MICHAEL DIAMOND

### March 20, 1990

Q: Tell me your name please.

A: My name was...uh...Maximillian Mikulaš Diamant. Uh...I was born in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, in my grandmother's house. (Chuckles) We lived that time in Hlohovec which was about two, two hours from the main city Bratislava. Uh...It was a small town, about 25,000. It had a very nice Jewish community and we had a very nice life there. It was democracy in Czechoslovakia. The President was...was...uh...Tomáš...Tomáš Masaryk, who was really a[n] ideal president and we loved him. This democracy was...

Q: Well, tell me.... I am going to interrupt. Just say...Let's...tell me about your family growing up. Okay?

A: Yah. My family. My father...uh...was a big rancher. We had a big ranch on the outskirts of Hlohovec, that...that little town. And I had a terrific childhood. Uh...When I was about five years, we had...half of the house was rented to...to the army, and I had a very good friend there who was...who was always...uh...caring for me and I was much with him. It was the Czech [Czechoslovak] army. Uh...After that...

Q: Tell me about...tell me about your...your mother. You had a mother. You had parents, sisters.

A: Yah. My...my mother was a beautiful woman and really a[n] angel. My father was a gentlemen...uh...a little bit like a gentry but he always was for...for the little man. He was very social-minded. We had a big farm and...and...uh... a lot of animals. Uh...the...the house was tremendous, big. The front was about 500 feet front and it went back about six, eight hundred feet back. In the back we had stables for horses and we had...uh...uh...prize bulls from the town, and we had...uh...carriages. My father did...uh...deliveries of building materials. We had big fields, corn fields, and...and wheat, wheat fields and...uh...we had 16 pair of horses. I had a terrific childhood. The town had a beautiful ...uh ...synagogue where we were playing as kids, and I had in my house...uh...a soccer team. I had my own soccer team as a child. It was really a beautiful childhood. But we had some problem. There was behind us...uh...behind our house was a small town. The...the town was...uh...very poor people behind it and very backward people, and we had always fights with them, especially there were...there were religious fights. Yah? Catholics against the Jews and so on and...and Evangelics against the Catholics, and things like that always. There was...were always fights. So we had to be very careful. I learned early in my life how to be careful really because every time if I...came home...home from school, the school was uptown and I was living downtown. In this area I had to be very careful that I don't get into a fight with...with somebody. Yah? So I learned early in life how to take care of myself. It was a beautiful area. In front of us was a big river, it was called Váh. On this river were...were mills on pontoons. There were about seven mills, one after the other, near each other, and millners [**i.e., millers**]. For instance, it happens one day, for instance, we had a big flood. Every spring we

had a big flood. And sometimes we...the flood was so...so high that our backyard was like a lake, so we took...we took our wash tub or something like that and we were paddling with it in the back yard. Naturally, the horses and the animals had to be evacuated every springtime. We had a big...uh...uh...barn up...uptown...yah?...in a place and so the animals were taken there and we just stayed. Our apartment was a little bit higher located with few steps up so we didn't get the flood into our apartment. The house was like a...like a castle. It was one metre thick walls, solid brick, so that house could stand everything. Yah? There was no fear that the house would collapse or something like that from the floods. My...my father bought it from the local Count who had a castle not far, and the Count was a friend of...of my father. My father was a expert on horses, riding horses and...and...and...uh...race horses. So he was buying the horses for the Count, so he was very friendly with him. Sometimes my father took me to the Count, to the castle and I had a very good time there. The castle was beautiful, and we had a little buggy with a horse. He took us...he took me for a ride, and my sister too. Uh... We had a beautiful childhoods. One day there was a big flood, like usually in springtime and the water was...uh...coming almost to the top of the road. Between us and the river was a road, a highway. And it was very high the water, almost to the road, and we were always standing there with my sister and watching it. Watching because down the river were going even houses and big piles of...of straw and things like that. Yah? And that day my...my parents went to the market for food up...uptown and we were alone left. My...my sister was six years older so she took care like she was like a little mother to me. So we were standing at the river...river and watching the flood coming down, whatever was coming down. There are seven mills and the first mills, they were standing the millners always catching stuff what was flow...uh...going, flowing down the river. And one of...of these things what they wanted to catch was flow...flooding down...uh...a big pile of straw. They wanted to catch it and to dry it, you know, and...and to use it. But they didn't realize that the bottom was deeper and heavier than the top, and that hit the first mill and the first mill tore off all the chains. Yah? The big chains and everything and pushed into the next and into the next and the next and the next. All seven mills with the millners inside, with the people inside, were floating down the river and down the river was a big steel...uh...bridge. Yah? And they hit the steel bridge and exploded everything. Nothing. Was just a big cloud, a flour cloud, from the flour and quiet, and nothing visible. All the millners were gone. Naturally, that was a tremendous shock for everybody, and there was their funerals. They found them later, drowned...yah?...down the river somewhere and there were funerals always. It was terrible. The other things what...what was very important for me was I had a very good friend, a old retired mill man. Uh...Mr. Hauk. Mr. Hauk was his name. He was always sitting at the edge of the river on a bench near a little shed and he was always teaching me how to do work with...with...with...how to carve things for, with the little knife, with a...uh...and he was telling me story and he was teaching me. He was a very experienced and very nice man. A beautiful looking old man. And that...that was a big influence for me.

Q: What happened...as you started to grow up?

A: We...we had, yah, we...we had a beach there. We used to go to the beach and...and the whole town, all the boys and the girls together, to...on the beach. I had a...with that time I had a

boat, a paddle boat, and I used to take them across the river and we were swimming in...in the middle of the river, down the river for miles. It was a very dangerous river but we knew that river so well that...uh...it didn't bother us. The parents were always, naturally...uh...leery about us. I was all summer long only in swimming trunks. I don't put on anything else because I was always on the river with our friends. So it was a really beautiful life. We had very good neighbors, for instance. The [Brandts]. That was a good friend of mine...and...and Wally [Brandt] was the...uh...uh...girlfriend of my sister and the next neighbors were the [Holliger] and the [Hertz]. They had girls and boys so we...we got together quite often. We were playing together. They had a big...the [Holligers'] had a big...uh...uh...mill. lumber yard, and lumber mill. And so we were playing there...uh...hide and seek and things like that. So that life was there 'til '32. In '32, there was a big...uh... economical slump, especially agriculture and my...my father lost a lot of...uh...money, so he decided to sell...everything. He didn't sell the house. This house we were renting to a garage. 'Twas a garage later. A part, the other part was occupied by other family, the [Britzomeyers] and we kept that apartment, but...but...uh...later we sold it. Uh...We moved to Bratislava, the main city, where we had all our...my mother had all her relatives, her mother, her...her aunts, her sisters so the family lived there. So my...my father went...uh...got a companion in a...in a paper wholesale business with my uncle and he worked very hard there. He was everything there. Shipping clerk and...and...and you name it, everything he was doing. He was working very hard. But after that...in...so we lived there until early...that was going on 'til...till the '38. I was studying. I was working part time...uh...in my uncle's workshop as a electrician.

Q: How old were you at that time?

A: I was a teenager. We...we moved to Bratislava when I was about 13. Yah? And as...I was going high school there, studying there in high school, and after that...uh... it was...it was a very normal time so...til '38. In '38, it started. We heard about the German...about Hitler, about the Crystal Night. We were shocked to hear about that all, because we...our cultural language was German. A lot of people were speaking German. Uh...We didn't believe that the Germans could...could...uh...do something like this because we used...we used to know the Germans as a cultured nation. Yah? So it was a tremendous shock for us to hear all this. But it didn't affect us personally right, right there. I knew always what's antisemitism. I knew always because there were a lot of antisemites in the...in the town, wherever I was. Yah? So that was nothing new to me, but we lived pretty comfortable near each other and the country, the laws were democratic so I had no complaints. But, as I say, in '38 it started. We...we almost had a war. We thought we will have a war with Hitler. The...the Czechs were very good equipped, the army and everything, and we were willing to fight. Yah? But the President Masaryk died and President Beneš took it over. He told...he saw that it was fruitless to fight. It wouldn't be worth to fight the country with...with...with the Germans, so he gave up. It broke up...the Germans took up...took off the Sudet, Sudets [i.e., **Sudetenland**] ... yah? ...from Czechoslovakia and Czechoslovak...uh...the Czechs broke up and made it a protectorate with a President Hácha. Beneš died before that.<sup>1</sup> He couldn't take

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<sup>1</sup> President Beneš died in September 1948, but he resigned from office twice--October 5, 1938

that, probably. And we had a...it started, everything started that time already. And the Slovaks ...uh ...switched ...uh ...and ...and ...uh ... got in a... in... uh...contact with the Germans, and they...they made... the Germans made a...a sample state out of Slovakia. The President was, ...they took out from ... from .... uh... prison, Hlinka, and they made him President.<sup>2</sup> And the Hlinka party was actually the fascist party, the Slovak fascist party. It...it was a terrible time. They started to...to ...uh...do with the Jews. Yah? They took over the Jewish stores, the Hlinka party. They put in so-called [Arierzahat (ph); Aryanized] stores. Yah? And they...they just took over all the...the stores. Me, in '39, I was drafted to the army, to the Czech [Czechoslovak] army, but that was...that was exactly when they...when they switched to the Slovak state. And the Slovaks put us in...in working camps, army working camps. The first army...uh...first camp was in...in [Oremaz] which was...uh...used by the army, by the Czech [Czechoslovak] army, as a manoeuver place for the summer. There was barracks there and all what they...what we were doing there, we had to go out the roads in winter, in the biggest winter. Yah? and clean the roads from snow. They didn't have snow plows or something like that so we did that work. The roads, the highways to clean from snow. We were about 500 guys there, young, Jewish guys, and it was a terrible place. A hundred in a barrack. Yah? A hundred guys with bunk beds and one tiny little stove. Yah? We couldn't cook nothing. The meals, we were getting the meals at night. Early morning we got a coffee with a little piece of bread. At night we got the dinner. Yah? Which was naturally no...no fancy stuff, but it was all cold. Yah? Because that was actually the lunch. The lunch was the dinner. So but we came home at night, so we had the cold lunch, the dinner. Some people could get to the stove to warm up that, but most of them ate it just cold everything. I...with that time, I got frozen feet, boils on my feet...uh...so few days I had to stay indoors and I couldn't go to work. Yah? I was sick and so happens with many of them. Yah? We all got frozen boils on our feet, and it was a terrible place. So that was the first winter. Uh...The summer they transferred most of the guys of my...my colleagues there from the army to other places. They were sent mostly to...to Sabinov. That was a...a sick...a small town... uh... in...uh...the east, eastern Slovakia. I was still there because I was a expert ...uh...electrician so they kept me to fix up a movie house. The electric...the electric and the... the projection machines and so on to...to fix them up. But they were so old, all these things. There was a...there was a "dynamo" or they call it here...uh...I don't know. Some kind of...of electric machine. Yah? A generator. I had to fix it, but that was impossible to fix because it was so old, so backward that it was impossible and...uh...parts were missing and so on and projector parts were missing so I just took my time there. They didn't mind. They didn't care. They forgot about us there. We were there, a little group, just. But after that, finally, they got to us and they send us to...to Sabinov. Sabinov, no...nobody was there anymore. They were sent already away to a other place, to other camp. So they sent us to...to Liptovsky Svetý

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following the Munich Conference, and June 7, 1948 following the installation of a communist-dominated government.

<sup>2</sup> Andrej Hlinka died August 16, 1938. Monsignor Josef Tiso succeeded Hlinka as the leader of the Slovak People's Party and became President of Slovakia in October 1939.

Martin [NB: there is no such place in Slovakia; probably he means Liptovsky Svätý Mikuláš]. That was a nice town and we went there as...as normal...normal army men, but working commando. The working commando was that...that, for instance, just we were couple of...of guys, so one was a waiter, for instance. I was put in the...uh...weapons... uh... repair, where I repaired weapons. Huh? That was a pretty cushy job. I got food, normal food with the army and normal...uh...barracks...yah?...with a normal bed, but we had to train with the...with the rest of the army. But one day the...the German army took it over. Yah? The commando, and they needed an interpreter from German to Slovak. So they asked me. So I...I volunteered. I will be their interpreter. I had a very good life. There was a high, very high officer, a German from the Wehrmacht. Uh...He was very friendly to me because I spoke the only one German. And he couldn't speak with nobody else. And the same his wife. He had a very...he was a old guy, but he had a very nice, young wife. And I had to go with her shopping. I had to go horse riding with her. I had to help her everything, with everything, because she couldn't speak one word in Slovak and he couldn't speak a word of Slovak. So in the morning I was the exercises, the army exercises, I was interpreting... uh...to him, and afternoon and so I had to go shopping with her and horse riding. (Laughing) So I had a pretty good life as...as in the army you have. Right? Uh...But that didn't last very long. Then I was transferred to Vrútky which was a...a army depot ...uh...to clean the old uniforms. Yah? It was a ugly place. All day long smelling this... this... uh... old uniforms. Yah? They were in...in moth ball and so. But that didn't last again too long so they send us from there... uh...to...to \_emerné. It was in eastern Slovakia, but that took a pretty long time until we got there. Meantime, we stopped places and we had a good time. Yah? So in \_emerné, it was terrible. Part of the camp was...was gypsies... yah? ... who were taken there, and working camp. We was...we were...we were...uh...doing nothing, just like in a concentration camp. It was a concentration camp. Uh... Before... but before that...uh ...we were in Svätý Martin. Svätý Martin before...after Svätý Martin, we were in...in Svätý [Pretor]. It was a little town too, but we were working there very hard. We were working bridges...uh...uh...roads and...uh...stone mines and air fields. That was a very nice place, picturesque, but it was high in the mountains, in the Tatras. And it was in winter, freezing cold, and to work on the roads...uh...it was terrible. We had to do earth moving for instance by hand. We had to...to do it with... with... uh...picks. The picks had to be sharpened every few minutes because the earth was like concrete, but we had to make a certain quantity that moving and so we had to do the same in a corn...in a stone mine, a certain quantity of stone we had to break out from the mine and bring it on...on a little... uh...wheelbarrows and so on to a certain place. It was horrible. But we had good food. We had the peasants there...that...that... the villages where we got good food. So that kept us going, and we got just stronger with it... with the... our...we ate a lot of fat, you know, pork and so on, to keep on going. The...the food in the army wasn't enough for that to do hard work like that. But as I say we had opportunity to buy things, food and so on. So I survived that very good. But in '42, from \_emerné, we demobilized, and when I came home there was starting transports...yah?...to the concentration camps. Most of these guys who came home, like me in '42, they were taken straight to the concentration camps to Germany and anyplace else. Me, I was lucky. I was chosen as important...uh...economically because I was a electrician and they, the government needed experts so they...they put me in charge as a electrician for a new...they just started to build a

new...uh...university. The government built that. So...but...the...the university was located up on a mountain in a...in a park, in a forest. They confiscated a forest from a old lady, a countess who owned it and then they made a park out of it and....then they started to build. We had to do everything from scratch. We had to...to take out the trees. Yah? Like...lumber...uh...uh...jacks. We had to do everything to take out the whole forest to make room for...for that new...new buildings, the foundations and so on. And they started to build that after...after we finished. Then I was a regular electrician. I had to bring the electric lights and everything in. They made temporary buildings for the...for the office and so on and workshops, and I was their electrician there. Then later we had six electricians, all Jewish boys who...who was...were electricians. It was a very hard job to work there to do all the electric work. And...and on top of it I had to be there every night because they were pouring cement at night and I had to supervise the electric things and bring...locate the electric lights all over, wherever they were working and...uh...it was...it wasn't easy. And on top of it, I had to make...help with the payroll in the office. Yah? For...for the workers. There were about 300 workers there. Huh? Everything was by hand. There were no machines like here. (Laughter) So I had to help with that too. Uh...Then one day everything was finished. We...we... you... we couldn't stay there anymore. We had to disappear. I... a lot of guys went to the partisans. Yah? Those were the Russians who...who were in the mountains. Yah? Already against the Germans fighting. Guerrillas. Guerrilla war. And some of our guys joined them. And we had a place where we had...where we had a little workshop for... for carpentry... carpentry workshop with machines there and we had a little dormitory there so some of these boys were hiding there, because nobody knew. That was far in the forest the end of...of...of the property. And we made tunnels to hide under these...these....uh... these workshop. Yah? To hide in these tunnels there if somebody would have come there. But it was a pretty safe place. We had bunk beds there and as many as possible we were having there boys. I was hiding there for awhile and then later I couldn't stay there because it was too overcrowded. Too many people were there and they...they had the factory...uh...to falsify papers, you know, for the partisans.

Q: Was this under the ground?

A: Underground. Yah.

Q: Can you describe...tell me what that underground bunker looked like.

A: (Chuckle) It was...it was...uh...under these...these workshop. And they had a machine there to make papers, you know, government papers like...like...like...uh...like false... uh...uh...false papers. Yah? Identifications and... and even passports we made there. But...uh...uh...all kind of papers, everything we were...made there. And we had draftsmen who were...who copying all these...these legal papers and so on. So we had some very, very handy very good experts there. And that was sent out to the partisans and to people who were hiding, ...these papers. Now one day there was no room for me. So one friend with me, we knew from our experience of working there on that ground that there was a old water reservoir...uh...that was not used. So that had a manhole on top. That's all what it was. A manhole, so we could



open the manhole and climb into that water reservoir and we were hiding there. And we had a...uh...I had a cousin, a girl cousin, Gerty Schweigger, she was bringing us the food every night. Only by night we could get out. Because what happened that place had a...had a...uh...whole unit of German army there during that time already located. They confiscated...that was a...a palace...a palace from a old lady, a countess. They confiscated it for the German army. I don't know what they did with the old woman, probably they got her to a old age house, and they took...the army...the German army took...took that...uh...place. But that was a ideal hiding place, this whole ground because everybody knew that there are the Germans there. Yah? And the army they even know that we are there. Yah. Hiding. They didn't care. They didn't care about nothing. Only like army, you know. So that was for awhile we could do that. And afterwards...uh...I came home. My...my parents...there was...there were transports already going to concentration camps. My parents were kept a long time because my father worked in the...in the kitchen where...uh...the Jewish kitchen where they supplied the transports with food and everything. Yah? For awhile it was good, and we had food from there too. Uh...So...it wasn't easy. Every day were going transports, but we were...because my...my father was working in the kitchen, we were kept...uh...for awhile safe. And then it started...uh...that these transports and I told them, "You better hide somewhere because that will not go forever like this. You will not be able to keep it." We were all concentrated already in a ghetto. Yah. A long time we had to be in a ghetto, all the Jews, so they had us already concentrated there. Uh...My mother didn't want to hide. My father wanted to hide in the country somewhere. He had friends between the peasants and they would have hidden us, but my...my mother didn't want to go because the relatives were very prominent Jews in Bratislava. They were on the...on the...uh...committees there...uh...Jew...Jewish committee, and my mother thought they will know when to go to hiding. They will know what to do. They will protect us. But it didn't come out so. They were not protecting nobody. Nobody was protected. So I was hiding already. I was underground on the...in a house. It was a fancy, fancy one, a old fancy one, like a boarding house. It was a old woman, she kept it. She knew we were Jewish. She wasn't Jewish. Yah? She...she was a very nice woman. She know we are Jewish, but we had papers--different, not Jewish papers--so she thought...she thought it will be...she will be alright with that. The Germans were very, very dangerous for that too. It was very dangerous for her because they would brand her as a collaborator if... uh ... if they would know. So we were hiding there...about three or four Jewish boys with...with false papers. Yah? But I couldn't sit all day long home there. So one day I was going out. I was always going where big crowds were. There was a road not far from us... uh... uh... uh... street, the shopping street where all the stores were and windows so there would always be crowd so I always blended there in...in the crowds, hopeful that nobody is going to recognize me, that nobody is going to...to catch me. Yah? But it wasn't so. What happened--one day I was walking there and I see in a show window a old friend from the army. Yah? I knew almost everybody because we were a pretty small group, so I knew almost everybody from the army and there was a young man in a leather coat standing and watching the...in the show case. Yah? And I go to him, and that was my downfall because what I found out later...I didn't know at that time. But later I found out that he was caught by the Gestapo. Yah? And to get out from the Gestapo to be still alive, they told him they can do it only if he brings in... uh... some Jews... Yah?... from

the army he knew, whoever he knew from the army, Jews...that he will...he will give their names or...or...or just...just give them over to the...to the Germans, to the Gestapo. And as soon as I got in touch with him there, he pretended he's very happy to see me and so on. There he was...he looked good. Yah? A blond guy with blue eyes, he looked like...like not a Jew. Yah? But few minutes later somebody grabbed me from the back. It was the Gestapo and they pushed me into a standing car there. They were watching him. You know? With whom he gets in contact. And they pushed me...they pushed me into a car and took me to a center...uh...which was once a Jewish house, a apartment building, and that...the Gestapo took over. So they pushed me there in. That was...there were a lot of Jewish young boy and girls waiting for a transport. Huh? That was already a...a concentration, a transport concentration...uh...place. The Gestapo was interrogating and trying to get names, you know where they can pick up some other Jews, some other young men who were hiding because everybody was already hiding that way that time because the transport was...were always finished. It was already '43, 1943. There were still going to the last minute, the transport. So what we did...uh...that was a apartment and I saw that there...there was a place where...where was a little room and they...they had there a sign 'no...no entrance'; nobody can enter, it's the next room. There was a little room, like a corridor and there was a door and a...a guard, yah?...a SS guard was walking there with a rifle, watching that nobody should go in that little room there. But I thought there must be something important if they are watching...if they are watching that room. Huh? So when the guard went by...Yah?...I run over into that room. I opened the door. It was open, and nobody was in that room. And I looked out the window. I was looking for a escape situation, and I saw my...my escape situation. There was under the window... I ... we were on the second floor and in the back yard I saw a window...the window...looking out the window I saw a little shack, a wood shack. And I saw that it wouldn't be hard to jump out the window on this shack because that was higher than straight to...to earth. That would have been too high. So I figured out, I stayed there 'til night. When it got dark. Everything was...was covered... the windows... yah...because of the airplanes and so on. They had to have covers on the windows. So I opened the window. I jumped out at night. 'Twas about 9 o'clock night. I jumped out, and jumped on that shed roof; but I didn't know that that shed roof was all wood, wood planks, and that acted like a...like a...like a jumping board and it...I jumped up back and fell down on the ground on my back, and I passed out. I got a terrible...uh...when I woke up, I saw where I am lying and I was in terrible pain so but I know that I had to disappear so I pushed myself into the wood shack between the wood and...and again fell unconscious. I don't know how long I was lying there, but I... when I woke up I knew I had to get out from it. I had a terrible pain in my back but I knew I had to get out from that place. So where was the place? There was a...there was a... uh... fence... yah?... uh... uh... brick fence, but on top of the brick fence was...was wire that these...these...uh... I don't know how you call these wire. You know with this...uh...little like on the front you see these...these wire mesh, so I jumped over that fence. I had that...that much strength that I jumped over the fence, but I didn't know what's on the other side. There was a...there was a big empty crate. Yah? A wooden crate, and I fell into that crate and again passed out. I don't know how long I was there lying. Again I woke...I...I woke up. I saw maybe I can get out. That was already the next house. So I tried to get out the door, but the door was closed, so I knew what I have to do. Jump the other fence to a other house. Huh?

The houses were...uh...like townhouses. So the next house was again like that...a fence. Yah? And I jumped over. A dog...a dog started to bark and came to me in order to eat me. What I did, I grabbed his mouth. It was a German shepherd. I remember. It was a big dog. And I grabbed. I didn't have no other choice, I was desperate. Yah? I grabbed the dog by his mouth and pulled him through the door and tried to open the door to run out from the door. Yah? The house door. It was open. Huh? So I pushed the dog...dog back and I run through the door. There was a other door on the other side. It was open, too. But I had to be very careful because the street was patrolling... uh...the SS...Yah?...with the rifles. So it was night. It was late night. I saw that the...when the guard was going up the street, I ran out the other direction and I run through...through back yards... yah?... through all...through little streets. I knew Bratislava very well. So I run back to my place and...and I was in tremendous...uh...this... uh...I had a tremendous pain in my back. So I lie down in bed and was lying for a month in this bed and after a month I got up. We had a little meeting with all...with about four or five guys together to plan what to do next. Yah? What...what was the news? What was going on? Cause we didn't know. So as we were having this meeting, I was the first day up. I was in my...my...uh...robe. Yah? Suddenly, the door opens and four big SS guys in leather coats were standing there with their guns on us. Yah? "Let's go." I had no choice. As I was and as they were, we had to go. They put us in...in cars...yah?...and they took us again to this place there, but this time they knew already what was...that we are trying to...to escape so that we...there was no escape there. But first of all they wanted to know some other guys from us. So they took us one after the other for interrogation. The interrogation was terrible. I...I was standing in the middle, four guys...four SS guys were standing there and hitting us with their fists...with their...with their...with anything what they had at hand. They hit us... uh... and asked questions. I remember the last one wanted... took off the...uh...uh...hanger...yah...a wooden hanger and hit me with that. I was all bloody. Then I...he couldn't get nothing out of me, so they took us out and they threw me in a deep cellar where just was a tiny little window. Uh...I don't know how long I was there because I was unconscious when they brought me there, and when I woke up I was lying on a bench, on a plain bench I was lying there and a guy was over me and trying to wipe off my blood. But I didn't see him very well. Then later he came to the...to the window. We were sitting there near the window and I asked him question. Who you are and what's your name and so on. He looked very weird. He looked very weird. A big guy, young, big husky guy and he looked very weird. And I asked him, "What time is it?" And he takes out like a...like a quarter, something like that...money, and looks at it and said, "It's 8 o'clock," or what, some...some...some kind of a number. I look out the window. It was day light. Yah? So I saw there is something wrong with that guy. It came out he was taken from the institute by the Germans...yah...by the Gestapo. Was a Jewish guy. He was taken from a...from a mental institute. He was a cook there. Yah? And he was brought. So he was sitting there and I couldn't talk to him. He was out of it and I was scared. I was scared what will happen with this guy there. So then I started...he had some normal moments. So I asked him, "Who are you? What's your name?" And he told me his name. Uh...uh...He was Stern, I think so, was his name. And I said to him, "I was in the army with a young guy by that same name." And he said to me, "Oh, you must have been with Hansi, my brother Hansi." Yah? Hans. I said, "Yes." From that moment, he kissed me and he...he talked to tell me about him everything.

Yah? He had some normal moments. Yah? He was glad he saw me and that he spoke with me that...that he knew that...that his brother was alive. Huh? He thought so...his brother was alive. I don't think so he was alive, but I didn't want to tell him what's..was going on. He didn't know everything. So I was there about two or three nights. He went with me together. I couldn't escape from there. They took me out just straight into the transport. Yah? The transport was covered up, you know in a...in a covered wagons, you know, these...these trains and that was it. We were going to Sered. Sered was still in...in Slovakia. It was...uh... "**Sommerlager**." It was a camp where...where they brought in just everybody and from there the transports were going to Germany and so on. Yah? It was still in Slovakia.

Q: I think this is a good place to stop and break and change tapes. Then you can tell me about "**sommerlager**."

A: Yah. Okay. All right. Fine.

TAPE #2

Q: Can you describe that transport to Sered? What was that ride like?

A: Yes. So they...they put us with...with other people into... uh... uh...train, yah. Closed truck. And we were about 70 in one truck. And the transport was going only to Sered, which wasn't too far. And there we got out into a other camp. T was a old...uh...military camp, and there were barracks there. And we had...we got...uh...our place in the barracks ...our ...our bunkbeds. And the food was still...uh...pretty good there because the...the Jewish... uh... these.... uh... agency was supplying it with food. So we were standing... staying there until they had ready transports, the Germans... to Germany. Yah? Until they put together a train transport.

Q: What was Sered like? That camp?

A: That camp wasn't bad because it was actually just a summer... summer camp. That means...uh...just concentrating people. I had there some friends in the workshops who told me, "When you will get to the transport, like few transport ahead of you, young men...they jumped off the trains, and escaped to the partisans. Some of them got through. Some of them were... were caught. So that...that's your only hope what you can do. They supplied us from the workshops with blades and...and drills, things like that which we put into our shoes. They are builded into our shoes, and they told us when you go to the transport, you should put these with you...take these with you. Put on three or four...uh...jackets and clothing, everything on you. Nothing in your hands because you will jump. And to minimize the...the...the injury, you put on as many as possible clothes and jackets and...and...and suits and so on. So really it came to it. I didn't think, but it came to it that they...there was a transport going to Germany and they put us on that transport. Again in closed trucks, you are going at night. Everything was going at night. They were everything doing all these things at night because they didn't like the population to see that. Yah? What was going on. So we got into one of...all the young guys, friends... Yah?... together. We got together into one...one truck. And we figured out we will cut out the lock and jump out when...when the train will go slow...will slow down a little bit. Yah? And so it happens. It was at night. We cut out the...the door. Yah? I helped. I helped. He'd helped and so on. We...we...we changed, and we cut out the lock. But before we...the end that we should...should throw out the...the lock, we kept it like that. You know it looked like it would be still on, the lock. But it was already cut out; almost was to the point where it will fall out, the whole lock. Suddenly the train stopped. Yah? It was a little station in Slovakia still, somewhere in Nové Mesto [nad Váhom], or where it was I don't know exactly. On the way to Germany. And the...right away, the SS who was...who was...uh...going with us...uh...with a rifle as they were patrolling, looking all the cars, at the locks because they had the experience already. Yah? And they saw that our lock is cut out. They opened the truck and all out. All toward...towards the wall. Yah? So, I said myself, "That's it. That's it." Huh? They put us on the wall. "Every 10th will be shot dead." They put us on the wall, and who knows who is the 10th? How they will start to... to... to.... Really, every 10th they shot dead. Yah. Every

10th. That was the first time I saw they are not joking. And the rest...I was left. Yah? Some other friends were there, they were dead already. The rest they put into the first car. That was a Panzer [armored] car. Yah? No food. No nothing. Yah? Not even water. They put us there. Dark. Just a tiny, little window was on top of the Panzer car and nothing else. We were going for 3 days without food, without drinking water, without anything. Yah? Even the closed up about 12 or 50 guys, we were there. So we were going until we stopped one day; at night, naturally. We stopped in Sachsenhausen. I didn't know right away where we were, naturally, but I knew we must be in Germany. Sachsenhausen ...the first impression. Everybody out from these trucks and everybody in five, five...uh...five people in one row. Yah? And that will be like soldiers. And they were surrounding us with dogs, German shepherds and...and...and ...uh... SS... Yah? ...standing with...with rifles on us, trained, and we saw far away from the trucks...we saw a big camp with a big door lead up with... with... with... uh... with...uh...lights lit up and they told us, "We will march there." So we were marching there to that door, to that big door. We marched into the camp, that was Sachsenhausen. First impression was...I saw running around there...it was night. I saw barracks there. I saw people running around, some, not too many, but some running around, probably kapos, in these uniforms. I was so naive that time that I thought those are pajamas, because it was night...that...that they have pajamas. Yah? (laughter) And then there were...there were slogans on the barracks written...uh...uh..."Arbeit Macht Frei"...Yah? Uh..."Work makes you free." Huh? Things like that. Slogans, they had there. So I was pretty good impressed. I thought we will be in a working camp, working! Yah? But they brought us first into a place, looked like a factory, like a broken down factory, the [sauna]. The [sauna] was a place where...where they...they disinfecting station... was a disinfecting station. Whatever we had with us, it were...what we were carrying with us, they took away everything. We had to strip completely and they were internal ...they were checking us out completely...if we don't hide something. Yah? Gold or...or jewelry or something like that. And they took us in a very cold room. I was freezing, all naked, and there they were...were a whole group of barbers and they...uh stripped our hair completely. Yah. All over. And we had...the next step was...was to go into a pool, a stinking pool with sulphur acid or what was there...some...some kind of a...uh... sulphuric things, because it stank terrible. And that was the disinfection. We had to go into that pool and submerge few times completely and that was the disinfection. Yah? After that we had to go under a shower and they gave us a...a towel, a rag and a piece of soap. After that, after the showers...it was cold, freezing there. Yah? That...that was not heated. Nothing! We were all naked. After that they...they brought us in a place where they gave us these uniforms. Yah? The stripped prisoner uniforms. Then we knew what it is, and nothing else. All our...clothing, civil clothing and everything was gone. They kept it, the Germans. So I was there in a...in a quarantine. The first thing was to put us in a quarantine. Always the first two weeks, wherever you came from you were in a quarantine because they were...the Germans were terribly afraid about sicknesses, about epidemics and things like that because of their own...for their own purposes. So I was there in Sachsenhausen about two weeks, the quarantine. After the quarantine, we had to march at night through a town...I think so it was Sachsenhausen or so...to a town to Heinkelwerker...Heinkelwerker. Yah? It was a terrible place. Terrible place, Heinkelwerker. It was nothing there. No food. We didn't get there food. It was in a hangar, in a airplane

hangar. They...they pushed us there in, and there were some...uh...some bomb pits in these hangers. The hangar was cold like ice, but we had to stay there. I...we thought maybe we will be working in the factory there. That was the Heinkelwerker...the airplane factory. So I didn't think about nothing. But we were there for two or three weeks and nothing happened. We were just in the barracks there and we got hardly food. So it...it was terrible. From there they took us to a transport, again to a transport, put us in...in...in these trucks...Yah?...in the railroad trucks and they took us to Buchenwald. Buchenwald again started the same thing with the...with the disinfection station... Yah?... and the quarantine...for two weeks in this quarantine. After the two weeks were off, they took us...uh...to the regular camp what they had, for work. So I was very satisfied, very happy. At least some work to do and maybe we'll get better food because when you work you have to get food. Yah? So really they took us out one...but first of all the barracks were already better. A little better, and the food was right away a little better too. And they got...we got some money, Lager money. You know, it was their own, made-up currency which, when you worked, every week you got a certain salary. It depends on what kind of work we were working. And for that you could buy in a canteen there, let's say a beer or a...a...something, yah? Something, a soda or something like that...for the whole week's salary, naturally. Yah? So...but it was something already, after all. So I was working in a detail...go out of the Lager, out on a road doing the ditches on the road, cleaning the ditches, making new ditches on the highways and so on. Naturally, they were watching us very carefully...the SS with the rifles trained on us and with the dogs there with the...with the shep...with the German shepherds watching us. It was very bad. And they had some people escaped I heard. But...uh...we never heard about them. Yah. So there I was just a short time. After that, they took us to...uh...to Sachsenhausen, to..., from Buchenwald we went to Bergen-Belsen. Bergen-Belsen. That was a terrible place. That was terrible. First of all, it depends in what Lager you were. There were different Lagers in the Lager...in the concentration camp. There was, for instance, a Lager where... where privileged Jews were, so-called, which were...uh...had relatives in America or so, and they sent them money and they paid the money to the SS or to whomever. Yah? And that's how they survived there. And they had maybe a opportunity to go even out from the country. That was really privileged people. A handful. It was a small Lager with families and so on, and very, very prominent people and so on. But I was just a plain schnook so I had to go through again the...the [sauna]... the ...the disinfection station, and then after the...the quarantine. The quarantine was terrible. The quarantine was made that way that more people should die as possible. It was a big room, open room, with a concrete floor and everybody was sleeping on that concrete floor. We got one...one... uh... blanket, the only one, and...and we had to sleep on that concrete floor. So it was terrible. The food just to survive that. A lot of people were dying there because they were already weak anyway and they didn't have food. So a lot of people there dying there already. I discovered there a friend of mine. He was already on the end. Strong guy. Strong, beautiful guy and I told him, "Stay alive. Try to survive." He had no...no guts anymore to...to fight. Yah? He couldn't fight anymore. I tried to give him a little soup when I got the soup once...the little warm soup. I pushed it into his mouth. He didn't want to take it anymore. He wanted to die. He wanted to die. And so...but I didn't want to die. I had the survival instinct. No matter what, I had to live. So what happened? They were bringing food in 50 pound, uh, 50 liter or so containers. Yah? Open containers.

The...Russian prisoners, Russian army prisoners. They were in the...in the kitchen there, and they were... uh ...distributing the food, you know, in big containers. What was the food? It was a vegetable soup. Yah? But better than nothing. What...what they did, on the way to...to where... where they were supposed to hand out the food, they stole one of the containers, so there were one container less and they knew...knew that will not be enough. They stole it and they sold it for money or...or...or gold to some other place, some...some other prisoners. I don't know where. Yah? And so what they did, they put down these...these two container and told...told everybody, "Get it yourself." So what happened? Everybody run and grabbed some...some soup from there, and so far that...that if you couldn't get even to it because everybody was fighting. So they tipped over the whole container on the floor, and who is going to eat it from the floor, cold and everything? Yah? And that was the only food what we got! So what I did, just thinking for survival. What I did, I picked up the vegetable, the cold vegetables from the floor, ran to the barrack room and washed the whole vegetables and everything under the water pipe and ate it cold, whatever, just to survive. Yah? I survived it so far. But then they put us in the regular... the regular...uh...this... uh... barracks. And then there was a sick barrack. The sick barrack didn't have nothing. I was sick. For instance, I went to the...to the...uh...sick place...to the so-called hospital, or what it was. Yah? What they gave you a placebo. Yah? In every color, or they gave you charcoal, little pieces of charcoal. What did I do? I ate it. I ate it just to survive. For instance, I found a old toothpaste lying on the ground somewhere. I opened it up, I ate the toothpaste. Yah? What was inside. For instance, I...I...there was... uh... grass. I mean wild grass, crab grass. I pulled out the crab grass and ate the roots, wherever, whatever. Just to survive. And there was a other...other place, other barrack where all the sick people were going. Yah? When you were sick and you couldn't go to work, which there wasn't work really, you had to...uh...go to this barrack, the sick people. What was the barrack? Concrete floor, straw, some plain straw on the...on the side of the barrack. In the middle a...a walkway, and there they were lying there and waiting to die them. Yah? Then in front of it or in the back of it was a big pile of dead bodies. Yah? All like...like skeletons. When I saw that, I knew what's waiting for me, naturally. But it didn't happen that way. I didn't stay there long, because if I would have stayed there long... That was a terrible place. Just to see that, yah? First of all, people...we were walking just like zombies. We are walking...I was already skin and bone, already that time. We were walking there and walking all day long just asking for... for situation reports from...from the fronts or so what's going on? 'Twas late. It was in '43. Yah? Already. And...nothing. We didn't know nothing. And one day they came, took us with big trucks away. We were going in the transport, I don't know how long, in covered trucks with a guard in the truck. We were going to Hamburg. Neuengamme. There they told us we will be working there. It was a factory. An old factory where then it was like a...like a warehouse, something like that. There were bunk beds, and I was there I don't know how long we were there. I met an old childhood friend there by accident. He...he recognized me. And...it was Herman. His name was Herman. He was a child. He was completely finished with his nerve...nerves. He was crying and...and asking me I should save him. I should save him. "My God, I cannot save myself. How can I save you?" Huh? And a few times we...we saw each other, and he was happy to see me. Yah? And then he disappeared. I don't know what happened to him. Huh? I never found out what happened to him. So from there, we are



going to...uh...to Mauthausen. In Mauthausen was terrible too. It was just terrible. I couldn't get food there. I couldn't work. Nothing. You were there going through the process, the quarantine and everything, and that weakened us even more; and we got very bad food or we didn't get food at all. It was terrible. The hy...hygienes were terrible. We had very bad bathrooms and everything. You...it...everything was cold. Cold water. There was no warm water. Never. So I don't know how I survived that. And we were in a other camp....

Q: Did you...? Excuse me. Did you work in Mauthausen at all?

A: No. No. Nowhere. I...I didn't work in there. Only place I started to work a little bit was in...in Buchenwald. They didn't need us. There was already a...they were evacuating everything. They were...they were losing the war. The Russians were coming. Huh? They were running from the front, and they were running with us. They were always pushing us further and further. Yah? And they were running to the Americans, not...not to the Russians. Yah? So they were always running from the Russians. And they took us with... with them. We were going...I remember once. They put us in a Lager. It was an old...it was a new...uh...army camp, but it was empty. And why it was empty I found out later. It was all loused up. Full with lice. And they put us there. Huh? Naturally everybody got lice...lice. And we were dying like ...like...like...uh... flies. And then what they did, they wanted to make us to work so they took us...every morning at 5 o'clock we had to get up, "Appell". "Appell" was...was where we had to account...everybody out. They were doing the count of everybody to stay in rows like soldiers and they... they marched us every morning over...through a town. I don't know even what was the name of the town, to a...to a station ...to a railroad station, a little one. And there in the railroad station there were old locomotives, old, old engines. And we had to clean these engines and repair them because they were rusty. Repair them to...to use them, because they were out of engines. Yah? They were bombed, ...the...the....the railroads. Besides that, we had to carry...uh...uh... railroad tracks. We had to carry to where they were bombed out, you know, where they were repairing them; from...from a forest to this place, to the station. What was that we were carrying. Six...six people. Six meager people...I mean we had to carry a big railroad track. I don't know how many feet it was long. But it was very heavy, even for six people. Three on one end, three on a other end. It was murder. Yah? I saw if I will do that with these food what we had, I couldn't survive it. And really everyday a few people just dropped dead. And I saw that, "My God, I have to do something." So the first opportunity came and they were looking for...for a guy who knew how to handle a engine. Yah? A steam engine, a locomotive. I thought myself, "What can happen? Just to get out of it." I...I said I can handle the machine. Yah? Like that. I...I was technically always inclined...I was in engineering school and so on. I knew the principles and so on. So they took us into a forest where old...uh...all these old engines were rusting there and they told us, "Any engines which will be fixed up, we should try out." Huh? The try out was that we had to bring it to a SS man, the engine from the forest. I mean it was on tracks but...but old tracks. We had to bring it to the SS commander and go a stretch. And if we made it, if we made the test, he told us to go forwards, to go backwards and so on. Then we will be accepted...accepted. Yah? As a railroad engineers. Alright. So I tried. I tried my best. But in the meantime, I tried really to find out what's about it. How to work it. There was a Russian

young guy...uh...a Russian prisoner. Yah? Not Jewish. I knew...I found out that he was really in a factory on an engine. He was going in a factory with...with an engine. So I asked him all the details how to handle these engines. Yah? And it happened that I tried out and it was working. Yah? It was working. So now came again the test. Yah? One guy in front of me...watching...come...came to the test. I knew he was an engineer. Yah? I knew. But what happened is these engines are old and rusty and he couldn't move that...that handle, and he got stuck somewhere. Yah? He couldn't come back to the...the...the guy, ...the...the SS man ran after him. Yah? And shot him right there on the spot. So when I saw that, I wasn't sure I will not be shot either. But luckily, the engine was going. I could do everything. It was a better engine. So, I got through the test. The next time I was...I was getting better food. I got better place, yah, in the barracks and I was doing the job. Every morning coming there with a whole group to that place and picking up the engine and taking materials, railroad tracks and all these things to a factory...about a 15 mile track. There I had two civilians. They were doing the...uh...the other things on the engine. Yah? There were my...my assistants but actually I was their assistant, officially. Yah? They were...had the... they... they were in charge of the water and the coal for the...for the steam engine. So when I came in the morning so everything was prepared already, and I had to ask them always, "Did you prepare everything? Is the engine, everything okay? Did you check out everything?" "Yes, everything okay. There is water, everything." I spoke German. That...that was helping me, you know. So I went on a stretch like usual, and I got stuck. The engine was overheated. I didn't have enough water in the engine. And right away him coming on a...on a car, you know, a railroad car, you know...uh...the SS guy and a commander, "What happens? What happens?" I said, "They didn't put in enough water. I had to let off all the steam and everything from the engine because we don't have water." "Ooh, you don't tell that the Germans. The German civilians did that, that they didn't put in water?" I said, "Yes." That was enough for him. He pulled out his...his gun...Yah? and...and to show it to me. He said to me, "Ooh, that's too good for you. That's too good for you. I will take care of you." For what he will take care of me, I didn't know. Huh? Yah, he put me on a...in a place...in a jail...in the ...in the Lager. Yah? No food. I had to die hunger. That's what he said. "You will die hunger." It didn't need much more. Huh? But what it is, the others didn't know about it, the other commanders and so on. Only this one. And I thought...I looked terrible already. I was quite down and I said I have...uh...I have before T.B., you know, tuberculosis so if I can go to the...to the hospital. I asked in the hospital. Huh? I got out to the hospital and I made believe that I have tuberculosis. They didn't have x-rays or nothing so I just made believe that I am coughing and I am cold. Yah? I...A cold I had always anyway, so I could make very easily believe I have tuberculosis, and I looked it too. Yah? So they put me into the sick bay. That was a barrack where all the sick...sick were. Again it was the same thing as...as in...in...uh...before I told you. Again a barrack with...with a concrete floor on the side, straw and all the sick were lying there. Whoever stayed alive, whoever could go for food. Yah. They brought a container. Whoever could go for food survived. Whoever couldn't get up, he died there, a slow death. Yah? So it was terrible, but what happened one day the...the war was getting to end and there was a...I saw on the side there, there was a transport of...of German Army, a convoy going on the...the high...highway, not far from the camp.

Q: Which camp were you in now?

A: I don't know what camp it was. It was somewhere, I think so, in Württemberg, because it had just...just a number. It didn't have a name. It had just a number. And what happened there, I saw this...this convoy and suddenly I saw airplanes, bombers, English bombers came and started to bomb that...that convoy. And it was very close to the camp. And the camp started to get bombed, and from the pressure, the shrapnels and everything, I flew into one corner of the barrack... Yah?...of the...of the barrack and a big plate, a table plate, flew right on me...Yah?...and covered that corner. And that saved my life from the shrapnels. Yah? I survived it. A lot of dead already there. A lot of dead, and whoever was there alive, they made a quickly, quickly to evacuate us. "Everybody out. Everybody out. Everybody stand up." And they...they brought a train, a open train, a coal train. Yah? It was usually used for coal, and they put us in the open trains. Everybody who survived. It was terrible. It was already...uh...in '44...uh...it was already...uh...starting to be summer. Was sometimes in spring. And they opened...during the day these opened cars were...were hot, like Hell. The sun was shining on us. And at night was again too cold, you know, freezing. Was terrible, but we were about 50 or how many in one of these trucks so we huddled together just to keep ...uh ...warm during the night. And the...the food was terrible. They didn't have themselves already, the Germany army, much food. So that was the German army. So they took us already with them to evacuate. And what they had only corn syrups with...with...with...uh....beets. You know, red beets, sliced beets. That was the only food. And when they let us out when they stopped somewhere because they had to stop because some...some of these...these trucks were bombed out, so until they fixed them they...we had to stop. So they...when we stopped, they let us down to the...from the truck, but they were watching us with a...with a...machine guns and everything. Huh? So I tried always to take out some...some roots...some roots from grass and eat them; just to survive, because that wasn't enough. We got water. That's all what we got. But not always water either. So one day it was very hot. We were about 14 days on this trip. All up and down going over Germany. I don't know where we were. And all SS as...as the war was going, as they were running, so that's how they took us with us, with the transport. And...it was terrible. It was hot one day, noontime and we didn't have water. There's no water. Now I saw there was...there were people, Germans civilians.... repairing the trucks. Right the other trucks and there were about 30, 40 feet away, and I saw they have their pail a little bit water with a...with a little...little thing...uh...cup for drinking. So I thought myself, "What can happen? I will die...die this way or that way or...or...or...from...from...thir..thirst. I was terribly thirsty. People were dying there from thirst. So I jumped out from the car and run to that pail and drunk that water. Naturally, the...the guard...right away, the guard...but he couldn't shoot on me because I was between the civilians there. I... he would have shot a civilian. And I run back, so he couldn't do nothing. What he...the only thing what he did he did hit me with his butt, with his rifle butt good on my head so that I was knocked out for a...for a...I don't know how long...which rammed into me good. I had a big bump. But I survived it. I survived it. And next...next time...what was it? Bergen-Belsen, or...I think so. It was Bergen-Belsen, or was it...? Yah, that was the last one. I think so.

Q: You had said Bergen-Belsen before?

A: Did I say before? Yah?

Q: You were in one more camp now?

A: Yah. One more camp they took us. We came night there. I didn't know even where...what it was. We came at night and was a big camp and [pause] we had to get off into the...into the camp. We passed the kitchen and at the kitchen...in front of the kitchen, there was lying...uh...potato peels, you know, what they peeled off dirty potatoes, you know. We were so hungry that we run to these potato peels and grabbed as many as we could these potato peels and ate them. Dirty and all, dirty, whatever it was. Yah. Just to survive. Yah? It was terrible. It was a terrible camp. Again through all these procedure, I found out that two of my uncles died in that camp because I met their...uh...uh...uh...good friend who survived them. Yah? Who survived until we...I came there, but he was in pretty shape too, very bad shape too. And so we were there, I don't know how many weeks we were there, just surviving. We got there some food, some...some bread, sometimes. Yah. But not all the time. So we survived somehow there. One day we hear the Russian guns. At night you could hear already the Russian guns were coming closer and closer. The sky was red. We were starting to be very happy. We know what's happening. We...we knew that what's happening. And the Germans were very...very concerned about it. They felt already that it's getting to the end. So one day they made it at night a "Appell" and we were in rows standing and as we were standing, "March." We were marching by a...a big...uh...warehouse, a German warehouse, and you know what was in that warehouse? Care packages, from America. They kept it there, you know. They didn't give it to us. All the time, they had...these Lager...these warehouses were full with packages, these care packages. When we got there out because they were evacuating us, actually. Yah? We didn't know that, but it was the evacuation. They gave everybody two care packages to carry with him. So we were very happy. But to carry that with our bodies, you know, weakened, it was terrible. It was a ordeal. We were marching and marching and marching and you had to be in line because if you were not in line, if you stayed behind, they just shot you dead. Everybody who stayed behind, who couldn't walk was shot dead by the SS. The SS was going with us. Uh...I don't know how many...how long we were walking. My feet were all...all bloody because what did I have? I had wooden soles and...and...and material at top. Yah. So I couldn't...I could hardly walk in them, and we had to march. We have to stay in line and we had to go. Finally, sometimes noontime, it was very hot already, we had to rest. The rest was on a open field near a river, and we were very thirsty so we run to the river and took with our...we had that...that...uh...you know...this...you know like a ration. Uh...We had that and with us so I run to the river and drunk the water. And that was polluted water. So after an hour or so of sitting there, I started to get very sick. And so others too. Some others. And I knew if I stay here, I couldn't get up, if I'd stay here I will be shot dead. Because everybody who stayed behind, the SS shot. So I was standing there, but I was lucky because that time there was a...uh...a unit of...of regular army in the...in a village there nearby, and they heard that we have care packages. Yah. And they wanted the cigarettes. And they went, came with a carriage and tea.

Yah? Tea! They came and said to the SS man, "You are not going to shoot anybody anymore. You go." And they took all...all the...whoever could walk, they took and I couldn't walk anymore. Whoever stayed there, the sick people, they gave everybody tea. Yah? The SS...the...the regular army, and they told us no more shooting. They couldn't because they would have gotten into a fight with a...with a...with the regular army...the SS. So they couldn't shoot us. So we survived there. We gave them cigarettes. Huh? And they told us, "We will take you to the village and we will hide you there. You will give...give the peasants some things from your package and they will keep you there. They will give you food and everything." So really one carriage came to me and put me on a covered wagon, yah, army wagon, and they took me to the village. It was a nice little village, and they took me...two...two guys we were together. He was a German. I just spoke German. So they took us to the...to a peasant and we told him that we will give him soap, American soap if he would give us some food and...and give us some lodging. So he said, "Okay, I will hide you here." He put us in...into a empty pen...uh...uh...pig pen. Huh? And he brought us some potato soup. Yah? And we gave him...we gave him every time he came, we gave him a piece of soap. Huh? So we were there hiding. I don't know how long we were there. Just a few days. They said they cannot keep us here because the SS is coming and so on, and there are other transports going like our...our transport. They will try to put us sick people on a baggage store because after every...after every transport...the walking transport, was going a carriage with all the luggage of the kapos and...and the SS men and so on. They were pulling it. Prisoners were pulling it. Yah? So they said they will try to put me on a baggage... uh... this ...uh...little carriage. So they put me really to a transport on a bag...baggage...luggage...these ...uh ...trans ...uh ... carriage and I had to give the prisoners always cigarettes that they should carry me. But I...I was feeling already very bad. I was losing completely my...my...my conscious. I was falling...uh...like in a coma. I was very sick. I...I had...had...I later found out I had stomach typhoid. Huh? And terrible dysentery and everything. I...I was very sick. A few days and I would have been gone. But so they were carry me every time I gave them a cigarette. "I want a cigarette. Can I have a cigarette." Cigarette, cigarette, cigarette. Until I run out of cigarette. And I run out of food. Very sick. The carriage...the care packages. I ran out of everything at the time. And...the food didn't do us good. These corn syrups from...from the...from the care packages because we didn't have bread. And to eat these ...these corn syrups and everything without bread that was...for our weak stomachs, that was even worse. Huh? That make us even more sick. So I give...when I gave up all my care packages to these prisoners who were pulling that carriage, with the... with the luggage and me, they just stopped one day and just threw me off...off the carriage into a ditch near the road. Yah? And I was lying there half dead because I was almost ...most of the time unconscious...unconscious. I was already in such a...uh...state that I saw...unconsciously, I saw a...a white tunnel with a white light on the end, and I knew... somehow I felt that if I get to the end of the tunnel, I will be dead. Yah? I felt that somehow. So I picked myself up and was watching the road. And there was running...the army was gone already....the Germans. The civilians were running from the Russians...Yah?...in...in carriages with horses. Horse-driven carriages, covered wagons. They were running there and it was already getting late. The Russians...you could hear the Russians guns. And I didn't know where to run. Nobody wanted to take me on these carriages with him to run from the

front, to run. Finally on the end, there was just single carriages going with...with...with these...these covered carriages. With one single horse, I saw a old couple. And I said to me, "That's my last chance." I jumped out from the ditch, caught the...the horse muzzle, and I told them, "If you don't take me with you to the next village, I don't let you go." They were scared of me. Those were old people, a...a...a very old couple, and I looked terrible. I...in the prisoner garb, so they knew who I am, so they agreed that I should sit down in the back, they will take me to the next village. But only to the next village, because the horse cannot take more. Yah? So they really took me to the next village and the road...there was a big old restaurant and I got there, and I saw there was a lot of women from concentration camps. They were there from...from concen...all kind of concentration camps. On the way to evacuating, they got lost there. The SS was running. The ...the army was running so they left them there. There was a big...like a auditorium, old, very old, junky. There were straw on the...on the ground and they put me there. Huh? And I wanted to eat something. So one day I go. There...there was a big kitchen and open stove, and they were cooking there soups and food for themselves...these women. So I sit down near this stove, just to get warm. And I hear talking to the...one of the womans to the other...give this old man a little warm soup. This old man, give him a little warm soup. I must have looked terrible. Yah? I was in my early 20s. Yah? An old man. So they gave me a little food, a little this. Was very good, but I was very sick. So they put me again there into...into that auditorium there on the straw lying and suddenly, we heard the Russians coming. The shrapnels, the...the guns were...you could hear. Yah? I knew that was...at the...at the main road so the Russians will come there. They will bomb this whole place. So the women run away already. They run all over to the village, deep into the village, and they left me there alone. I was, ...I think so, the only one left there. So if I saw that and I saw it starting to hear the guns...if I will lie...lie here I can be killed here from the front. The front will go through. So I crawled on my four, with my last strength, I crawled deeper into the village about 300 feet or how much...was a peasant farm. And I thought I'd go in, no matter what, into the farm. I opened the door. There was a apartment and nobody in. The peasants were gone, so I opened one door after the other. One was a bedroom. I saw there a bed, a open bed with a big...uh...down cover. I lie down into that bed and covered myself over my head and I lost my conscious. Huh? I don't know how long I was lying there, how...how long it was, but I woke up suddenly. I took off my...somebody pulled the cover off my head, and a Russian soldier with a Kalashnikov trained on me, "Who are you? Where are you? What are you?" I showed him the prisoner garb. I am a prisoner. I am... "What country?" I said, "Czechoslovak." "Oh, we are friends. We are friends. Good. Don't worry about nothing. I will get you." I said, "I am sick. I am a sick. I am from a concentration camp." "Oh well, we will help you. Don't worry, nothing." And he left. Yah? And I opened my eyes to see. The roof had a hole. All the brick and everything was on the...on the pillows, on the...on the cover. Yah? It was terrible.

Q: We have about one minute left. Was that your liberation?

A: That was my liberation. Yes. But I had a lot of troubles with the Germans...with the Germans...with the...with the ...with the Russians soldiers. The...the...I tried...there were seven children and three women hiding. The old woman, the old German woman put me on

my feet, really. She helped me. Yah? She...she gave me food and everything and brought me up really. And then I helped them. I helped them a lot. I brought them food from the Russians. I kept the seven children alive, and the whole family alive. Even two teenagers who were hiding from the Russians, I kept alive. I brought them food. Germans. I said always I will revenge myself when I come out. I will kill all the Germans. Nah! I didn't have it in me, I couldn't do it. I saved them. I saved them from the Russians. The Russians wanted to kill them. Yah? I saved them because I interpreted from Germans to Russians ... Yah?...a little bit. So I tried to protect them. Yah? "You are protecting the Germans. We will kill you. We will hang you. Next day we will come, we will hang you." A other day...other one came, brought me a bicycle. Yah? "You're a good boy. I bring you a bicycle." Brought me a bicycle, and the next day he took away the bicycle. The third day came at night a guy...yah, a soldier, and he knew that...that officer nearby in the other bedroom was leaving. He brought from somewhere wine. So he knew that. He came in. A plain soldier, a peasant. He goes straight there, and this officer told me, "Don't let nobody in there." I said to him, "Don't go there. The officer said nobody can go there." "Why," he said to me, "you are telling me that!" ...pulls out his bayonet...yah?...and his knife and puts it like that to me. I said, "What you want from me? I am a sick man. I am just telling you what the officer said." "You don't tell a Russian soldier nothing." You know, he went in, straight in, and picked up all the bottles, you know, and drunk them and then the officer came home and he almost killed me.

Q: Okay. We have to stop. I want to thank you very much.

A: Okay. All right. I hope it...it hit the point.

Q: It hit the point very much, indeed.