United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Chaim Engel
July 16, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Chaim Engel, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on July 16, 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.

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.

CHAIM ENGEL
July 16, 1990

01:00:00

Q: We're on. We're about to start. Would you tell me your full name please?

A: Chaim Engel. C - H - A - I - M.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I born in January 1916 in -- I born in a small place really, Brudzew, B - R - U - D - Z - E - W, but when I was five years old my father moved to Lódz. I remember when he lived in this place, they had a textile store -- they called him "the millionaire." He probably made a living, that's all. But wasn't, not -- one of the not many Jews there. He had a store, so automatically he called a "millionaire." And that's the reason my father left, was just afraid. It's the antisemitisms for Jews, so he left. He left, he went, moved to Lódz. It was when I was around five years old. And he started different thing. My father was really not a businessman. He was really a scholar. He studied for rabbi. He never practiced it, but a very Talmudistic -- he was really a -- let me call a scholar. That's probably the right word. But he had to make a living, so he had this textile and then he came to Lódz to live and he started different kind of business; and, we, we were not poor but we made it all the years, we made a living, nice living. And my youth was, in a big city. I went to schools, to a Jewish school which also had, from the government, you had to go to school to make, regular school. How do you call it? The...

Q: Public school?

A: Public schools. So while you -- there were schools, Jewish schools, what they had it connected together. That covered that, too. So you had both things in the same. And that's the kind of school I went. And I finished, the middle school, called middle school, maybe till around 14 years or 15 years.

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And then I started to work. My uncle had, a factory, a textile – stockings, they made stockings there, also textile. And I worked with him there for a year and then I--

Q: What, what was life like for a teenager at that point?

A: Well, well, we always felt that we are Jews. We were sections in Lódz I wouldn't go as a Jew, because you were a Jew. I don't know -- discrimination of, it was so much against Jews I assume I didn't really felt it so much because I lived more in the area of Jews and I maybe didn't have so much contact with not-Jews, but the -- you always were aware that you are a

Jew. You didn't go in certain sections which was not Jewish. You felt that you are a Jew because the laws which were there or the surroundings what not-Jews, how they acted and reacted to your being a Jew. So that was really what was as far as I can remember as a as a as a teenager.

Q: Did you join clubs? Were you part of a group?

A: not really. Not really, not really. We were more -- Jews, my friends who are Jewish, mostly, and we not really lived in an area where were just Jews living. We were also in an area what lived other people, but your contact mostly you had with the Jewish, because you were resented very much from the not-Jewish. Very seldom that you had a not-Jewish friend. And my time was that I worked, I worked till, when, we are 20, 20, you had to go to the army. When you are 20 you went to army for one and a half year. And that was in 1938. And, but my mother died in 1936. She was sick, I don't know exactly what, I think bronchitis or whatever. Anyway she died and I was about 20 and there come the time I had to go in the army and my father remarried after a short time, married, and I resented this. So as it came I had to go to the army and I served in the Polish army, for almost one and a half year. My time expired. You -- after one and a half year would have been on September the 15th, 1939, and the war broke out on 1st, September the 1st, so I ended up being a soldier while the war broke out, so I was in the war as a soldier, Polish army, against the Germans. Now talking about the reaction of non-Jews to the Jews, when I was in the army I went in the war. I was just as afraid from my comrades and from my sergeant as much as, as I was from the Germans. I didn't trust them. They mentioned, "You are a Jew," and things like that. So I was really afraid in a time like that can happen anything with you. So, we fought till the 25th, seventh, whatever the two weeks, three weeks; and I ended up, I became a prisoner of war. And the first reaction I had on the front with that soldier, the German soldier what took me said, "Are you a Jew?"

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I just said, "Yes." But he didn't react. He could shoot me or whatever. He didn't -- said, "Go, go, go." And they didn't do anything to me. So, but anyway they took us as prisoners of war. They kept us for two days outside in the field and it was cold already and they sent us to Germany as, as prisoner of war. And as prisoner of war we worked; it was very bad. I got sick and they did hardly fed you. They didn't get hardly any food, and you know any -- may, maybe I need some medication or whatever. I didn't get anything. And most of all was our work. We went cleaning the streets in Leipzig. It was -- must have been near to Leipzig, I remember that. And there we cleaned the street and, and -- till the one day came that all the Jewish prisoners of war from Pole had to be sent back to Pole. That was in March of 1940, and they sent us back to the place, to Pole, because they figured for the Jewish prisoners of war still has some more privileges than a Jew in Poland and they wanted to get rid of the Jews. That's the reason they send us back. And I came and I thought I go back to the place where my father lived. When I came there I found out that in '39 already, in December, they already took all the Jews out. There was a big apartment house, so all the Jews took out and

sent them away to Lublin. So I followed them. I didn't know exactly where, but somehow -- I don't remember how I found him. I found him where he is, and I came there and he had a hard time because they took only with them whatever they had on their shoulder and they had on them. They didn't, could take -- you couldn't take anything with them. So that was a hard time. Didn't have anything. So was very, a very hard time. So when I came back and I looked down what's going on, so I figured -- I went, I went to a farmer and asked if I can be a help there, as farmer's help. And he agreed to it, and he kept me there as a farm's worker, and I just did farm work. Was a Ukraine family and, he paid me. They gave me food and shelter and I think he paid me by the year with so much bags of corn or whatever, what I could sell and that I could help my family with that. And I was there for one and a half year, and then my brother what was nine years old, younger, was in the age that he could -- he was about 18 or something -- so he could -- 17, 18, that he -- I found for him a job too.

01:10:10

Q: What was it like on the farm for you?

A: Now they were, they were nice people and they took me like a farm's help, and probably I was cheaper than anybody else, but they were nice people. They were pretty good to me. They were not really to mistreat me or something like that. And, I had to do all the work. They were very nice people. I cannot, say they mistreated me; but my father lived in a place not in the village where I work on the farm. It was a small place, not far from the farm, about five miles away, things like that. So sometimes when I had a day off I could go back there and I walked. A matter of fact back then there was not any transportation there, and there was very hard for the people, for the Jews. Very hard. Very restricted, curfew. They couldn't do things much, but the mostly what they lived is they went to Lublin, brought some merchandise and sold it and that's the way they could live, 'cause it was not that -- they probably they didn't much trade and there was not any industry whatever. So they had really a hard time and, and the Germans mistreated the Jews. If he saw one on the street and he didn't like him, he could shoot him like that and they buried him in a place where he stood where he shot him. So we had places where you have to watch just not to go on these places because there's somebody buried there, so this really was a sad time. It was also very dangerous to go from my village to the place where I, where my father lived because if a German saw you on the road and he didn't like you for whatever reason, he shot you and no, was no recourse. He couldn't tell anybody, nobody will listen. He was king, as far as a Jew concerned. He didn't need any laws to ever, to adhere to it. He just, just did whatever he liked, he felt like. So that was really -- you got used to live with it. You took it already for normal the way it is. You just watched out that you are not around what get shot or whatever, so we worked there and the restrictions for the Jews became every time more restrictions and more restrictions till, one day the only things what Jews could do is working at a farm as a farmer's help. So we were still safe for a little time because in meantime they sent all these Jews, sent away to all these concentration camps.

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And in June of 1942 when they, they sent a transport of Jews away from the place, and my father was in this group with the second wife, with my step-mother. They were in this transport. Later when being in, in Sobibór I found out that this transport went to Sobibór because I met people, younger ones, what went with this transport and they worked there, so they knew about it. So, to come back to about my story, when I -- so I, as I say we still were able to work at the farmer, till one day all they came the restrictions Jews couldn't work at farmers. Everybody has to concentrate in the next place, nearest place, bigger place -- all the Jews around what work for the farmers, so in other words it was strict, no, no Jews anymore. So we know what's going on, so we didn't go, so my brother and my friend were -- all three we worked at the farmer's. So we decided not to go to this place. We thought, "Let's go in the woods. Maybe we'll find some, some partisans, or something like that." So we went in the woods instead to go to the place, and we walked around in the woods. We didn't have any food. It was cold and no shelter, nothing, so we had to come, find our way out of it because we didn't find any partisans and you couldn't live that and the people, the Polish people, wouldn't help you. They didn't. First of all we were afraid to show our face and if we did even they were very reluctant have anything to do with you. You were afraid they might go to tell the Germans that you are there. So we heard somehow that in Izbica--was a city about maybe 10, 15 miles away, 20 miles, whatever--that there are still some Jews in this place, so we walked till we came there. We came there in the evening. And we came, there were still Jews there and we talked with the other Jews what lived still there and surely everybody was helpful to do. We told them where we come from and what -- sure -- they took us in. Every stranger, they took us in, in the house and there was full with Jews, you know, on the floor and everybody just took care of a shelter; and the same night the Germans came at night and drove all the people out of the houses to collect them in the center of the city and to go to send them away to the camps. Now we were still -- there was this old houses, you had this attics and things like that, so we tried to hide there in the building not to come out, but they didn't do any effort to get you out because they figured eventually you will have to come out.

01:16:10

No food, no shelter, no facilities, you have to come out, and that is what happened. After three nights hiding and not having food, whoever was hiding came out of this place and the others went already what they collected, they went already sent them back to a camp and we were the ones what were hiding, so they later they took us to the trains, to the freight trains; and, whatever people they collected, they pushed us in, in this freight trains, as many people as they could squeeze in and we were standing, no moving, nothing and the whole night we traveled in this train. Now there was people fell down. People had to go to the bathroom and there was, there was a mess -- you cannot imagine. But you had no, any choice, nothing. So that after the morning -- in the morning we ended up arriving in Sobibór. That is the way we arrived in Sobibór. So I was with my brother and myself and my friend; and we all meet the other rest of the people, about seven, 800 people and they took us out from the trains and they put us in two lines and they start collecting -- picking out people. I didn't know what the picking out means, so one German asked me, "Where are you from?" I said, "From Lódz."

"Out." And then they went further. "What are you?" "A carpenter." "Out." Things like that, so they picked about 18 to 20 people. Well, let me maybe say that we hear in Poland that that happens with the Jews. They kill Jews and they gas Jews and things like that; but we really, as young people, we really didn't believe that something like that is possible. We thought, "Maybe the younger people will take to work. Maybe only the older people…." You just didn't want to be -- wan-- wanted to believe, because it was so incomprehensible, so unbelievable that something like that can happen that you just -- even if you had the intelligence you didn't believe it, so when they picked us out in the camp, I really didn't know what means the picking out means, whether life or death.

01:18:35

So they took us -- the 20 people -- they took us in one side and the others went to the camp, to the gas chambers -- what we found out later. So we worked in there. Went -- in the afternoon, in the afternoon, they took us with all the other people to separate the clothes. That started to be our work and I started to separate my clothes -- that was the clothes from people who just arrived with the transport what we came with, and while I did that I found the clothes of my brother, the pictures from the family, so I knew already -- they already told me what's going on, so I knew already what happened, that he went to the gas chamber with my friend and I am here separating his clothes. So you can imagine what went through my mind when that happened.

Q: What did you do? How did you handle that?

A: Well, I really don't know. I, I -- everything stopped on me, like I stopped functioning. I just -- also I heard all the stories before that didn't penetrate in me, I didn't accepted it, but that made it already accepting. That is the truth. That's what happened, because I saw what happened. So it's hard to tell the feelings. It's -- it is just -- you stop thinking. You stop functioning. It is just like somebody hits you with a hammer in your head, something like that, so -- but you had to do your work. You were not your own. You had to function just to function, to move, to go, to do things like that, so we finished our work and surely constantly in my mind what happened and, and, and that was really our work, what we do, day in, day out and, and then we went back and then after the work they always kept us around five o'clock, before it gets dark, back to the barracks, where we, we slept. Selma told the work about it was divided. It was a section where the Germans lived, and that was really fixed up nicely with gardens and things like that. And then was barracks where we lived, mostly where, we slept in other words. And there was a few places in the park or call it camp or whatever -- there were also places where they had a shoemaker, a goldsmith, a tailor, a regular smith, things like that, but that was mostly not for the camp. That was mostly work done for the Germans in the camp. What they need some work, they did it; like the goldsmith that did for them good different things, made for them up rings. You see, the camp really was -- that was one of many camps, of about four or five camps what was really a death camp.

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It was not a concentration camp. The distinction is the death camp, people came there, they were directed to the gas chamber. They -- the small group what worked, like us, was just to keep the things going; in other words separating the clothes, cleaning out.... Before we came, before I came, about a few months before, they start, it was different. When a transport came, they picked out about 50, 60 people from this transport and when all the people were already in, gone to the gas chamber, they cleaned up after them and then these people were shot in the gas chamber, often in the camp, Camp Three. later they found out it's more efficient for them to have the same people do always the same work, so they start to have permanent people doing the cleaning up, the separating all the kind of thing, and that what started to be a permanent group in this camp what worked there. And we were the ones what, what did this kind of work. So it was, as I have to explain maybe, the camp was so as I say we lived apart where the Germans lived. We lived, the place where we worked and there was Lager Three, or Camp Three, where the people went to the gas chambers and there, there were in the beginning was as burying and later…. Is that the right word?

Q: Buried.

A: Buried them. And later, they came they burned. They had a big roaster thing that they burned the people. Now, also, we had hard times. Everyday, almost, they beat you, they, they mistreated you. They made you working, day and night and all the kind of thing, but you were young and you could take it as much as you could take it. Whoever couldn't take it was taken to the camp, to Camp Three and was shot and a lot of people couldn't make and they fell, just fell from the from the kind of work and the food you have and things like there was a change of people. Very often a lot of people were changed because they just couldn't make it. They couldn't, physically they couldn't have it. Now the people what work in Lager Three was often a change of it, because the people worked directly with the bodies and having to work on that, it -- most people, mentally, they just couldn't have it; and they were changed. They had to change the group. They killed, they killed them and they picked out another group of people and they took them, or they took some of ours or things like that. They took; and if you once came there, you never came out of it because that was the real end, the real end. Nobody could come out from that. So, in camp itself the food what they gave you really was -- we called it a straw soup. That was something you couldn't even swallow. You had to spit out and in the morning, black water and a slice of bread for the 24 hours.

01:25:30

Now if you had to live on that, you couldn't really live there; but because we work with this, clothes, separating the clothes and the people came -- they always brought with them -- you saw -- they couldn't take much with them, the people what got sent on the transport. They just took them from the houses and say, "Go," so they took with them -- usually what you take, you take with you the valuables what you can in small things like diamonds, rings and things like that. They figure, "They'll let me take something. You never know what happen." And also some food. They took cans of food, things like that, so we were the ones what

really worked with that, so knowing that we don't have much to, to eat, so we took the risk to steal this food and we brought it back and we ate it. Now if they caught you, you were shot on the place. You had a piece, a can, or whatever, they shot you. They didn't even question, ask you nothing. Just shot you. Now lot of times they did it, they caught somebody, they took us out to show what happens if somebody steals, but we still kept doing it, regardless; and so we really had -- sometimes we had food to eat. So even the time when we didn't have the food one evened out with the other, so we were not -- as far as that's concerned, not they fed us but we fed ourself. We took the food, we stole the food and so we had sometimes from the transport, we had the food.

01:27:00

And also, as for clothes, what I mentioned -- people ask you, "In the camp you look not so bad dressed," and things like that. Now we work with these clothes, so if, if we had a ripped jacket and we saw another one, we took another jacket and we didn't have special camp clothes. We had our regular clothes what we came in, so there as far as that, but there was always the -- if you didn't look right or the German maybe had just a drink and he didn't like your look, he took you out and shot you. There was nothing. He didn't have to give any account to anybody what he is doing. He just did whatever he felt like. Now we had some what we had to be very careful, because they always were suspicious. And if they had any suspicion, justified or not justified, you could be a target of it. What they did, sometimes they took us out from the bed and they, they took us and shot people and things like that, you didn't look right, you didn't walk right. And also when they took us out on Appell[1] and you didn't stay right, he decided, gives you 25 whips -- they had whips -- 25 whips on the, on the on, on, on your bare, bare bottom. So, I had it a few times. I got beaten, so, so I took when I was on my work I saw some other pants, so I took two pair of pants. I figured if they beat me it wouldn't be so bad. So they found out that, so I got beaten and I had to take off both my pants. And so you got beaten on 25 whips and if you, you had to count it. If you didn't -- stopped counting in the middle, you had to start from the beginning and he gave you another 25. So that was really one of the minor things. The main thing was we always were living with that people seeing what we -- the transports that came and they went to these gas chambers -- men, women, children, and that was always a heart-breaking thing to see and, and that was really.… Ours is beating alright, the next day you were better, but that is not so important. But that what we saw what happens, and that what really always touched us. But, but it is strange that even, even, if you were young and even if you see what happen and you know it's no way out of here, even if you think, "It's just a fantasy," that you think, "I will come out of here all right." It just -- you hope, your hope is justified hope -- not justified hope, but you think because your will for life is so -- you think, "Ah, one day I will come out of it." There was really not any reason to believe it will happen, because it was, it was around with barbed wires, mines around, in the woods, guards around, dogs around, and even if you get out you wouldn't know where to go even. So there was not really any, any real hope whatever, not any spark of hope there that you would can come out ever. But still, you know,

[1] roll call (German).

as I say, you're young. You think -- a matter of fact sometimes being in a camp and you're not fully alert, you were not -- you couldn't believe that what happened happens here because it was so far from reality really, thinking that -- how can you imagine -- they burn people -- they, they kill people, young people, children. You couldn't believe that. So if you're not really fully aware you thought that is not true, you just dream. But really that was, was what happened. So, in general to say that really what, what was the situation in camp. So there are different, cases that happened that people -- it is in the movie, is it about -- there was a group what worked outside the camp, about 10 people, 15 people, whatever; and they went out with two Ukrainians to work there. Now and there was in this group -- one day, they and were in this, in this Ukraines, the guards -- and they killed one and, and they start to run away, so a few got away and the rest were caught and brought back to the camp. And when that happened, they -- we had to go on Appell and they took us to show how they shot all these people and we had to see it as a lesson when you ran away. That was one accident. There was another one, a similar story happened something -- somebody ran away so this time they took different. They took each 10th -- they put us on an Appell and every 10th of the line they picked out; and every 10th, the group what they collected from that they took them with them and they shot them together with the other ones. Now I happened to be number nine in a line where they picked the 10th of it, so luck was with me somehow I guess. So they, they shot this group; so things like that happened very, very often. I really couldn't recall how many times -- probably Selma told about this -- 72 Dutch people, there was a rumor that they want to ran away so they took the whole 72 to Camp Three and they shot them all.

01:33:00

Things like that happened very often. Somebody -- I told you about the -- we were on this trial in Germany and I testified that Frenzel[2], one of the Germans, he shot a dentist for no reason. We had to see how he put him down and turned around and shot him in his back, in the neck here and he fell down, and I testified for that. Now that's one of the few cases that I remember things that they did, things like that.

Q: Can you tell us a little more about Frenzel and the kinds of things he did?

A: Well, the -- each German was really an, an individual by himself. Although they all had -- they came for one purpose, just to treat the Jews there, but each one had reacted to his character. As I mentioned once, there was one what was there for some whatever reason, but he was not the worst one.

01:34:00

He could give a Jew another piece of bread; but the other one like Frenzel, he looked for trouble not for him, for the Jews. He didn't like somebody, he shot them. He would -- people

[2] Oberscharführer Karl Frenzel

would -- sometimes you couldn't go to work. They were in the barrack for a day. He didn't like you are so long there for a day. He took them out and took them to Camp Three and they shot all of them, so each individual really was what he was by himself. It was not a command they had to do that. Like we had another one, Wagner[3], what was -- that was the worst one of all of them. The worst thing about him is he was very sharp and very suspicious. If he has his eye and his intuition and his feeling for so he could smell out something there will be trouble tomorrow, so we were always careful. When he was around -- we had a name for him, "VaYikru". Now that means -- we called him "VaYikru," because we didn't want any name, popular name, that you don't recognize it, so we knew when we said -- when he came near to the camp we said "VaYikru," so everybody knew to be alert and out of his way because it always happened with him something. He always took somebody. He killed him or he beat him or whatever, so we always were very careful as far as that. So what I want to point out, the claim that these guards say they had to do the things, are definitely not true. First of all, a lot of time they asked for volunteers because they didn't want to work they went there, but they were not commanded to particularly shoot this one or do this one. Their function was to go there and to see that if work functions, that the people go, come from the train, go to the gas chamber and do the things, but each individual showed his character there and when he was one what he wanted to hurt personally something, he did it there; and he didn't have to give any, any account of it, what he is doing.

01:36:00

So the Frenzel was really one of the bad ones. He, he really -- if he could kill people, he did. we had one, for example, what worked in Lager Three and he used to be a boxer, Gomerski[4], and for him they made a special whip what was heavier and one day he came back from Lager Three and we were on Appell and he came -- this Frenzel was with us -- and he was bragging to Frenzel -- we understood, we speak German -- so he says to him that he just killed a Jew with 12 hits with his whip. So, so they chose that each character lived out his character there. It was not that he had to do that; they did it, so the excuse that they had to that is nonsense. So, there's -- well, also my work was separating clothes when transport came at night. Sometimes they took people out any time, anybody to do different kind of works. What they did, they cut the hair of the women. The women went to the gas chamber after the men and then they stopped, about one or two barracks before the gas chamber was a barrack where they left their luggage and they had to undress; and there was a barrack the next to the gas chamber where they cut at randomly, they cut the hair of the women. They utilized it. They send it back to Germany; they did for brushes, for everything. So we were sometimes picked out at night to cut the hair, and it happens once I happened to be one of this group. I had to go also to cut the hair. Now we were about 10 feet from the gas chamber. There was -- the gas chamber was here and there was like the barrack like I say next to it so and they came. If the Polish transports were-- the Polish Jews knew more what's going on. They knew they're going to death and also they were more religious and the women came in

[3] Oberscharführer Gustav Wagner
[4] Oberscharführer Hubert Gomerski

and we were young boys, 20, 22, five, and we were standing there.

01:38:30

They came naked in, and we had to cut their hair. There was a horrible yelling and screaming for all these, from knowing, from feeling they go to the gas chamber. On top of that, they're ashamed to put it in. But with the Dutch transport, was quieter. They didn't know really -- they didn't realize really that they're going to the camp, to death, so I have I happened to cut somebody's hair and they started to talk to me. Say, "How, how is it here and what...?" They still didn't believe already, and the Germans around the small room but a little bigger than that. So they around so we couldn't, we couldn't talk to them so I didn't say a word. I couldn't, because they didn't want us we talk to them. They were afraid we tell them or things like that, so we couldn't say anything, but that was a horrible thing to see these women with children and all ages and things like that. I mean know -- we knew where would they go. So as I say hard to, to tell this picture. They cut randomly the hair, something like they chopped up down here and send away those people, so to the lowest point these people were brought down when they went to the.... It's, it's unbelievable how takes it to tell that. Whoever didn't see it cannot describe it how that really looks or feeling it. We were always were sick from it when we came back from that, but as I say that was random. Sometimes they took us to this kind of work. And, we had other things. Like for example we had one times we had, on a Sunday was that and they locked us up in the barracks. We were not allowed to go out and a train arrived and there came some, some people came in this camp. And there was full with guards and all the guards were in, all the Germans and everything, and they took them further down where they usually people arrive and they go and take their luggage and we heard a lot of shooting. So much shooting and shooting, we didn't know what's going on. The next day they took us to work to separate the clothes, and we're separating the clothes from these people what were shot.

01:41:00

They're full with blood -- terrible, and, and while we are separating the clothes we -- I found in a pocket of one of these of one of these trousers -- I found a little note written in Yiddish and it says, "We come from Belzec," what was another camp like that and where the people that did the kind of work that we do; and to liquidate the Belzec, they brought them to Sobibór. And the people knew where they go, so they put a resentment, so they shot them. They just shot them in the train, so all these people, and they say, and the note says, "We are from there, we know where we go. Take revenge for us." So that was -- we knew the people or so. So our hopes for coming out was really no hopes whatever, no hopes whatever. We knew what the end is. It's just if the transport are finished, we are finished and we go and we will be shot, all of us. I don't remember, there's so many de-- so many accidents -- incidents that happened in camp what so horrible I really don't come to fresh in my mind to tell what it is, but stories like that happened almost every other day. Almost every other day. It was if we lived through a day -- if we made it through the day, if you make it to the evening you know you lived today. Otherwise you didn't know what tomorrow is, because tomorrow morning if

he didn't like what you looked like, you could be dead. Constantly like that. So we lived with this. It is hard to say how you live a life like that. You just live with the minute. You don't make plans. You don't think far. You don't -- you concentrate, you just concentrate on the minute, "I want to make the, the first 10 minutes, the next minute, the next minute," and that is the way we really lived because, it's really impossible to explain what it means to live in a situation like that. And nobody -- if somebody tries to say something about -- it's impossible to say. Even the one what lived it through couldn't explain really how that was, to live like that. So -- but -- and there was a group what, was thinking of, of running away.

01:43:37

Q: Let's hold it for a minute. Before we get to the uprising, we -- would you tell me, um, how you met your wife?

A: I guess by at work. By at work. Because we worked in with separating the clothes and in the evening we came back to barracks. The men and women lived in the same compartments, or big -- the camp was circled round with barbed wire and woven with branches from the green -- evergreen trees, and -- but there was many barracks was in that. There was a section where the women slept and we slept in another. The kitchen was there and the work places were they set, so in the evening when we arrived they gave us to eat something and, and then we have about nine o'clock or eight-thirty depending when it was dark, we had to go and sleep in our barracks, so the few hours between eating and sleeping so we could see each other, walk around in this half of this, court, court round and we could talk with each other; and I, and I met Selma. She probably knows the details better than I do, but anyway we met and we stayed always together. So I think that also was really a -- that makes it also easier, subconsciously, easier for us to endure in this camp because we had each other. We liked each other, and we could, communicate together and we were young, so I think it's a normal reaction to it.

Q: How did you see -- keep seeing her, given the camp and the way it was set up?

A: Yeah. Well, we tried to be as much as we can together. In other words when we went on Appell, we tried to be together and, when -- after work we were together. So we worked, we went separating the clothes, if possible, we were together, so we were pretty often and pretty – very -- and very often together as far as the work didn't interfere with -- if the work wasn't the same location, the same thing, we could be together with.

Q: You had started before to tell us about some of the Nazis. Can you tell us about Wagner? Can you tell me the story about him?

A: Yeah. well, Wagner, as I said, was really somebody the most we had to be careful with. He was the most brutal one and a vicious one. He was really -- he looked for the occasion to murder somebody, to do some something bad to him. He was, he was himself and he had the occasion to do things like that, so he very often he sneaked in at night, you know, or in the

evening when we are just walking around in this lot, in the place where we lived, just to, to, to sneak out, to suspicious, to see something. Maybe he's stalking to somebody. I know he went in once to the barrack, one of -- there was a young fellow, he was a Kapo and he slept, and he went in, in his room, he start to wake him and he wasn't reacting quick enough so he took him out with a -- he killed him. He killed him because he didn't react rightly on it. A matter of fact, the uprising later maybe I will tell -- we geared it so -- they went every three months they went on vacation, so we all -- we planned it to have anything -- when we planned the uprising we planned it so that he is not in that time there. He is on vacation in that time. Now, while I'm talking about reminds me, the Germans went every, as I say, every three months they went to vacation. Now when they do that, when they went there, they always prepared them to go on vacation. What that mean is, they took all the best clothes what they could find, they -- some of the valuables what the people had with them -- that they had the biggest suitcase and they filled up all these things. They filled it up till they couldn't even carry it, it was so heavy. And each, each one of them took home these big suitcases and with especially the Dutch people brought really nice things with them, and they took all these things. They took them home for themselves, so that was really for them a big holiday. To go home, they took with them valuables what never more could -- they probably in their private life could never afford this kind of things, so, that was really what they did. So, that that really was for them, that was the purpose of being there, so they could steal and take the things. On top of that what they murdered, that they could steal and take the things with them. Now Wagner, the end of Wagner was after the war, he ran away.

01:49:00

He ended up in Argentina and one of the survivors, Szmajzner[5], what he recently died -- he was in Argentina, too; and when it was Hitler's birthday, they, all these Germans make a coming together and he happens to be there and this Szmajzner, Szmajzner, he, he somehow found out that he saw that -- he went looking for these people. He saw him there and he recognized him, and he said, "You are Wagner." He said, "No, no, no." Anyway, it ended up that they took him to jail, and while he was in jail he hanged himself. So that was the story with Wagner. But while being in a camp, we were really -- if we were afraid to the most it was for him. So really that was really a beast. He, he was so vicious. He was looking already that he can murder somebody, kill somebody. I never saw a person like that. Some of them still had sometimes, human feelings, you know. You could caught them, and catch them in a lighter moment, but this one was really just vicious. You couldn't afford even to look in his face. He didn't like you look at him and things like that, so there were -- before me were there even also were others what I didn't -- Stangl[6], I think, but I, I didn't -- I was not in the time when Stangl was. I don't know anything. I only from I heard from the others telling -- he had a dog and he martyred people with the dog and things like that. Now I, I was not my time. I came in, in – no – yeah, I came I think in September 1942. So I was 11 months I was in camp because the uprising was in October, so that was not my time. there was transport

[5] Stanislaw Szmajzner
[6] SS-Hauptsturmführer Franz Stangl

came really -- sometimes they came -- I remember just talking about -- I remember there came a transport. There was a big transport and there was a lot of people, half-dead, dead, no clothes.

01:51:30

Terrible, I never saw something like that. It's just unbelievable -- half-skeletons. The people looked just unbelievable. They must have had a big trip, no food, muddled up before that, so they want to get it over as quick as possible, so we had these trolleys, like the wagons what you have in the coal mines, what you swing back and forth, you might have seen them. So they said all the bodies we had to throw on, on this to take it to the Camp Three. And there were half-live people. We just had to throw them together with the, with the live people -- with the dead people together, so I see an old lady, a gentle face and things like that and it was on top of all these bodies. She couldn't hardly talk, and they all went just like that. Put half-life on, whatever lived still, on the fire there. So things like that really -- I couldn't -- I, I couldn't bring up everything. It was so many of them I couldn't really remember everyone of them. It was horrible, horrible. I just don't have words for it. You cannot, you cannot, you cannot tell a story like that. You can tell a story, the words have not the same meaning to the listener that it has to me, because I saw it and I see the picture before me. And it's different telling a story -- no matter how good words you find for it, it still cannot give you the right picture what it is. So that is to say the most horrible thing imaginable, that what it was. If you, you cannot imagine, but, but if you could have a horrible picture of the worst of a picture, the picture, even if I were to tell it, because so bad was it.

01:53:30

Q: What kind of food and living conditions did you have?

A: Well, as I said, we all got -- the food was -- you had in the -- we got -- well in the morning we got our slice of bread, a heavy slice of bread, black bread and black water. It was not to drink but that's all you get, and in the evenings we had a soup. As I said, we called it the straw soup. It was from corn, I don't know exactly the name of it, it's with the peels, the corn with the peels, so you couldn't really swallow that and we called that the "spit soup." Now some people couldn't eat it and they just didn't eat and die. They couldn't eat it. Especially the Dutch people, what were used to a little bit better life, so they couldn't, and if you had to live on that you couldn't make it long. You couldn't make it long, and they -- a lot of people didn't. But we were the ones who were next to the food and we stole it. That's the reason we had more people. It was illegal, dangerous. They would have shot you if they catch you, but we nevertheless we did it, so the -- as far as food concerns, that was really the situation, but if you think about how they fed you -- forget about it. You couldn't make it at all. You couldn't make it. And, clothes -- as I said, we came with different clothes and we just changed. If, if it was ripped or whatever, we changed to another clothes. Just that what kind of thing, but they didn't supply you anything. They gave you -- they treated you like a commodity, not like a, a human being, not at all. You were not a human being. You just had

to listen the order what you got and to do it, just like the robot. You had to do things what you are told and if you didn't do it right, they did away with you. No fooling around.

01:55:30

And then was, a punishment for whatever reason, the whole evening instead after eating we could go and be in the barracks. They didn't bring you to eat and they take you around, running around, put down -- as a punishment; they let you ran, ran, and ran, fell down and get up, fell down and get up for hour, two hours, till you got so exhausted and tired, some people died on the place. They couldn't make it, and some, the younger ones, they, they did it, so there was a punishment. Things like that happen. As I say, they tried to martyr you. They tried to take away any thinking of you, that you don't -- you're not on a human being, you're not functioning as a human being. Just you have to be a robot and to kill you, any thinking, any initiative, anything -- just to do what you're told and to keep you as long as they need you. So we really were not human beings in their thinking and their functioning and in regard to us, so they didn't come for that. So they exploit us as much as they could.

Q: At this point I want to stop and pause and we're going to change tapes.

01:56:40

[Technical Conversation]

End of Tape 1

TAPE #2

02:00:00

Q: OK. We're on. Let's pick up now.

A: Well, we were always knowing what's going on. We were talking about an uprising. In other words, we talking about running away somehow, organized. There was a small group. I was not involved in this group. And there was a lot of talking about how to run away. Now there were many plans how to do it. It was not an easy task. There were always mines around, guards around, and there were about a 150, 200 Ukrainian guards in the camp on top of the Germans, so that was really a very difficult task to find somehow a way to get out. And -- till one day came a transport of Jewish Russian prisoners of war from Minsk. That was about -- on -- not far from the Russian border where the Germans caught them, the prisoners of war, so they took out the Jewish prisoners of war and send them to Sobibór. From this group they picked out around 30 people to work in the camp and these people when they came in and they heard what's going on. They're all soldiers so, and a different spirit, said they want to run away the first day. So we tried to explain to them that it is not so easy. "Where do you run? You don't have the cooperation from the people outside even if you make it already outside, and, it's not so easy." And we told them also that we have our own plans and we wanted to do the same thing. Maybe we can talk together and come up with a common things, and we all can do the same thing together, what made sense, and they agreed on it. And after many secretive meetings in the evening, we, after work, we came together and we talk with them and we talked on different plans, different possibilities, so -- till one day we came upon a plan that we make an uprising on this way.

02:03:00

We worked till it was the time of October, what about five o'clock they brought us back already to the living quarters because they want us always bring back before dark, so we decided at four o'clock we start to make an uprising in this way. In each group what worked like we, for example, with separating the clothes; we had two three Germans what were supervision over us. They supervised us and each group what worked in different ways had two or three Germans what they were there to watch them, how they work. So we decided in each group to assign two people and these people with some pretext, they will have to get them to a warehouse or somewhere and quietly kill them with a knife or an axe or whatever and just do it like nothing happened and in, in the meantime also to cut the, the wires and as I said, as I said before, we tried to gear to do it in the time when Wagner was on vacation; so that was really not safe, but safer. And that was -- and so as I say, we was assigned people in each group to do this kind of work. Now there were in the barracks where we lived, there was a goldsmith, a tailor, a shoemaker and that they made for them clothes, shoes, these people there; so they made, they had to come to fit, so they told them, "In this day I will have the fit for you. Come then, and I will have the fit for you your shoes or your clothes."

02:05:00

And when they came there they were already people with this axe of knives. They were hiding behind a, a curtain or something, and they killed them on the spot. When they came in to fit, they overwhelmed them and they killed them, and shoved them in under the, under somewhere that nobody sees, and, and the work went through like nothing happened. And so I was not assigned to anything because, you see, I went with Selma and Selma didn't speak Polish and the whole plan was very secretive. Although it was planned for all of people in the camp, because everybody could run away, but not many people were told were about -- be afraid it might come out, leak out and then we all gone, so whoever was, didn't speak the language, didn't know somebody, so it was secretive. So I had my friends there and I knew everything that's going on; but I was not assigned to anything because of that, because I was with, with Selma, because she didn't speak Polish. So where I worked there, there were some people assigned to kill by the clothes where I worked, the separating the clothes. And then there were two people what assigned to go to kill somebody in the office, a German in the office, and the last minute one of them got scared and he didn't want to go. And I was there and I heard the story and I knew already that there's 10 to 12 Germans were already killed, so I know -- the ordeal I know already.

02:07:00

We are already -- unless we get out, otherwise we are dead. So, Selma brought me a knife with a point, knife. I said I wanted to go. You see, from all these people what people brought from the transport, utensils and all the things, there were a warehouse for it, and we're not far from this warehouse, so she went there in and she picked a knife, a pointed knife. She gave me a knife, and I went with the other fellow. I don't think I was a big hero or a big, courageous man, but I figured it's self-defense and survival. If I don't do it, it might spoil the whole thing. So I, I instinctively -- is not decision. It's not a decision. You just react, instinctively you react to that, and I figured, "Let us to do, and go and do it." And I went. I went with the man in the office, and we killed this German. With every jab, I said, "That is for my father, for my mother, for all these people, all the Jews you killed;" and I -- my knife slipped out, slid out from my hand and I cut myself and I was full with blood and when he was dead we ran out of the office and we were lucky. Just came a big truck came with Germans on it, but I somehow -- there was -- the, the idea was when at this comes five o'clock that we all go back to from work to the living quarters like nothing happened, and that was just in that time and Selma went with this group and she saw me and she took a, a nap-- napkin or whatever she had with them, she tied me up there, wiped off the blood from me and I went with this group till the main quarters where we where we came in and all the groups in all the places came in, because it was five o'clock. Then we all start to run away. Everybody ran in different directions. I tell it so quick, but, it, it was more tension because it was a whole hour was going on, so we were very tense. We knew there were already Germans killed. We knew already it's going on, so we just hoped that nobody unexpectedly comes a place where he doesn't supposed to come and finds out what happened. If that is, then we all killed and lost, so somehow we are lucky with that. We killed these Germans

wherever we worked and everything went accordingly to the plan, till we came to the main gate. Now we could -- people ran, ran all over, so the whole camp knew already what's going on by then, so some ran on the mines, got killed. Some people didn't ran at all. They gave up. They didn't want to run. They just gave up. They, they just waited till they get killed. But the younger people, most of them, and whoever was courageous enough to run, they ran away and then a lot ran on the main gate. Now we started to run and we were next to a barrack and then I saw Frenzel with a machine gun, and he started to shoot and more people were running and I, I wanted to hold back because afraid for the machine gun, and I figured, "Here is dead. Here is maybe something." So I pulled Selma's hand and we ran through and somehow, some fell and we made it through the through the gate. So we were lucky we came through. So that is really, I think some luck was with us. So we came through that and then we ended up -- it started to be dark, and Sobibór was in the woods, so when we came out from the camp we ended up in the woods, and it was rainy and it was wet and she had some boots on and somehow the boots didn't right, so she pulled it off and she couldn't get it on, so she ran with one boot, half on the foot and on the, on the heel like that, you know, she ran. We ran the whole night and we didn't know where we ran; and till it started to get light, dawn. And what I forgot to tell you is when we knew when we go away, we took money from the people. The money what we should have given to the Germans or sabotage, we took with us some because we figured if we go out, we probably will need it if we have any chance to survive. So we took some with us, so when we came -- we figured -- the first night we came next to a village and we saw a house and I figured, "Let me go and ask if they can keep us over the day," because they were searching there all over. So, and I told them I -- whatever the figure was -- I had dollars, gold, things like that, so I told them I would give them so much money. He probably never heard so much money what I gave him, so he agreed to hold us over the day. They took us in. And it happened we were six miles from the camp. And later we heard that in the same village they were searching the whole day. They found a lot of people. I don't know if all of them -- they found of them and took them back to camp and shot them.

02:12:35

And it happened we were lucky, they didn't, didn't find us. So, and then we, we, we ran, we -- no -- when it got dark, we left this farmer and he told us a little direction. Now I was thinking because I didn't know where to go, what to go, so I was thinking I worked at the farmer before I went to Sobibór, I figured, "Let me try. Maybe, you never know, maybe -- he was a nice person as I said, he was a nice person. Maybe he might do something." Now I didn't know direction. We couldn't go on the roads. We went in the field always, because we are afraid they will catch us and not to be found, so we went in the woods. We didn't -- what we looked is on the, on the Big Wagen[7], on Der Nipper[8], Nipper. I don't know I went the right direction. Anyway, that was our guide to where to go where to go, so we ended up at

[7] wagon (German); “Der Große Wagen” or “The Big Wagon” is a colloquial German term for the constellation Ursula Major.
[8] the sipper (German)

night, we walked in dark, and during the day we tried to hide. Either, we tried to go into a farmer in the morning, very early in the morning, give him money; or sometimes we were not so lucky so we were hiding in sometimes in the woods during the day or on an open field or we went in a hoykh barg[9] or something. And one day we couldn't find a farmer, we couldn't find anybody, and we ended up on a top of a high barg[10], and it happened during the day some children came there to play and there was a sport to go on this and they found us, and they started right, "Jews, Jews, Jews." I said, "Selma, let's quick run away," and we ran away. They couldn't find anyone, so we ran away. I don't know, we got out and while we were running there were two wagons haul-- wooden wagons with farmers. They didn't know that I speak Polish, and he said, "Come, we will take you. Come, we'll take you." And I was on one wagon and Selma was on the other one, and I hear in Polish they say, "Let them take it -- we will, we will do something for them," whatever -- not, not good, so I screamed to Selma, "Jump! Jump!" And I jumped and she jumped, and I let them go and we went away, so we ran away.

02:15:00

So for about two weeks we ran, sometimes coming to a farmer, sometimes not, but every time when we were at a farmer, we tried to tell them that we have some money. We want to give them this money, and if he wants to keep us over the war. It was already in the end of '43 and, the Russians moved back and forth, so, so maybe they figured that maybe it wouldn't take so long and they might willing to do it, till one day we came to a farmer and we asked him that. And he said, "Listen. I am too near to my neighbors and I am not able to do it for you, but I have a brother of mine what lives about 10 miles away or 10 kilometers away. Let me bring you there to him and maybe -- he lives a little isolated. He might be willing to do it." And that what he did. So he put Selma, dressed up some as an old lady, and me he put on a wagon, the long wagons what they had, covered me with branches and he drove on the road. Now I don't think he realized the danger of what he imposed on himself. If they caught us, if the Germans on the road caught us, we all had been dead and all his family dead. Of course, really very dangerous. I assume he didn't realize what he is doing, because that was so dangerous and they were all over, the Germans. And especially they were look-- we were not too far from the camp anyway, so they were looking for everything. So anyway we were lucky. He brought us to his brother, and his brother said, "Yes, I can keep you." So there we end up -- we gave him what we had. Don't ask me what it was, was -- gold pieces, diamonds, things like that, I don't know. Anyway, we gave him all these things and he decided to keep us, and he put us on top of the cows on the straw -- made a -- more straw put on and, and then, a bucket for your toilet and once a day he brought us some food, and he kept us there for -- that was in October -- he kept us till June 1944. That was, when the Russians came, till the Bug, till, till the Weichsel. The war was -- the Russian came already in '44 till the Weichsel -- there was six months no fi-- no fighting in this side.

Q: Excuse me. What was it like? You said he kept you. Describe where he kept you and how

[9] high mountain (Yiddish)
[10] mountain(Yiddish)

you were given and all of that?

02:18:00

A: Well, as I say, we were where the cows were downstairs it was full with flies on the top and we could never get straight. Once in a while he took us down for -- to wash ourselves, and the food -- we had once a day food. It was not enough but at least we could live. Selma had sca-- scab-- the right word, is it?

Q: Scabies?

A: Scabies. She had scabies, and we knew with -- we knew…. What is the material you use on matches?

Q: Sulfur.

A: Sulfur. Sulfur. And with that you could get rid of it, so we didn't have any money more. I remember I had a gold-filled, a gold, pen, a fountain pen, and I gave him. I said, "Why don't you sell that and buy us this sulfur," so -- and then he had to drive to the city because in the village they had nothing. So I think that what he did once, but it was not enough. So we ended up she had sulfur all the time. So, she -- we lived with that. I had it too, so we had it both. We had to -- so I was not so, contagious to it. I didn't have it so bad, but she had it very bad. They, they treated us well. This how you want to think about: we were lucky and happy that they kept us alive and they gave us whatever food they gave us; and also no matter what condition, because we knew, we knew somehow a friend of ours what also was asking a farmer to keep him, and he said, "Keep me." And at night he came with the hay fork and killed him and took all the money from him, so knowing all this kind of things, we were, we thought--

[Beeping noise]

Q: Excuse me. Can we stop the tape please?

02:20:00

[Technical conversation]

Q: Okay. We're back on tape.

A: So, knowing that, that what can happen, so we really felt very lucky that we find people that they kept us, no matter what conditions. So that's the way always we look at it, because they saved our life. Now, when the Russian -- no. A few days before the Russian came, somehow a family child came from-- eight years, 10 years or whatever years old--he came to this uncle. That was his uncle, and he came to, to the barn. Now a bird happens to fly up there

where we were, and he climbed up and he saw us, and he was.... That was a secret for the family, because nobody knew what's going -- they had young children, one or two, so nobody knew and when they saw that so that was really dangerous. We had to do something. But two days later the Russian came, so we came down. We came down and the Russians, saw -- we saw the Russians. We all -- before we heard already the Germans leaving and the shooting of the big guns came nearer and nearer till the Ger-- Russian came, so then we were safe. So when we came out from there, so he brought us to Chelm, what is about 10 kilometers from where we were hidden. And then we found more Jews there and so, you know, there was from all different places came different Jews were hidden or whatever, or were with the partisans. Somehow, I don't know what happened exactly in that time but, after a short time we moved away. We went away, whatever. And, and then we ended up in a small place in Parczew, the name of the place. Now, Selma was pregnant at that time and when we came out, she went, she had a child in Parczew, in a hospital, and then we move already with the child. And in Parczew what I started to do to make a living is where the Germans left, was there to buy things to bring to the area where we lived, because there was -- where we lived was nothing, and where the Germans were there was more, so I tried to hitchhike and travel some and bring home different things. It tooks me one time a week or two weeks till I came to a certain place and I bought things and I brought it back and I sold it, so that's the way we make our living, right. When I sold the things, I went for a new trip. But Selma was always alone, not speaking the language, with a child. So there was her friend, what she mentioned before, her friend -- there was also a Dutch girl, this, Ula Stern, and she was a good friend for her before. So I decided that she come -- she came from the partisans and she had a hard time and she couldn't go by herself, so I said, "Why don't she come and live with us," so Selma has company and not alone for all the time I am away. And that is the way we kept her for a time. She was with us, and I was traveling back and forth. till one day they say they go to kill all the Jews at night in Parczew. The partisans go to kill all the Jews. So, I said to Selma, "Now we go." We tooks, took some -- I had some freight, a truck or something like that, somehow; somebody took us to Lublin. And we went to Lublin to some Jews what was other survivor from Sobibór, and he was one of the two what ran away in camp when they outside, what I told you, they had the two Ukrainian guards. They killed one and they ran away. He was one of the two what survived, so he had there -- he was already longer there. He was -- some business did, whatever, and he took in Jews and they took us also in.

Q: What was his name?

A: Podchlebnik[11]. Podchlebnik. He died in the meantime. He, he lived in Vineland not far from, Esther. He died a few years ago, some years ago. So anyway, and so we were with him for a little time and I did the same thing. I bought whatever I could and sell that we could make a living. till one day, one day we heard there was also in Lublin -- it was a bigger place -- there was also a lot of Dutch prisoners of war what were freed by the Germans, so there was some more Dutch people in Lublin and somehow, either through the Red Cross or

[11] Shlomo Podchlebnik

whatever, they organized into bring them back to Holland, bring them back from the Russian -- I don't know from where, but it went out. So they start to concentrate all these Dutch people together. Now Selma was Dutch, but I was not Dutch and I didn't speak the language, so it was a little of problem, so I tried to talk as much -- as little as I talk I talked less, and so I didn't talk at all. I tried to be like I'm also Dutch but I don't talk too much and we happened to have -- Selma got acquainted -- there was a Dutch officer what he happened to be a nice man and she told him about me, so he tried to help us. He helped me that I don't have to come and to tell things like that, so and I went through as a Dutch person. I went through as a Dutch person, not much exposed you know. That was always my policy. Keep away as much as possible. In camp, too. If I could avoid seeing or talking to any of the Germans, things like that, I was always on the side. I tried to be not around 'less I had no choice, so I figured the less that I am exposed, the, the less chances I have to be hurt, so here the same thing. I kept like as much as I could I avoid everything. I just went, went with the masses.

02:27:00

Now I'm not -- to don't know me. And that probably helped, and then they took us, because the war was still going on, to the other side of the Weichsel. In other words from Poland Weichsel till that was still a front, so they brought us through Russia, through Odessa, the Black Sea, if you can picture it, through Odessa, the Black Sea to the Mediterranean to Marseille, to France. But to come so far they took us -- we had to go with -- they brought us to Odessa with a freight train. there was -- the train was split in half, with -- they maked a ceiling of, a division, so half that more people can go -- there was an up and down in the freight trains, you know, a freight train. They make a division that people lived downstairs upstairs and slowly the train went. For three months we make it till Odessa. They must have given us some food because we got some food from them and, sometimes the train stopped so we could go, to facilities or washing something quick because we had the baby and so -- but, we made it till Odessa and then they kept us in Odessa till our boat was ready. They kept us there. What we got I think from the Red Cross, we got some packages. The Red Cross supplied some packages and so that was in Odessa, and then came, one day came the boat. The boat supposed us to take to Holland. Now there was really a strict control on that, because I came on the boat. And there was one girl, she said she is Dutch; they found out she is not Dutch, so the whole boat left and this one girl -- still seeing stand there -- she couldn't go with. So we were on the boat and crossed my fingers that everything, already we go. And on the sea the child -- probably Selma told the story -- the child got sick from food poisoning. They gave it -- this, this was the powdered milk or whatever, was too strong or whatever, and then the stomach and there was no medication, nothing. So the child died on the boat and it was in the sea during -- the Aegean Sea, next to Nexon-- Náxos Island, was the child was buried there in the sea, and we arrived later in Odessa. And, in Odessa they kept us for a day or two till we arrived in Holland. Now the part of Holland, probably Selma told more pri-- more about than I, so that's basically the way we ended up in Holland.

Q: How long did you stay in Holland?

02:30:00

A: Now, in Holland I stayed till -- we arrived in '45 and, we left '51. About six and a half year.

Q: And you came to the United States then?

A: No. No, no. We came -- Selma didn't like Holland and also it was for me hard. In Holland, if you wanted to start a business, you have to have some special permit and you cannot just start a business like here: you go out, you open four walls and put in merchandise, you have a business. So it was a hard time for me. Now I had also from Selma's family was a permit like that what I could get and I got and I got apartment and we started in the textile business, and we didn't begin -- we did very well, and later my partner just, cheated me out and I, we lost all the money and I had -- I couldn't start another business so I was decided to go away. So Selma always wanted to go to Israel and I liked to go America; so to America was a Polish quota and it was very hard and -- but to Israel we could go easier, so I decided, "Let's go to Israel." So we sold everything we had and we -- in the meantime we bought, built a new house and we had, a whole and everything and in the house, so we sold that everything, and we went to Israel in, like a kibbutz, Moshav Shittufi, what we lived on our own but we worked together. But I was not I think made for this kind of life. I, I, I couldn't -- from the first day on I said to Selma, "How do we go back?"

02:32:00

I, I couldn't have it. I was in the age about 40– what was I? Forty-two? Forty-four? And I had to go every so often to the military for, to the army for six weeks and I had enough with the camp, with all the kind of things, and I didn't feel like that, so from the first day on my mind starts to work how to get away from it, how to go America. And, I worked -- I couldn't be in this Moshav Shittufi. I couldn't live there. I was really mentally sick. I went -- I worked specially two weeks together that I can have two days to go away for the weekend. We got a free day, so I went to an uncle's of her in the Carmel for the two days to look for something else, so when I came there and Selma told him that I am sick there, she couldn't believe it, because I came there. I was in another world. I didn't have this problem, so I really -- my mind went already to come out, at least from that, because that was a dead-end for me. I knew where I'll be buried. I knew, what tomorrow will lead me. You know, you live in Moshav Shittufi, is taking care of you, everything. They know what you eat today and what you get tomorrow and where you'll be buried and if you are sick, instead. They know everything about you and I couldn't live this life. It was -- I had -- and all my private initiative went and I just couldn't stand it. I couldn't stand it. So I ended up, I ended up -- we brought with us a lot of things where we came from Holland. We brought with us Frigidaire, what was in that time was in very scarce in Israel, and 'frigerator, a washing machine and all the things; so we had something we could sell what had a value. So I decided we'd go. We ended up in a place where Dutch families lived there and the people said, "Oh, why don't you come here. You find a some job and you do something," and things like that, so I went out for it and I looked and I found someplace in Netanya. I, I started to be -- I, I said, "What can

I do?" I have no special trade and I don't money to start a business, so I ended up I wanted to go as a waiter, I work as a waiter. I worked there for two months, the summer season or things like that; and in the meantime we moved to Beth Yitzhak, next to these people and it happened in the same Beth Yitzhak was there a woman what had a vegetable store. And, and these Dutch people we met, he said, "You know, you should buy this store," he said. "It's really a -- you, you will make money. If you don't have enough I will give you some money and you borrow some money and start this business," and what I did. And I took this -- I said first, "How can you have, in a village where everybody grows everything, how can you sell vegetables?" Anyway, it worked out good and I opened in two villages, two more business; what I went one or twice I went there, and we made a good living and made good money with it, and, so I got a little money and I start to think how do I come to the United States 'cause I didn't want to stay there. So through different -- talking with people, things like that, I could find out that there's a way of doing it. I was very desperate. I wanted to do anything just to go, till I came one day and through the uncle I got an affidavit here in America and, and so I went it up and we went, we went in '57, we went, we came to the United States. we went by boat. I don't know what the reason, had with me two children. and we were through the way we stopped in Italy because the boat, that's the way the schedule went and then we came here. Now, our plan was to go -- Selma had a brother in Canada, and we thought we can go to Canada just being a little while with him, and then we start whatever starting and we can go to the States. Well, we couldn't do that because if you have a permit to come here, you have to come here first, so were in a dilemma. We didn't know what to do, so it happens in Westport, excuse me, in Westport was a family what came from the same place where we were living, came to a sister of hers in Westport, and so we had written to them that, so they said, "No problem. Come to us." So we came to these people. They live in a small house. One, two children.

02:37:00

Two bedrooms and they said, "Come, just live with us," so we went there for a week and we rented a house and he worked at Gristede's, as like a clerk at Gristede's, so he got me a job there for taking orders on the phone. I didn't understand the language. I didn't know even what the material what they told me. Anyway I hold out there for five weeks, for five months, hold out. As I said, we had a little money with us, and, saved a little bit. With the little bit I made I saved and we bought something else and we started to do our own business. And we built it up and we ended up having another business and then, we ended up having a jewelry store. That is, briefly told, my story. So--

Q: Is there anything you would like to add?

A: Well, we always say when I talk to the children in the high school, we always tell them that they should be always alert when something happen. You shouldn't minimize if you see something like you see the Ku Klux Klan or the skin-heads or the others. You said, "Ah," you minimize it. They said, "What is -- it's nothing. Forget about them." Don't minimize it, because Hitler also started very small. You never know how it can grew, whether I believed

that here is it not the same situation, that is too many minorities here to be able to have something like that, but it is not an impossibility, so I think we always can think about it is possible. Don't minimize it. If you see something, react to it. Don't say it is nothing. It is nothing in the moment, so that's the reason if you get a reminder or if you get to the B'nai Brith or everything, they warn you, they tell you. You think, "Ah, they always come up with the new story." It is very important because we cannot prevent it. Eventually it might happen again. I hope not in our generation, not our children's generation. We were scapegoat all the years, and we have to be very alert. We still, we still went through the whole story so we know more about. Surely our children will know less about, so, so we still -- the survivors or the people what generation what went through or were part of it, should really understand that don't, you don't minimize things like that. They can grow. From a small seeds can grow a big tree. I think that is what I wanted to add, unless you have questions.

Q: Chaim, thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.

Q: That's it.

02:40:00

Conclusion of interview