United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Beno Helmer
June 25, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Beno Helmer, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on June 25, 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.

BENO HELMER
June 25, 1990

Q: OK. We're on. Would you tell me your name please?

A: It's Beno Helmer.

Q: And where and when were you born?

A: I was born August 21st, 1923, in Teplitz-Schönau [**Czech:** Teplice-Šanov]. It's in Czechoslovakia. Actually, it's in Sudetenland. You know, it's... And I come from a family of three children, my parents, my grandparents, bunch of aunts, uncles, lot of cousins. As a matter of fact, my mother's family--all of them--settled in Teplice-Šanov after the First World War. And my father was a poor refugee who just happen to come to Teplice, just to look for a job. And fell in love with my mother. And the rest of this is history.

Q: Tell me about Teplice.

A: Teplice was a very good city. I mean, I grew up there; went to elementary school, went to high school there. And what's amazing about it is, I never encountered anti...antisemitism. I mean, I never knew, even... Matter of fact, I never even knew I was Jewish. Because I didn't know Judaism is a connotation with a religion, or anything else. So I was Jew by religion, but it was not part of my personality. And I must have been, maybe, 11 or 12 years old and my best friend ... His name is--I shan't forget--his name was Egon. And as we playing in our backyard... Because I...my father build me cages for rabbits. And I had so many rabbits. So during this play-thing, or whatever it was, he says to me, "Beno, my father says this you are Jewish. Are you Jewish?" And I said to him, "I don't know." Because I never realized, as he asked my religious affiliation, or it was a part of a playing thing. And is the last time I saw Egon. And never saw Egon since; and he was a very good friend of mine. And I always asked my parents what is the reason, how come I didn't see Egon. They never told me why. And I lost Egon. And this was...and as a childhood was quite a good one until it was getting bad. And college, I couldn't go to anymore; so I went to Budapest.

Q: Tell us about Budapest, and what you did there as a young man.

A: At...at Budapest, this was at that time the capital. It was almost like Paris, you know. It was a very lively, very vivacious city. Not for me, because...uh...financially, I couldn't afford anything else. But it was fairly good to me. Even in poverty, it was fairly good enough. And through...I don't know...circumstances, I got a job in the movies. I played in extras. I met S. S. Cuddles. I think here in America, they called him S. S. Cuddles. Actually, his name is S. S. Sagal. I made two movies with him...with him; and a actress at that time which was very, very popular in Europe--[Barsa Nirosi (ph)]. By the way, the reason also I got the job is because I was at that time bilingual. So the movies, at that time, were made in Hungarian and in German. So I could speak both languages. So when we took one take, I didn't have to

change roles. I could stay in the same role for the German take and for the Hungarian take. And...and plus we played with Hans Virbis (ph). He's supposed to make a picture with Martha Eggar, except at that time she fell in love with Jan Kippur. And she came to America, and she left the Jan Kippur in America. And...and this was my youth, 'til my parents came...also came to Hungary; and it was getting... because Czechoslovakia became very unpleasant at that time. And...uh...

Q: What was happening to your parents?

A: Uh...My parents came and tried to settle in..in Hungary. They felt this maybe in Hungarian, because at that time Horthy was more fascistic. So they felt that maybe Hitler's gonna spare Hungary. And plus, my father had a older brother living in Hungary. And he couldn't get any...in that between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, it was not very pleasant circumstances. There were already talking about war rumbling. So...uh...it was very rough, and my father couldn't get the papers to, uh...couldn't get papers to become a citizen or...or allowed to be stayed...allowed to stay there. So, through some acquaintances, my mother knew Mr. Beck. I think...I think Beck was at that time Foreign Minister of Hungary.[1] And she went to his office, and she bribed him quite--I don't know, let's call it bribe--when she gave him a tremendous amount of money. At that time, this was a big money for us; because it's all what my parents almost had. And after this, she gets an invitation and my father gets an invitation to a dinner which is in honor of Mr. Beck. So they were very elated, because they thought this gonna be the chance that he'd finally...he'd gonna give a...the papers which they needed to stay in Hungary. So during the conversation... During this dinner, he knocked on the glass; and he says, "I have another question to ask. I want to ask Mr. Helmer how come he gave me this tremendous amount of money." So it's a good thing that my father said, "I'm giving it to the Hungarian Red Cross." And with this sentence, he lost all his money. Because Mr. Beck didn't take the money. The Hungarian Red Cross got the money. And my parents were deported. And it was my parents, my brother and my sister; and they were deported to Poland. Because they had a chance to go to Czechoslovakia. You had a chance to go to any border they choose; and they choose Poland. And shortly after this, I was deported also. Matter of fact, I shall never forget; I came home from a movie which I saw--Modern Times, with Charlie Chaplin. This was the movie I saw. And I came home; and they woke me up during the night and arrested me. And they deported me to Poland. And I wound up in the city of _ód_. Always almost exactly the Friday before the war. And before the war. So we stayed in somebody's apartment. I don't know who it was, where it was apartment. By that time, the German war started. I think it's October 1st, 1939.[2] The occupation was immediate. We couldn't escape anyplace, anyways. And, uh...because of financial difficulties, at that time was nothing left. So...because a lot of people escaped. So we found a place in _ód_ on...in a attic. Matter of fact, it was...the attic was so low that I don't think we ever...

Q: I'm sorry. I can't hear you.

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[1] István Csáky was Foreign Minister of Hungary from 1938-1941.

[2] Germany invaded Poland in September 1939.

A: The attic was very low. This was on the roof, underneath the roof; so we couldn't even stand up. So we only could stand up where the pitchwork came together. Otherwise, we always had to hunch over. And it was...the whole room consisted of one double bed and a big basket--like, uh...like a steamer trunk. And this where...all our possessions were in this steamer trunk; and that's the place where I slept. Because all four of them slept in this bed. And just when the ghetto was formed, this was part of the ghetto. This attic was part of the ghetto, _ód_ ghetto. So we didn't have to move. We stayed there, which was uh dire circumstances. No toilet, which was four story down in...in the yard. No water, which we had to carry in pails all the way up to...four flights. Bed chambers [**NB:** chamber pots] at night time, and emptying. It was horrible circumstances. And couple of weeks after, my father was arrested. No, I'm...I'm... I have to retract. I have to retract a little bit. Before we went in a ghetto, before the Germans came, my father went back to Czechoslovakia. And he was joined the underground in Czechoslovakia; and got himself a job through his brother-in-law, through my uncle, in an insurance company. In a big insurance company. And he changed his name. He got papers. His name was Pollack. Mr. Pollack, a widower with two children. And he...he was quite active in the underground. In one of the newsletters--the office newsletters--there was a letter written as...as...a letter to the newspaper, or a letter to the editor. It says, "How come there is a man here with allegedly two...a widower with alleged two children, but we feel he's here under different circumstances?" So he felt this letter was written about him. So he packed up; and through the underground he... They gave him money to smuggle it out of Hungary, to bring it to...to smuggle it out of Czechoslovakia.

Q: I'm sorry. Smuggling what?

A: Money. Cash for the underground, to be...underground in Poland. So they gave him money. So he got money belts around him and he... Plus the shoes. The shoes was...instead of leather, the...they stuff--all the big denominations they stuffed in in the shoes. And plus, wherever they could, they taped money to him. And they smuggled him to back to Poland. Except, on the border they caught him. And they caught him...and not only... This was not the German who caught him; it was the Polish who caught him. They took all his money away. Everything take his money away from him. Only thing they didn't find was the money in his shoes. And they sent him back to Germany. So when he was back in Germany, he smuggled himself back--finally lucky--back to...to Poland. Because of this...all this walking what he did, he rubbed his soles through. And matter of fact, the cash he had had holes in it because of...of the walking. So, actually, the money was...was worthless, or much less worth than it was supposed to be. And he stayed in the city of Krak...uh, Kraków. And after this, there was a struggle between the fraction [**NB:** faction] of the underground; between the Russian fraction and the English fraction. So anyways he came and joined us in _ód_. And this where finally the war caught on. We wind up in the ghetto, which was 28 Franczískanska Ulica.

Q: Tell us about...tell us about life in the ghetto, in addition to the attic. What was your daily life like?

A: Now, our daily life was...uh... I mean, the daily life was...uh...the daily life was--not only us and everybody else--was to...to find food. The struggle was to find food; because we were constantly hungry. I mean, hunger was the pri...primary requisite just of survival. And...and the only thing...I mean, to compensate hunger, we were drinking water. I mean, water's fine, fills the stomach; but you're still hungry. So Father got a job to supply groceries. You know, whatever was there, to certain outlets which was giving the...the...which were giving out. So...so sometime he gets a little bit more flour; because that's all what he was delivering--flour. So we had a little bit more flour; so Mother used to make a paste and make something like a Matzah or something out of it. I don't know what she did about it. I left quite early in 1941. I already got a job...or 1942, I got a job from a man--name is Goodman. And he got me a job outside of the ghetto. I was working for...for...for the Germans. So what was...I was working in a...because I was studying architecture. So they needed some kind of building, the Germans. So they took a forced labor out of the ghetto, so we should work in the...in the...in the construction there. Since I had a so-called background of two days, so...so (laughing) so they made me in charge of it. But what's only good about it was this: they gave us a half a loaf of bread coming home. So we sustained ourself, at least, with this half a loaf of bread. Mother sliced...sliced it very thinly, or she made bread...uh...soup out of it. She boiled water and put the bread in it; and that's all what we had. It's bread soup. Except it was expanded so much, it became more filling. And it was...I mean, uh...plus I mean that what's bad about it was is also bodies...lot of bodies all over. Wherever you went, you saw bodies dying. And it's becomes part of it. You know, [the] first two, three or four, you find them as a shock. But later, you find them...it's...you gets quite used to them. It's...it's...it's like part of your nature. I mean, you just see a body and you disassociate yourself completely from it. It's...it's...it's...it's completely somebody else. It's...it's has nothing to do with you. Filth was also tremendous. Filth. It was filthy. It was filth even the building where we lived. I mean, in the winter time. I mean, the toilet was...it was...it was ice. It was all ice; and then the feces and the urine all over. Was overflowing...overflowing there. And...and sometime, they took you to forced labor. I mean, one incident happened. They...they took us into a home. The German came and they...they lined everybody up. They lined everybody up. And there was...you know this was like in a semi-circle. You were standing in a semi-circle; and there was a lady there with a child. And, uh...(deep sigh) (deep sigh) And he ask, "Whose, this child?" And the woman who was the mother, she did not admit the child. So he took the child by the legs, and he swung it against the wall. And he killed the child. And I looked at the mother; and it was like somebody else's. It wasn't her child. She completely cut this child off...out of her emotions. She cut this child off completely away. And I realized at that time the self-survivals is of most...more primary in your life. It's more than...than even your own child! And this was just terrible. So this was one of the experiences. I got a job aft...also to empty cesspools. Because they used this as fertilizers at that time. So to empty a cesspool, they gave me a job. They gave me a pot--a cooking pot. And this is how I was emptying cesspools. In front, went into the hole up to the waist, whatever; how you stayed in it. And, uh...you emptied it into a bucket. And later, two men took the bucket and emptied it in those containers--metal containers. This was one of the jobs they gave us. I was...I had a job cutting roots out of...you know, they'd be cutting down trees and...and excavating the roots.

And I think they made camphor out of it. I don't know; some kind of chemicals they made out of it. So they gave us ax...ax and shovels. And it's very hard to dig a tree. So if you didn't do it, we got a hit a few times. You know, it seems they had a quota. We had to do a quota. So this was one of the more pleasantness thing of the ghetto. So this was it. Was only survival. My father was getting weaker and weaker. And once in a while they came down, they closed off the building. They closed off the block. And they took the men or women; and if the people looked sick, unhealthy, as they just took them away. To regress, before they go...close...closed the ghetto, my father's youngest brother went also to Poland. Because my father was there, so thought he gonna be there. And he decide, when the German marched in, this he gonna escape toward Russia. So had a...a horse and buggy, or horse and carriage or something. To see his wife and two children--my cousin Lisa and the boy. Went towards Russia; and they froze to death in...in the...in the [Bergen (ph)]. We just found it out by coincident. Matter of fact, we... Not true. I found it out after the war; because somebody knew them. This they froze to death, just to...it was so cold, it was bitter cold. And...and it seems like they fell asleep, and they never woke up. And on the ghetto again, so this was the job. So finally I got a job through Mr. Goodman; and I met somebody in the underground. A French lady. I never knew her second name. Her name was [Renée (ph)], or actually we called her "Renya." And she got me a job with a German family. And I got a job not far from _ód_. I went to Cz_stochowa, which is where they have uh the Black Marie.[3] It's the seat, I think, of the Cardinal's seat there. They have the Matka [Mosca (ph)]. Matka...yah, Matka [Mosca (ph)]. And I got a job. And I got a job as a German in Entlösung Amtstadt [**Ger:** "State Redemption Office"]. Entlösung Amtstadt is the uniforms which came back from...from the front--which were dirty, filthy, had to be cut. You know, repaired or something else. They came to this Entlösung Amtstadt, where they were repaired, sewn, cleaned and sent back to the front. My job was to see the divisions where they came from. So when I gave to Renya the numbers I saw--you know, I saw 70 uniforms from the 31st Panzer Division; I saw 20 uniforms from this and this division--what happened is, they knew approximately proportionately how many soldiers get injured or how many soldiers exchange uniform. They knew approximately...uh, approximately how many divisions, how many soldiers are in a particular front. And I...I was with the job quite some time. And it's became quite, you know, finally you...you're acclimatized. You settled; the milieu became yours. You became the German. You became the milieu. Like as a German. I was thinking as a German. And we had the head of the charge was there; his name was [Frombuloff (ph)]. He was nobility. And only thing, funny thing, is I speak German. But wherever I was in Germany, I always spoke with the wrong accent. So I never been in...from the right Germany where they wanted to be. I was there, I was Ausdeutschland. If I was...I was in Munich, I was a Berliner. If I was in Berlin, I was from Hannover. I never spoke the right accent to suit those people. But anyways, I was there; and it's became quite good. And I sitting there one lunch time... Lunch time, you know, and whatever they gave me--and they...being SS Ausdeutsch, I got little bit food from...from whatever they gave me. And the Germans gave me food there...the workers there, some of them. So I...I don't know, it was some kind of conversation. I said to him, "Das ist der Hund begraben." Which is..."Das ist der Hund

[3] **NB:** Black Madonna.

begraben," means--like you say, you know, "the crux of it." You...or, you know, this is a...you know, like he's gonna say there's a "Hund begraben" like "here is a dog buried," actually; but in German, means you know, uh...uh, like...uh... What is it? "Das Hund begraben," is "here's a dog buried"... Is like, you know, "You hit the nail on the head." Something like this. Like you hit the nail on the head. And he says to me, "You know, it's very funny. I never heard this in my life time. It's the only time I heard this saying before was from a Jew." So I said...(laughing) So it became quite, quite uncomfortable (laughing) for me. So I thought, "My God, now he associates me. Because of this one sentence, he associates me with a Jew!" But...uh...it's came over. And...and later this woman, Renya... This matter of fact, everybody says, he's somebody from the underground, or somebody does a little spying, it's very exotic. It's not. I only knew this Renya. This woman Renya. This was my only contact I ever had. You know, I met some...I met some, uh...people who were dropped from England; but I only met them on...on a one-to-one basis. Because we..I did some sabotage work also. I became an expert in derailing trains. In 19...uh, at that time, the trains--I mean, the axle--I don't know [if] they didn't have ball bearings or if they had ball bearings outside the...the where the axle was and the wheel was. There's a housing. And this housing was threads--like rags or something. And those rags had a lot of oil in it. And this was grease...greasing the axles. So I became an expert as taking out...opening this little housing, this...and with one swoosh, taking out the oil in those rags. But you had to be very careful there shouldn't have any droppings on the railroad...railroad ties, or pebbles there. So you had to make sure that the oil should not drip on those pebbles; because they would see somebody did something to it. So the whole idea was to swoosh it out and throw it away, but there shouldn't be oil...any oil should be left on it, on those pebbles. So I became quite proficient in this...uh, this endeavor, whichever, which I was doing. And what happened is that as the train was running, the train froze, the wheel froze, and the train was derailed. I never saw it derailed myself, but we know the consequences of my doing that. And I stayed there for quite some time. And once I found out that my father was getting very sick. My father was very sick; and so I got back to the ghetto, eventually. No! One more...a funny incidents I had. I lived in the city of Cz_stochowa, and I'm walking up to this Polish--allegedly Polish--family who was...where I was staying with this Polish family. Walking down; and I had a...a open shirt, and I had a big cross. I wore a big black cross. It looked like a ebony, but it actually was out of wood. And just as a coincident, I walk up the hill and there's very few people on...on the street. And there's a man walking down the street, on the other side...on the other side of the street. He looks at me, points to me and says, "Parszywy _idje!" [**Pol:** "Lousy Jew!"] Says to me, "Smelly Jew!" From...I don't know what it was, but it is... I mean, it's the most amazing thing or he knew or he smelled it or whatever it was. But he says to me, "Parszywy _idje!" This was also my...my little endeavor in Cz_stochowa. So anyway, I went back to...to--that time was Litzmannstadt [**NB:** _ód_]. They renamed it Litzmannstadt.

Q: A street?

A: Litzmannstadt became _ód_. _ód_ became Litzmannstadt. _ód_ became Litzmannstadt. And I brought back some funny...I had an opportunity. I brought a...smuggled myself...not me,

but through these people. And I brought some horsemeat to my father, so at least it was a little longer. And he needed some injection. I brought him some kind of an injection. And...but it was getting...he was getting weaker and weaker. So matter of fact, once they cut off the street and I had to take my father... Instead of upstairs where we lived in the attic, somebody allowed us to use the ground floor apartment. And we lifted off the flooring, and we hid my father--or at that time, our father--under the floor. So when they inspected us, we looked much quite much healthier than he looked. So that we were spared. Because all those people who looked sickly or...or didn't look well enough, they took them away immediately. And this way, every time, every day, we...we postponed the inevitable. And...

Q: How long did... Slow down a little bit.

A: Yes.

Q: How long was your father under the floorboards.

A: Oh, he was there for quite a few hours, because we had to wait 'til they come. Because we knew the whole neighborhood was closed off. So...uh, we had to wait 'til they went from house to house to house to house to apartment to apartment, to search for...for sick people, whatever it was. So he was there the whole morning; if not much, much longer. And...uh, and he was scared. We were scared that, you know, he shouldn't any noise; or when he steps on it, it shouldn't make a different squeaking noise...a different squeaking noise... noise than...than the floor would make. So, uh...we saved him 'til...um, 'til eventually all of us winded up in...in Auschwitz. But..but it was...so it was quite rough at that time. So...so the circum...not only this, but a lot of... There was also a...you know, they had their own police department in..in the ghetto at that time. Uh, Rumpow... Rumkowski was the head of the ghetto. He was not liked at all. He was not liked on; but I have no idea under circum...under those circumstances, anybody else would do better or worse. Every...every week or every day... No...no, not every week. Every day or every two days, always transports went...went out...out of _ód_ ghetto, under the heading that they're going to labor camp. And matter of fact, the propaganda was quite good; because nobody came back to complain. So...uh...it's...everybody toyed with the idea [that] maybe it's a good idea; because they told you you're allowed to take clothing, you're allowed to take whatever you want, and you take...take your sewing machine. Because you're going to go a labor camp, where they're gonna feed you and everything else. And a lot of them who came from Theresienstadt [**NB:** Terezín] at that time... In the beginning, Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia, wasn't a very, very bad camp. So they felt that's going to be at least as good as Theresienstadt, it wasn't going to be too bad. So even a lot of them volunteered to go away in labor. Because the circumstances were...were just unbelievable. Unbearable. Especially for my parents and my sister and my brother. The winters were...were excruciating. I mean, the cold is unbelievable. It's freezing constantly. I mean, they slept clothing...with the clothing; and when I was there, it was the same thing. In one bed, just to keep ourself warm. And getting up in the morning was the same ordeal as going to sleep at nighttime. So it was bad thing; until...until...'til finally the transport, we were part of it. We went to Auschwitz. I could have escape

Auschwitz. I could have escaped going to Auschwitz, because I could've be...be back in Cz_stochowa. Except I didn't want to leave my parents alone. And I fell under the same misconception, that...uh... we're going to something better. So if we go something better, I wanted to be with them. Especially, I felt, my father was very, very sick. Somebody had to take care of my mother, and my brother and sister. So I...I...I...I didn't mind to go. They...they tried to talk me out of it. Matter of fact, he...even Mr. Goodman tried to talk me out of it. But I didn't want to do it. I wanted to go with them.

Q: Had you been doing work for the underground while you were in _ód_?

A: _ód_--in the city of _ód_? No. In the city of _ód_, I was not doing the underground. I was...uh, they had a little farm. All the way outside the city of _ód_. And I only worked on this farm. It was an experiment in potato farming, you know. It just was...I only worked... I worked on this farm only because the border was not far from this farm--the border of...outside of...of the _ód_ ghetto, or the Litzmannstadt ghetto. So the guards saw me working on...on the farm. So when I went closer to the fence, they didn't shoot. They knew me. So they knew me, I was one of the farmers. So it was always a safe route for me to go out and come in. Except when I smuggled myself out, I did it also nobody [outside] of my family witness I was going out. Because you never knew who..who you were working with. And the same thing coming back. So...so when I went out--and that was always whoever we found we had go somewheres else, I had to go see my parents; and I was on this farm only to get out...smuggle myself out of....of the ghetto, and coming in. So that's how it was.

Q: Tell me now, if you would, about that...the deportation. The train ride. How...? You were together with your family?

A: Yes. We went there...we went on a train ride. I think it was cattle farm...uh... Cattle trains, you know. And...and they took everything--all our belongings, which was very little; because we started...matter of fact we started the ghetto with very little. And I don't know... Did I tell you this? My father was arrested and got bitten by a dog.

Q: No.

A: Let's go regress.

Q: Tell us.

A: Before they closed the ghetto, since we were foreigners in Poland, my father was arrested. Arrested by the Germans. So...uh...so seems likes that my mother...seems like a perpetual job to pay people off. Uh...Whatever we had left at that time in...we sold whatever we have--her jewelry, everything--was sold to get some money. And my father was released. He was released after a week or something. After a time; it was a week or two weeks. And the day of his release, the day of his waiting...we're waiting by the fence, my father should come with us. He was in the building where he was incarcerated. But there was a fence in front of

it. But going from the exit of the building to the fence where we were staying [**NB:** standing], they sent...they pushed...they put the dog on him. And the dog bit him through his hand. This was his...his goodbye gift. Matter of fact, since then I'm scared of dogs. Uh, because they bit him right through his hand. This was...this was prior, before they even closed the ghetto. Yah. So now going to...to the ghetto...eh, going to Auschwitz, we were in a...in a...in a cattle--those things. Except, you know, if you were the first or second or third or 20th or 30th into the cattle [car], it wasn't as bad. But more and more people were pushed in, more and more depressed you became. More and more you knew that you did a bad choice; because you found out they're stop being humans. They're already started treating us as cattle. Even at the train where they promised us we going to go to...to Utopia or someplace else. So it was getting very bad; but there was nothing we can do. We had no toilet. There was nothing else. There was no food. And the stench became unbearable. I mean, natural stench. And we stayed in until we got to Auschwitz. Got to Auschwitz... So was getting rough already, because it was bewildering. All of sudden, it's coming from the dark... dark...dark...uh, cattle--the wagon, whatever it's was called. You know, and they put us in lines...put us in lines. And then was my...(deep sigh) (deep sigh) They put us all together. And they separated us. And I didn't want to leave my mother. (Deep sigh) So, I...(Long pause) (Deep sigh) [(Crying) Can we stop? (Crying)

Q: It's okay. It's okay. It's okay.] [**NB: TEXT IN PRECEDING BRACKETS IS NOT ON VIDEOTAPE**] TECHNICAL CONVERSATION. All right. We're back on camera. Just tell us about the selection as best you can.

Q: Yah. So there was...uh, there was...uh...uh, they separate us. All the family went together. And at that time, I had the honor to meet Dr. Mengele--which happens to be a very good looking man. He was impeccably built, and impeccably dressed. And he separated us. And...and it was...he had a whip in his hand. I think he had a whip, or something. Yes, he had a whip; and he just motioned it left and right, and left and right. And it's quite bewildering. So he motioned to me, "Right." My father, my mother and my brother, he motioned left. What he did to my sister, I didn't see. I just didn't see. And after this, we...we separated; and this was the last time I saw of them. And we went...got to a camp, where they shaved us. Hair, genitals and everything else. Took everything away from us. And they gave us some kind of cotton uniform, which was a concentration camp uniform. And they sent us to a camp--which was camp D.[4] And the billowing smoke, you saw all the time; and it's became so pessimistic about it. You know, as you start wonder what're you doing? What you doing? Says, "Is there any hope?" And you spoke to those old timers. Old timers--which maybe they're there a week or two, or maybe just a few hours before you. But they already considered themselves experts. So they says, "You see those chimneys? This where you wind up." And it amazed me-- you took it nonchalantly. It was nothing...nothing shattering. It was nothing. Even, matter of fact, it seems like a relief. Because it was enough already. It was enough. And...uh, was no big deal. No big deal. It only changed... changed the scenery, but didn't change the suffering. And...and I...I...I amazed is, I never cried after my parents. I

[4] Birkenau Lager B-IId.

never missed them somewhere. I never...never knew what happened to them anyways; but it...it was completely bewildering. It's like another party, or another body, was in me. It's...it's...it's... All of a sudden, I didn't care if I survived. I didn't care if I didn't survive. Just a zombie. Living as a zombie. And finally I got to a camp...to a camp...barrack 27D. Camp D. And we had--I don't know if the day or next day--it was, we staying [**NB:** standing] for reveille in the morning. And the German commander of this barrack--which was a Nazi in itself. And he only wind up in camp for the reason is this: he was against Hitler making a pact with Stalin. So he became a little too vocal against Hitler, because he was more of a Nazi that Hitler himself at that particular time. And that's the reason they put him in the concen...in this camp. But he was...he had... You know, I don't know. He had it... Okay, he survived it enough-- because he had enough food, whatever he wanted--and he came in and out. So he was quite a big shot at that time. He was not a completely sane person. Matter of fact, his...his...his achievement and fame was, he always boasted is he raped a 70 year old woman against a tree in a forest; and he always said this was his biggest accomplishment, is this what he did. And he was in love...uh, he loved...in love with a Gypsy girl who ...who...who died before, but he slept with her dress. I mean, this man was completely deranged. So anyways, I am standing in this thing. And he walks over to me; and I speak German, so he says to me, "Bist du ein Jude?" [**Ger:** "Are you a Jew?"] So I says, "Ja." And he says... Can I say it in German? He says...I say, "Ja." So he says, "Nein, du bist nicht kein Jude!" [**Ger:** "No, you are no Jew!"] I says, "Ja, Ich bin ein Jude." [**Ger:** "Yes, I am a Jew."] He took a fist and hit me in the face. I spit out a tooth--I wish the dentist would do it as easily as he did it. Spit out a tooth; and I says, "Ja, bin nicht kein Jude." [**Ger:** "Yes, I'm no Jew."] So I admitted I'm not a Jew, and that's all he wanted. Seems like I was, at that time, blonde; and I was only, I think, Aryan looking fellow who he didn't want to become...he [**NB:** I] shouldn't be a Jew. So he gave me a job. And my job was to bring soup. And there where they fed us, we had to go down to the kitchen to bring those kettles of food--which was...uh, our daily insult. And I'm standing in line there; and one day he sent me the kettles on reveille. So when he sent us down to...to fetch the soup, seems like it was too late. Because when the fellow called off "27," in...instead of saying, "Here," I didn't say, "Here." He said, "27!" Nobody said, "Here." He says, "28!" Before he finished saying, "28," I said, "Here." He didn't know whether it's means here for 28 or 27. So anyways, I was late. So he put me over a bench. Somebody held it...held me between his legs; and I got 15 on my behind. But he...he walked...he had a walking cane; and he had a tape--like a electric tape--around it. And I got 15, which was a most excruciating pain at that time. At the first few of them...after this, it...it didn't matter anymore. After this, I got up. I'm going to the soup, which--I'm bleeding rectally. He says, "You forgot something." So what can you forget, if you're already getting 15 of it? He says, "You forgot to say, 'Thank you.'" So at this particular moment, I fainted. And when...in this place they had big squares which was full of water. In case of a air raid or fire, so the water was taken for the firemen of the fire brigade to douche the...the... So he threw me. So he kicked me into this water. This was, oh...uh, he kicked me in the thing. Only because I forgot to say, "Thank you." Coming back to the barrack at that time, I don't know what, he made me his cook. I don't know anything about cooking at all. But he had provisions. He got potatoes. He got extra this--not what we used to get. Not the food we used to get. So I don't know anything about cooking. So only thing he

said, he likes sauerbraten or some kind of vinegar. So whatever soup--I only made soup. So whatever soup, I finished the soup. Before I served him, I took a tablespoon full of vinegar and put the vinegar into the soup. And he thought I was the most gourmet cook in the world, (laughing) because I made...I added vinegar to his...to his soup. And I always looked for details, details where I could get out of this particular camp...camp site to go to other camp; because I was looking for my parents. And specially, I'm looking for my brother. I thought he...if anybody gonna survive it, it's gonna be my brother gonna survive. So I got details...uh, cleaning toilets. I got a detail becoming--whatever gypsies were left, I became interpreter to the Gypsies. Only because I spoke Hungarian. I faked my Hungarian, they faked their Rumanian; so we somehow understood each other. And I always gave the answers--which I felt it was good--is what the German wanted to hear, instead of what the Gypsies said to me. But there were few of them left, already; because most of them perished.

Q: Tell us about the Gypsies you met. What were they like, and what were they doing?

A: Now, I met Gypsies in the...in the men's camp. In the men's camp, they were bewildered. They were bewildered. Not only...they felt themself a minority of a minority. So...so ...so they felt alienated, even among the camp survivors--uh, camp prisoners there, they felt alien. So they kept as a group. So they tried to shut their personality as much as they could. In the ladies camp--this was a phenomena which was very interesting. They became--some of them became--in charge of...of the block...charge of the...the barrack in itself. And it's amazing thing. They assumed a manly personality. They used to do like this (rubbing chin), which a woman very seldom does. When they stood, they stood feet spread, you know. They...they became...they became a man. Maybe they...through being this manly personality, they became more assertive, or more... Became leaders of their particular group. So...so I think the men behaved more passively as...as the Gypsy ladies. The men became more passive than...than... than the women were. Anyways, I went and I never found anybody. Never found anybody in the camp.

Q: Your family, you mean?

A: No. I never found anybody. You know, it comes to a point, you know you don't expect. Well, first it's such a humanity. It's just a tremendous amount of humanity that you don't expect to. So the only thing I decided what I do in camp is, or since then I gonna do--since I don't think I have no answer to "left" or no answer to "right"--I don't gonna test fate. I don't gonna do anything against fate. If they tell me, "Stand there," I gonna stand here. If they tell me, "Stand here," I gonna stand here. If they say, "Go," I go. If they say, "Jump," I jump. Because since I don't know what to do, I didn't want to blame myself, you know. "I should...I went left, but they told me to go right. I should have gone right, because maybe right would be better than going left." This way, matter of fact, I dropped personal responsibility. I dropped my responsibility. I don't do anything. They tell me, I do. So one day, he comes in and the people come there with thing, and they stamp me. The stamp is right here on the chest; with a big black stamp. So it gives stamp; the stamp, I don't know what it is. So he

says, "Anybody who's stamped has to go to Buna, to the coal mine."[5] I said, "For coal mining, I don't...I gonna test fate. I'm not going where fate's going to send me." So I went and I tried to rub it off but I couldn't. The stamps seems like were very quite embedded, so I couldn't rub it off. So I went behind a barrack and I got dirt. And I rubbed my chest with dirt. So problem was this: my chest became, you know, raw. It's became here raw. So I was scared they should recognize that I...I have a raw spot, that I rubbed off the stamp. So I rubbed all over. Wherever I found a little spot, I rubbed this dirt into it, too; that I should have the same blotches which I had here, I should have it all over my body. And I met a friend. Not a friend. I met a man--by his name of Monyek Ravel, the same as the composer--and we became friendly. And we decided whatever [we] do, we shall try to do it together. So whatever happen, let's...let's stick it together. At least I...I had somebody, I had a human being with me. It was the most bewildering thing. I was quite young at that time, you know. I was not the old...youngest one, but I was not one of the masses that were older than we were. And...and because it was getting very rough... Like in my barrack, there came a man who was a Litzmannstadt, or in the ghetto--who was allegedly a big shot in the ghetto. He was not liked. So he comes to my barrack and he says, "I don't know why they don't like me." You know. Said it loud, you know. "I am...was only a barber. I was only a barber." And the people says, "No. No. Your life is short-lived here." Sure enough, by next morning he was floating in..in the cesspool. Seemed like they killed him, so... In the barrack. I mean, human life was not accountable. Human life was not important. Human life was the cheapest commodity, we always said. And we stayed in Auschwitz for some time; and after this, we wind up...started to transport to camps. I remember which camp was we go. We went from there. We went to a camp, which I remember because it was a short while. After this we wind up in a camp which was Kruppwerke. Krupp has a factory. We were working, Monyek and I. And we saw a lot of people were working in this camp. And one day, there is an air raid. And we see that it's a... I don't know whose plane it was--American, French or whatever it was. And it's most amazing. We had nowheres to hide. We just stood there and...and looked in amazing. And we saw the bombs coming; and you felt...every bomb... Looking up, you felt every bomb is meant for you. Which...which they didn't hit...didn't hit us at all. They went quite out...out of...of the range of the Kruppwerke. But the panic in the Germans, I never experienced before. This is the first time I saw human panic. Not in us, but in my enemy. And I realized this, they're as...as scared as I was. And everybody cherished...cherished his own life, in his own fashion. And it...and Monyek and I, we says, "You know something? It's amazing. Amazing!" He says, "Without a gun, they would be the same as I." Except the only difference was, they had a bullet. And from there, we went to...

Q: Hold on. Excuse me.

A: Yes.

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[5] Probable reference to the coal mine operation conducted out of the nearby Jawischowitz subcamp. Jawischowitz was subordinated to Auschwitz III ("Buna") for administrative purposes in 1944.

Q: What was it like in the Kruppwerke?

A: In the camp...in the factory? In the factory, we were working with a...certain...we had certain jobs. I had a job making...making... I had a big thing making holes in...in certain...certain metals, I think. There was some supervisors, which were Germans themselves, which ran the factories. Elderly gentlemen, which were kind to us. I mean, they were...you know, they were there. They knew who we was. I don't know if they knew we were concentration. I'm sure they knew we were concentration inmates, but they were okay. I mean, they were a little bit if kindness. Let's put it. I mean, we encountered the first time a little bit of kindness to humanity. The first time we encountered a little bit of humanity from them. But, you know, if...if a soldier--I don't know a soldier, a sergeant or somebody with...with a uniform--they saw a uniform, the attitude changed. Which was just natural, I could see it. They were scared themselves, you know. But they never would give anything personal. I mean, with me they could converse, at least, speaking German; but there was never something personal. Give me a piece of bread, or give me...which was a welcome thing from them, but they would never. Never. Never. Never gave us anything like that. So we worked in the Kruppwerke. And from there, it seems like from there we went to Buchenwald. And Buchenwald was one of the nicer camps, I think. Buchenwald was one of the nicer... I mean, the other camps I experienced since...before or...or since. And one day, we had to have a...and by then I was started... My beard, I remembere over there the difficulty with growing; because they told me to I have to shave. I don't know how I shaved before, I don't remember. But over there, I remember. So they gave me a piece of glass to shave, because nobody wanted to give a razor or had a razor. So they gave me a piece of glass to shave. Which was unbelievable, too. But...so finally somebody was nice to me. One of the inmates, also. And he gave me a straight razor. And so...so I finally I shaved over there. It was the first time I shaved with straight razor over there, instead of the piece...piece of glass. And told us to wash. So this Monyek and I, we washed in a drinking fountain. Just a little drinking fountain. And we took a bath; and it was quite a welcome relief to...to be allowed to be washed. Because in...in the Kruppwerke, before, we worked in this greasy water; and this was always running, always black. And we always smelled from oil. And they didn't care about us at all. But Buchenwald, they...they allowed us to wash. And... but hunger was always there. Hunger was always there. Death wasn't any problem anymore, because we accepted it. It's eventually gonna happen, so we became less scared of...of dying. It became as a everyday occurrence; so it was not a big deal any more. From Buchenwald, we went to so many camps I don't remember. Uh, Buchenwald...

Q: How long were you in Buchenwald?

A: Time is not a factor with me. I have no...no conception of times anymore.

Q: Can you...can you tell me some of the work that you did in Buchenwald.

A: Buchenwald? Nothing. Nothing. The only thing, I set... met--somebody pointed out to me, I

don't know whether it's were the truth or not--I met Schuschnigg, which was the Prime Minister of Austria.[6] They said, "You see him? This is Mr. Schuschnigg." Plus, they showed me a lady who was Mrs. Rothschild. She was a Rothschild, a Viennese Rothschild. I met her; and...and you know, you had Mrs. Rothschild. But that's all that I remember about meeting Mrs. Rothschild and Mr. Schuschnigg in...in Buchenwald. I don't know if it's the truth that he was Schuschnigg and she was Mrs. Rothschild, but this what is pointed out to me, was they were there. After this, it became...and we went to a camp by name of Ludwigslust.[7] In Ludwigslust, we were working in a spring factory. Always with Monyek. Monyek...wherever I went, Monyek went with me. My friend, Monyek. Uh, I worked in the factory in...in making springs; and what's good about this is is our camp in...in the factory was almost a unit. So we didn't have to march too far from work to the thing. And... and...and the camp commander was uh quite a human being, at that time. I mean, he was...I mean, he could he could...always fed us... I mean, I don't try to make excuses for him; but...but he fed us. He fed us, or whatever it was there. I was making springs there for car door springs; except my job was I was on the night shift. Night shift consists of 12 o'clock 'til who knows when the hours in the morning. Except I was making--instead of springs, Monyek and I were making knives for the Germans for their own use. So we made this...we was...out of those big wheels we was polishing and polishing those knives to make the knives; and somebody else made those wooden handles. So for each knife, we got...he gave us half a slice of bread...as half a sandwich. Monyek got one half a sandwich, and I got half a sandwich. For making the whole night long work to make the bread. And the circumstances were not not good, but wasn't bad. Uh, the prisoners that...the...we already got bunks. We were allowed to sleep two...two to a bunk. Which was much better than we had in Auschwitz, or any other camp. They were almost like cots in...in big barracks. And the SS, or whoever watched over us, were elderly gentlemen. The...instead of those young punks, we had elderly gentlemen watching us. So it wasn't... uh, wasn't...wasn't extremely bad. It wasn't the worst circumstances I ever lived through was already there. And from there, we found out that we are...we had...we had a transport to go to Sweden. Yes, we had...seems like Hitler tried to make a pact with the Austrian--with the Swiss, that he should get Swiss citizenship. And to show good faith, he allowed a transport of Jews--concentration camp Jews--to go to Sweden. So we bec... Was it that time? Yes. We became a transport to go to Sweden. I think it was that time, or before. And they gave us.... No, it wasn't near Litzmann. It wasn't this camp. One camp afterwards. From there we went to another camp. This camp where we were, we...they gave us...we stayed in the camp for a short time, and that time we had... They created a transport to go to Sweden. They gave us Red Cross packages. And they gave us each of us Red Cross packages. I had a job to open every Red Cross package, and take out the chocolate and give it to the Germans. So all...every Red Cross package, whoever got, was minus chocolate. And everything else came to us. And it was actually a bowl. And the bowl was fabulous, because we had food. Except we didn't know when to stop. So we almost

[6] Dr. Kurt Schuschnigg was the Austrian Chief of State from 1934-1938. He survived the war and died at Innsbruck in 1977.

[7] Subcamp of Neuengamme. Located in the city of Ludwigslust, approximately 5 miles to the south of Wöbbelin.

finished everything what they gave us at that time. The whole thing fell through. The transport fell through. Seems like that the Swedish government or the Swiss government didn't do it for Himmler. So the first thing what they did to us, they took the packages away. Whatever was left they...they took those packages. When humanity stopped, the bestiality started all over again; and they took another transport. And they took us on a transport in open cattle cars. But that time, was open with no roof. We were sitting, and completely exposed to the element. And we traveled; seemed like nobody wanted to take us because we were this...the privileged characters, we supposed to go to...to Sweden. Seems like at that time, whatever, the hierarchy didn't want...nobody wanted to take us. We traveled for three days in those open cars. No water, no food. Food wasn't a tremendous factor--at least for me. Thirst was. It came to a point that I...my tongue swelling in my mouth. This I couldn't close my mouth. I was...thirst was unbearable. Unbearable! And my things...my lips swelled. My tongue swelled. And it was unbearable. And after three or four days, it seems like an eternity, they sent us to a camp which was being built by Russian soldiers--by Russian prisoners of war camp. Which was a brick camp for American flyers, which supposed to be a show camp. When it was finished, it was supposed to be a show camp--how...how humanely the American prisoners of war are being treated. This camp was doing construction. Seems like it was terrible there, because the Russian soldiers...uh soldiers practiced cannibalism. Uh, not on a live one; but cannibalism on whoever died. It seems like this...this part of the thumb was the biggest morsel they could eat. No water. There was one surface pump, which was for mak...mixing cement or something like this. And there were soldiers staying watching this pump; because this was surface water, which they were scared of typhus. So anybody who was drinking, want to drink, was shot immediately. It was not for the preservation of the prisoners, but it's for their own preservation of the German soldiers. So over there was...was very bad. And finally we came to this camp, too; not having water, not allowed... That's the first thing they told us, not allowed to drink this water. So a soldier, just to prove...just to prove he did... he meant this thing, he took a gun and he said, "Boom!" And he shot somebody. So he proved his point to me. So he took one life...or not to me, personally. So he proved...he took somebody's life to prove a point. So it was like saying, "Good morning," or, "Good evening," he shot this man. A Russian thing--I shall never forget--it was long...he had a hat with long ear muffs. And this man was wasted, just to prove I shouldn't drink his water. We stayed in this camp; and we was...we were working in this camp. We did not...no barracks at that time. We slept on sand...sand, which was mixing the cement. Rooves wasn't there. Under the elements, we only slept to them. Whatever...we was scared most of the Russian soldiers; more than of the Germans, because they were more with us. The Germans were outside. The Russians... because what they did during the night, they used to kill us and take the shoes away.

Q: Who used to take the shoes?

A: The Russian soldiers. The Russian prisoners. Choke us to death or stab us to death. You know, the prisoners; so they could take the shoes away, or whatever. This flimsy piece, this one piece of...this pants and shirt, we had. No underwear. They took it away, because they didn't have anything. So Monyek and I, we always made sure we slept not laying down. We

was sitting back to back so one could look forward and one could look backwards. And this way we always had a common protection. But hunger over there was unbearable. Hunger there was unbearable. So not far down the road was a sugar beet factory. In Europe, they're making sugar--not out of cane. They're making sugar out of beets. So...and one night I said, "Monyek, I'm going over and I'm going to eat as much as I want." He didn't want to do it. I said, "You stay here. I come back." So I got out and I...I put my pants. I tied...whatever pants I had, I tied on my... my leggings together. And I went in to...to the beets. But I couldn't carry the beets, because they were very heavy and I couldn't carry it. I was too weak. But seems like there's another pile which there's the shavings. Seems like before the beet is going to sugar--a mill or something--they do like rough shaving. Like pieces of wood, like wood shavings. So I filled myself up with these sugar beets and where I could; and I went through and I...the sugar beets. Which I did a disservice. Not realizing you eat the sugars beets, this shaving of the sugar beets, you extend your stomach. So anybody who ate it, who ate a lot of it, they...they couldn't make it. They died because of the sugar beets itself; because the stomach just...just busted. Just busted. Seems like Monyek and I and quite a lot of other [of] us survived it. But a lot of them just...just couldn't make it. And...and we stayed there; and it was getting worse and worse and worse. And all of sudden, the camp commander comes to us and he says, "The Russians are coming, and...uh they're going to kill us." All the prisoners of war are going to kill us, because the Russians know we were helping the German economy. So he says to us, "All people who wants to march gonna march with us." And he points to me and says, "He's the first one who goes." And I says, "No." He says, "You will!" I said, "No." And this was the biggest beating I got in my lifetime. I got from this man, with a--he didn't have a walking [stick], he had a long like a hiking stick. A long...a long... Like a five-foot long stick. And he made me as an example. And he didn't stop beating me. That...beat me in front. It was unbelievable. And I...it doesn't matter anymore. By that time, didn't matter; because I couldn't walk anyways because the beating was so hard. And he disappeared. And no...no soldiers. And we were free. Except, there was no food. In our adulation, in our happiness, there was nothing we could do about it. We couldn't eat enough. We only had those sugar beets, and we wouldn't eat those sugar beets. Only thing we had a bowl was to drinking water. We finally...not from this...not from the pump; but we found where they kept the drinking water. And plus we were scared of the Russians. The Russian--not the Russian soldiers which gonna come in, but the Russian prisoners of war because uh they were a rough bunch of guys. Anyways, finally at two days later from the road, we see tanks coming. And we see tanks with a five pointed star. I didn't know how American tanks look, and I didn't know the emblem of an American tank. So five-pointed stars looks like the Russian star. Except they were American tanks. So the American tanks passes by. And finally, a few hours later, a little Russia--not Russian. A little American solider comes in. Very short, with the rucksack, with the pack, with everything else. And a miracle, finally. But this wasn't the biggest miracle I saw that day. He says he's thirsty. And I says, "There's no water here." He says, "What about the pump there?" I says, "You're not allowed to drink, because you're gonna die." He went to the pump, put water in the canteen, put a pill into it, shook it and drank it. This...and this was the biggest miracle I ever saw. And I...finally, I became a free man at that time. So he said they... (Deep sigh) I'm a...fine.

Q: This is a good time to stop and change tapes, anyways.

A: Yah? Fine.

Q: So let's do that.

TAPE #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: So.

Q: The day of liberation.

A: The day of liberation. So the American soldiers dranking the water. And he put this little pill in. And I found it was the greatest miracle I ever saw in my lifetime, that he was allowed to drink things that we were killed for it. We died for it. And he drank it. So he said that we should stay. And I was in no circumstance. I was sick and beaten up and bleeding. I have a scar. I still have a scar somewheres here. (Pointing at his head) I have a scar from my back. Uh, he says wait, they gonna send food for us. Sure enough, a half a day later, they sending... There's a kitchen comes, uh a truck with a soup kitchen; and it was supplied by the French army. And the French army says that before they're gonna give us soup we have to sing the "Marseillaise." And I said, "Shove it." And I didn't sing the "Marseillaise;" I didn't drink their food, and I walked out of camp a free man, without being subservient to the French for singing the "Marseillaise." Monyek said, "Let's sing it." I said, "Monyek, Goodbye. I'm leaving." My friend Monyek changed his mind and followed me. And we didn't sing it. We walked out. So the first act of defiance, after not singing the "Marseillaise," I saw a German soldier and I...I took his jacket away. And I wore his jacket; because I was...I had nothing and I was bleeding. So my jacket was ripped and I had no jacket. So we were marching, and next day... We slept in the fields somewheres. Next day, we saw American soldiers. And they were throwing balls...a ball to each other with tremendous big gloves. And I said, "Look at this foolish thing that they doing! Why they don't catch them by hand?" And this is the first time I was faced with baseball. I never saw it before. And it was unbelievable. I found it extremely childish. This look...big grown men throwing ball and catching it with a glove instead of catching it by hand. And later, one fellow used a stick! So it...it was quite amusing. So we're marching; and we passing a field kitchen where the...uh...uh...a fellow, an American, cook. And we saw there is a little fence; and there's a space and there was a table there, and there's...they were cooking some meat. And he was cutting meat. You know, meat. And...and I was hungry. And I said, "Food. Food." So every time he cut a piece of meat--and I had a German...I want to emphasize, I had a German uniform on. I had a German jacket on. Every time he threw the meat, he threw it short enough I should never catch it. Except he...there was a dog in front of me, on the other side of the fence. So all the meat he threw towards me went to the dog. And I never got the meat. And I was extremely disappointed and extremely hungry. So this was it. But we...but that time we already had something to eat, you know. A piece of bread here. We got a little piece of bread here; whatever we could scrounge it. But I never got this piece of meat from this cook, this American soldier. And we decided we gonna march. We gonna go to France. We gonna go to France. Why? Because Monyek had a sister there before the war, and she always said it's a lovely life in...in France. So we says, "Why not?" "We go this way, or go this way?" Finally, I said, "Which way you think is France?" So he said, "This way." "Okay. Let's walk

this way." Didn't (laughing) matter to us. So we marching to France. A American soldier gets hold of us. He says, "Where are you going?" So...I don't know how they understood it. We said we go to France. He says, "That's fine. Come on. Go in the Jeep. We take you to Paris." I said, "How good can it be?" We go to Paris; except he--I don't know where he took us--he took us to the detention camp. So we stayed in the detention camp. And uh...I says, "Monyek, I don't want to stay here. I have enough detention camp." He say he gonna stay, because he wants to go to Paris. And we said goodbye to each other; and I never saw Monyek again. We never saw him. And I went...there was a group in this detention camp. Was a group of Polish forced laborers. People who were taken out of Poland--not in concentration camp, but were taken out as a family to work on fields in Germany. And they were the forced...Polish forced labor. Not Jews. Forced labor. So I decided I gonna go with them. May as well go back to Poland, which is closer to Czechoslovakia than wherever I was.

Q: Did you... Excuse me. Did you explain to the Americans that you were Jewish? You were still in this German uniform.

A: I had...I had nothing to explain. I couldn't speak it. I couldn't speak at all. I couldn't speak at all that. Couldn't even say that. And with the Polish, I definitely would not say I was Jewish. The Polish are definitely against Jews. So they put us to a camp; and we were in a camp which seemed like it was a big school or something. Because they gave me a room to sleep, because next day they're gonna take me to...to Poland. I speak Polish also, among other languages. I speak, I think, seven of them. So I...except I speak Slavic languages, instead of speaking English. And I slept on the floor that time. And at least I slept in a room. I mean, it was the first time I really slept in a room. And they're taking us to...separate next morning, the families and everything else. They take us on trucks. And they take us over... Seems like between the Russian Army and the American Army, there was a no man's land. They kept a separation--I think it was about a few miles. It comes about evening...late in the evening and we go to the Polish...uh, go to the Russian side. And now, of all things, I became Polish. And... (laughing) and...and we get off...we going on the other side. And it's quite late at night and we always get off the truck; and the Polish laborers they had...bundles, you know, and blankets, whatever. And whatever they looted, whatever they robbed, and everything else. They take the men, separate the men; and they separate the women and children. And I became part of the men. I walked in with the men; and even having a German jacket, I spoke Polish. So...so that there was no uh ...uh, it didn't mean any difference. They didn't expect me not to be Polish. You marched to a field. And a little fellow came up. I mean, maybe five feet tall. A Russian Colonel or a Russian General, whatever he was. And he gives us a...a speech. He says that we have collaborated. Doesn't mean me as a Jew, but me as Polak. All of us...all of the Polish men. We collaborated to the Germans, to the war machines of Germany, for the destruction of Russia. And now we are his enemies, and we gonna be all shot. For this, I went through a concentration camp--to be shot by the Russians. So he said: but since the Russian government is..is a good-hearted government, he exonerates us for only [one] reason--because we volunteer into the Russian Army. And by stroke of this word, we became Russian soldiers. But by that time, Germany and Russia was already in chaos. The

whole thing was in chaos. So they didn't have any pants to give us; so I had only pair...pair of German boots, and I didn't have no socks. I had my striped...still had my striped pants on. He took this thing away...this German thing away, gave me a Russian jacket. And we were marching with the Russians. Marched all night long, and uh...no food. Absolutely no food! So we come to a little village. And there is a Russian--is a high echelon soldier. I don't know what he was. Colonel, or whatever he was. And he looked Jewish. I don't know. I just felt he looked Jewish. So I went to him, and I says, "You know, I am Jewish. You have anything to eat?" But he said, "In Russia, everybody's the same. We don't care if you're Jew or not. Everybody's the same." So I said, "Okay." And we kept on marching in, with our job was looting. We were looting. They were looting...whatever they could get ahold of, they were looting. I didn't need anything. I didn't want anything. So the only thing I found was sugar. I found two bags. I went to somebody's German home; and two bags of sugar. Like...only thing, I don't know why it possessed me. That's all what I was...from all the looting what possessed me, just to have the two pieces of sugar. And that was....they fed us, you know, this pork stuff and everything else. And I was...I was sick, and I was tired and I was filthy, and everything else. Eventually getting to a German...big German farm. Big German farm. And it's dust around it. So everybody drink. There's a tremendous amount of vodka they're drinking. Tremendous amount of alcohol they were consuming. And more...more what they're drinking, the more boisterous they're becoming, and the more dangerous I felt my...myself there. First thing, not being Russian; and not being Polish, and not being Christian. So...so the whole thing was awful frustrating. Anyways, I go to the farmer. And I speak to the farmer in German. I said to him, "I'm Russian..." So I never thought about that. I said, "I'm a Russian soldier, and I never slept in a bed for weeks." I says, "I would love to sleep in a bed," I said to him. But he said, "You know there is no bed. You people took everything out. You took everything over. We are ourselves sleeping in a barn. There's nothing there." I said, "You know, I have two bags of sugar." So I gave him the two bags of sugar. So he wants to...he said to me, "You know, it's very amazing. You being Russian, how come you speak such a good German?" I said, "I went to the language school in Kiev." I mean, I just made up. I didn't trust him. He doesn't trust me. So I said I went to the language school in Kiev. So he gave me a bed. It seems like in a barn where the cow...where the cows are standing, where they're eating, seems like for the help or something there was a room beyond... beyond those where the cows were standing and eating. So he gave me this room; and I slept overnight for these two bags of sugar. Reveille in the morning. I sleep. I don't want to get up. And they holler and they holler. And I am scared. I said, "The only thing is happen if they catch me, they'll think I overslept." With all this noise. If they believe me, they believe me. If they don't believe me, they don't believe me. And I stayed there. And I stayed there 'til maybe afternoon. Scared. Scared. Scared. Scared. I mean, I didn't want to die. This time now, I didn't want to die anymore. I mean, finished. The dying part...part is over. And I was lucky enough...they weren't there. They left me behind. I go out. It seems like somebody, another man, had the same idea what I had. He had the same idea. So him and I, we decided we're gonna go back to Poland. So this...this... They left the farmer with a horse and a...and a...like a carriage. So he said, "Let's take the farmer's carriage, and let's go at night." And I couldn't do it. I mean, he's the fellow who saved me. He's the fellow who gave me a room to sleep. So I says, "No, we're not going to take it. Let's walk and find

somewheres else." So sure enough, we kept on marching and we saw a German with a...with a same thing--with the horse and thing. We took his, and we...we kept on going. We didn't go too far. They took us...the Russian...somebody, not Russian soldiers. They caught a transport of forced laborers, which same [as] with we went they took the men away. This was a transport where the families was still together. So they made...this man and I, we joined them in the event that we going on the way to Poland. So we stop at night time. We stop, and they separated the men and the women. And it was like a...a garage, in a big garage. A car garage. So the men slept in one garage, and the wives slept in the other garage. The soldiers got themselves drunk, and they raped all the women. The noise was unbearable. And it was the worst thing was...was the husband or lovers or brothers had to listen to the yelling of the...the women. Next morning, nobody looked at each other. The women didn't look at the men. The men didn't look at the woman. It was tremendous embarrassment. Tremendous embarrassment. But anyways, we getting into Poland. Poland...we came into Poland. I escaped, and I decided... No. No. Not true. We came into Czechoslovakia. We came into Czechoslovakia. The transports was going to continue into Poland. I escaped from Poland. It was in...in the city of Plze_. I went back to Teplice...to Prague. I went to Prague, I got sick. I eventually wound up--with all the beating what I had, I wound up in a hospital. And I stayed in the hospital for almost three weeks. And I was quite sick; and I was staying by myself. They thought they're going to cheer me up. So they put me in a room with Russian Colonels or ranking officers, also which was sick. One fellow was sick because he was shooting at some uh...nest with soldiers, so they gave him a medal. And he was sick. And I was in this room with the soldier; which was like a ball to me, because every time they brought in food for the Russians, I got extra above and beyond. And in Czechoslovakia, at that time wasn't so good. Except that one bad thing--that every time they were drinking vodka, they were making me drink the vodka. So with all the medication I got, I never got better. And they couldn't understand how come I... There was no reason I wasn't getting better; because not realizing I was drinking alcohol constantly with those Russian soldier. 'Til somebody found the reason, took me out and I got better. And I went back to Teplice, to the city where I was born. And uh ...I was the only Jew who came back. There was nobody left in the whole city. (Deep sigh - choking up) And we had a big house. And the house belonged to us, you know, when we left. But they couldn't give me the house back; because Teplice, where I'm...where I am from, is known for three things. It's known for coal mining. Known as a spa. By the way, my mother was president of the culture of the city of Teplice. And they make crystals. So the German who was using my house was the engineer from the coal mine. They didn't want to antagonize him, because in case he should do sabotage in the coal mine. This was after the war. So they...after the war. This was in 19...end of l945. The war ends in May. And so not to antagonize him, so he shouldn't do any damage to the coal mine. So they gave me a lovely apartment. They gave me a complete furnished apartment; uh, and they gave me a business. They gave me a business. The Czech government gave me a business. I don't know, because I was a unique. You know, the unique person. Finally, somebody came back. They gave me an electrical store with the repair. You know, doing the repair shops, everything else; which was quite good. And I'll tell you a little small incidence. And they gave me food stamps. Above and beyond. They gave me like privileged class food stamps. So I had quite a lot of food. So...so life was coming to that. But I had no family.

Absolutely nobody. But...but life as...as for physical need was quite good. And I am staying once in a butcher shop, and a woman comes over to me. And she says to me in German--and at that time all of a sudden nobody spoke German. Because all of a sudden, you became a Czech patriot. Matter of fact, when I was born, my...even my birth certificate was still written in German. But all of a sudden nobody spoke German. So immediately it became Czechoslovakia, nobody speaks German. Anyways, she comes over to me and speaks in German to me. She said, uh, "Excuse me, can I ask you something?" Here I don't know, should I say I speak German or shouldn't I? So I didn't mind. So she says, "Are you Mr. Helmer?" Which was the most amazing thing. So I says, "Yes." She says, "I was a maid for your parents. And you look the same as your father." And she became a maid of mine. Not only her, her daughter. And she...she didn't become a maid for...for wages, but there came another maid. She came to cook for me, to clean for me. She didn't stay with me. For food; because I had enough food. So they didn't have enough food. So...so I stayed there. And... and I travelled...I travelled to Prague a lot of time. I had a room there, and everything else. And life was quite good 'til one day they come, a year later; and they decided they want to draft me in the Russian Army. I mean, the Party was creating a Czech Army, and they wanted to create I should be go to Russia. I said, "Listen, I just came through all this mess, all this thing I went through all my life. I mean, I don't have to tell you." He said, the man says to me at the interview...he says, "Let's face it. Who going to miss you?" So it was very bad. And I refused to do so; and instead they gave me time to think about it. I said, "Okay, give me time to think about it." But at the same token, they started taking my food away. They start taking the...uh, the food stamps away--the better food stamps away. And not only this; they took my store away. And I became a helper to an electrician in my own store. I mean, the store wasn't mine anymore. They gave it to a...to a comrade who was better than I. At least I had a job to go. And life became quite unbearable. Life became quite unbearable. I went to Prague, and I met somebody who said he's going to go...smuggle himself out. He's going to Israel. I says, "You know something? Israel is better than...than here. How do I get out?" What I wanted, at that time, I thought maybe I go to America. I had...my mother had a sister, an older sister here. "I go to America." I said, "If not Israel, I want to go to America." So I got in touch in....with the Haganah. And the Haganah said, "You come to Marienbad [**NB:** Mariánské Lázn_], and we gonna smuggle you through back to Germany." So I said, "What is..." They said, "No packages, no clothing. You walk out of your apartment. Make sure you keep the stove running, like you walked down to the grocery for a paper or something. Leave the lights on. Walk out, and not come back." And exactly what I did. I don't know what happened to the apartment, whatever was boiling there. I went to Karlsbad [**NB:** Karlovy Vary]. I stayed in Karlsbad for a day, and to Marienbad. The only thing which I didn't do, which they asked me to do, is they said they wanted to give all my papers up. Which I did...wasn't ready to do so. So I didn't give my papers. I was smuggled...there was a group maybe of four. There was a little...young girl, and there were two ladies and two men. There must have been five of us. And there was shooting with the thing; and finally we got to Germany. I don't know if the Russians...I don't know if the Russians were shooting at us, or the Germans or the Polish--or the Czech were shooting us, or the Germans were shooting us. There was shooting going on. And I remember we came down a...a like a ravine or something, on our behinds, you know. But he says nothing. And finally I wound up in the

country of my enemy. And I wind up in Germany again. And I wound up in Munich. And I had to... And at that time, a lot of Jews had...did a lot of black marketeering. Black marketeering became...became a way of supporting self. I just couldn't do it; so I got myself a little bit of a job with--not with HIAS--with the Jewish Restitution Committee, something.[8] And I...I made not...didn't make enough, but I had enough. And I stayed in the city in Munich, and bought a stye. Which... I stayed with a lady whose son--she was German--whose son was executed two days before the war ended. Maybe you heard about it. He was...he did the rebellion, the high school rebellion in the school. He was one of her son. So I stayed with this lady. Then, from nowheres, Renya--the girl which I knew from the underground--pops up in Munich. I don't know how she found me. What happen is, she found me in Munich. And she says, "You cannot give up responsibility." And I joined the CIC, which is the counterintelligence; and I became an agent of the counterintelligence, looking for Nazis. So...which was in itself not a bad thing, because this gave me an opportunity to travel and looking for my family. So I wound up in Poland again. And I wound up in the city of _ód_, in the city where I lived. (Sigh) And I...I went up to the apartment, and found food stamps. The old food stamps, and some other papers which I donated to the Museum. But I never found anybody else. By the way, when I went back...the reason I went back to Poland is that the Colonel was in charge of me says, "I hear rumors that the Jews which go back to Poland are being killed." So he said he wants to find out. So I went back as a Polak. And sure enough, there...they formed an organization which was called Armia Krajowa, "the Army of the Land." So when a Jew came back to a small town and he wanted his home, his business, whatever this else, the fellow [who] was taking care of it found it legally became his all of a sudden after a year and a half. So they used to kill them. Matter of fact, I've pictures...report of those pictures also donated to the Museum with names mentioned and towns where those Jews were killed. After coming back from all those years in the concentration camp, they were killed by the Armia Krajowa. And I didn't find anybody else, and I couldn't wait to leave Poland. Never went back to Hungary. Went back to Germany and looking for Nazis. I looked a lot. I was looking for a particular Nazi. I was looking for who they said worked for UFA. UFA is like a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer--a film company. And I was...as a German, we says we want to see how he is. We tried to get him as [if] we wanted him to form a former German organization. We tried to get ahold of him.

Q: I'm sorry. I don't understand.

A: We tried to...we didn't go to question the Germans as a Germans. I questioned them as a ex-Nazi. I didn't want to... you know, all of a sudden, "Here I am. Good morning." I mean, what you're looking for him as...as we want to get in touch with him where they are... Just to find out where they are. Because after I knew where they were, it wasn't my job to get ahold of them, to catch them. So long as we find where he was. As a matter of fact, they sent me to this UFA--which, as I just said, was a film thing--I met a lady. Who we were looking for this particular big shot from the city of Beckum, in Germany. The reason we were looking...it's a very interesting thing is, I was looking for this particular Nazi all over. The Colonel who was

[8] Possible reference to the Joint Distribution Committee.

my colonel of CIC, he came from Beckum. He was Jewish. When Hitler came to power, he went to England to school. He stays in England. And his parents lived in Beckum, a small town, as a Jewish family. His mother passed away. His father was getting old. He was...had a maid--a woman who was taking care of the father, you know-- before the Nazis...the Nazis took over. So she stayed in the same house, taking care of this old man. This particular Nazi I was looking for got ahold of this lady; and he said, "You slept with a Jew." Took this man and threw him down a flight of steps. Took this lady, and put her in a garbage--at that time, you know, horse...horses were carrying...taking garbage out, you know, for garbage...to take to garbage dump. So she was in this--reminds me of Robespierre, of the French Revolution. They took them...they took this woman through the city on this garbage heap, with a big sign: "I'm a Jew lover. I sleep with Jews." So this was his vengeance. He wanted to find this Nazi, just to revenge himself against...because ...against his father and this lady. So this eventually wind up in UFA; and I met this lady which wanted a lot of money to tell me where he is. So I went back to the Colonel; and he says, "Give it to her." Money with him didn't matter or anything. So I finally went with money; and she's changed her mind. Says she will not do it. So I never found him. Actually, I never found him. I found out years later. I met a sergeant who was sergeant in this...this headquarters there. He was...this same German we were looking for...was a cook in headquarters. He never left the town. He was always there. And I was looking all over for him. He was there as a cook. And we found out because he had a girlfriend who finally...uh, reported him. It was years after I already came to America.

Q: What was the Nazi's name?

A: I have no idea. I don't remember his name. I don't remember. K...K...K... Something with a K. So...so...so I was looking. So I never found. And I never found anybody else. So one day I go also looking, and going to Landsberg--which is outside of Munich. And I'm looking...looking for...for...for Nazis. I'm looking for my...anybody family. Can't find it. Landsberg was a prison camp, what Hitler wrote Mein Kampf. Outside of Munich. He was in jail, and he wrote Mein Kampf. And they made a DP camp out it. Looking now. "Does anybody know Sonia?" "You have a picture?" I have no picture. I don't have no picture. Actually, I was not looking for Sonia. I was looking for Helmers. Any Helmer. And actually, I was looking for Irving--my brother's name. And Irving Helmer, I thought, "He's a man. He's gonna..." He was young enough to survive. He was around six years younger than I was. If anybody survived it, he's the one survived. Leaving Landsberg, as disappointed as I was always disappointed, you know. And it's... And I'm... We getting to a traffic light. And I hitched a ride. I hitched a ride, and we're coming to a traffic light. I'm going one direction; and there's a traffic light, and letting the traffic go. And there's...and naturally, the other side, the same thing--staying for the traffic light. You pass each other. And I hear a voice. I don't know if it's directed to me or not. He says, "How is Sonia?" My sister's name is Sonia. (Crying) And I said, "She's dead." And this voice... I don't know. Sonia is a popular name, so it doesn't have to be addressed toward me. He said, "I just saw her." I don't know... I mean, since then, you know, my life completely changed at that time. I had one aim in life: to look for my sister. I'm still in Munich. And once in a while I go to the British ...British

headquarters; because I was working for the British CIC. Because Renya, this woman, was involved with them. So I don't know how she got ahold of me. And I can't find her. And I am once...I'm still involved officially with this UJA--with this...this Jewish Distribution Committee[9] just to have a legality, you know. I meet a girl. She knows me, allegedly. I don't remember. She said, "I saw Sonia." I says... So this was really good hope. "She lives somewheres in Hannover." So I go to Hannover. There is no camps. There is no camps where I can find Sonia. And this woman's girlfriend lived in Hannover. So I finally meet this woman; and she says, "Yes, I know Sonia Helmer. She doesn't live far from me. Matter of fact, we invited for a New Year's Day party there." She says, "You want to come with me? I go with you." I said, "By all means." I go with her. So we go from Hannover to the city where Sonia lives. Except at that time the trains weren't running at night time. So we stayed in the station overnight. And next morning--6 in the morning--we missed the New Year's Day party, but the train didn't run because it was New Year's. Next morning, she finally walked. She knows where she is. She walks to Sonia['s place]; and she knocks on the door. It's about 6 or 5:30 in the morning. And Sonia lived with a girlfriend by the name of Hannah, who she went through the camp. And Hannah opens the door and says, "Oh, my God, how come you came late? You missed the party and everything else." And I'm staying outside. And uh...she said, "The train wasn't running. But I brought a friend of mine." So Sonia, meanwhile, comes out...comes out from the room. I just hear it. I didn't see it. "Oh, somebody's here. Oh, good! Let me go in and put something on." So she walks out, comes back and comes to me and says... Kisses this girl; and comes to me and says, "Hello. How are you?" Not realizing who I am. And she fainted. And this how I met my sister. And by then, I already had my papers to come to America. Because I had an uncle who lived in Israel got ahold of me. And he said, "Don't come to Israel. Circumstances are very, very bad. Come to America...if you have a chance, go to America." So I had a chance to go to America as--not as a displaced person, as...as a political refugee. So I came as...as a political refugee.

Q: What about Sonia?

A: Sonia stayed there. And she stayed here. She had papers to go as a domestic to Canada. And her...her life, winding up in Canada, is an experience in itself. Terrible experience she had. That this was after the war. And I wind up going to Hannover, and coming to America. Except I had the fortune to come on two boats. It usually takes the trip between 5 and 6 days to come to America. 21 days. I...I took a boat ride for 21 days. What is happen is, I left on the Marilyn Marlene, that lost the rudder in the English Channel. And England didn't want to take us in. They wouldn't take in a bunch of refugees and displaced persons. So we...we bounced on the seas; and it was getting rougher and rougher. Not enough life preservers. So they put the men in the hull, hull with the bottom hull. Not enough food. Finally, after all those days food ran out. So they only gave us Coca-Cola to drink. And the boat was once up, once is down. So the glasses--at that time, Coca-Cola came in glass bottles--were breaking against the hull, against the wall of the thing. And so we were walking on...on glass. When

[9] Joint Distribution Committee?

you walk, you were falling; so we sat. They didn't have enough life preservers. So after this, I left on Marilyn Marlene, a ship. A boat, Ernie Pyle, came. And we transferred on the high seas, in the English Channel. Once the boat was here and once the life boat was there; so we was bouncing. And under those circumstances, we came after 21 days. I made America with six dollars in my pocket. And... and I decided I gonna start a new life. So I had six dollars and a suitcase of books. I had no clothing. So I had a coat ...a coat on. I had a coat and my suit on. So I took the coat, and I threw it in the Hudson River. So I said, "If I start with nothing, it may as well be everything nothing." So I threw my coat on April 1st in the Hudson River. I came away with the books and a suit on my back. And that's how I wound up in America. And after this... I mean, I got a jobs. And uh...my sister was in Canada. And she had bad experiences. The problem is, very good looking girl. Got a job as a domestic for a doctor. Bewildered. Doesn't speak the language. Doesn't know anything. The first night in Canada, he sneaked into her room. Was the most shocking experience she ever had. And naturally, she made enough noise. Went back to the camp, got scared of...of Canadians, wants to go back, doesn't want to stay in Canada because of this experience. Wasn't raped. She wasn't raped. No, she wasn't raped. She was...fondled. Uh... But finally she got in touch with a doctor...with a Doctor Cohn in Hamilton. And they adopted her as a child, as a daughter. And matter of fact, now she consider the boys now as her brothers. And...and she...she finally she made quite well. Went to school, became supervisor of nursing, married...married very poorly, started in business with two thousand dollars, sold it for many, many millions. And she's doing quite well. And with me, I...it was a struggle also. Coming to America was a struggle. Got a job. Came here, and...and because...because a friend in the movies--we knew through somebody, through my cousin, knew Eddie Cantor. And through Eddie Cantor--I never met him personally. He said since I played with S. S. Cuddles--he was in Hollywood at that time, as S. S. Sagal. But I don't speak English. He said, "You have two chances." One, I can become a usher at Radio City Music Hall; or, I can become a waiters somewheres upsta...in one of the Catskill resorts. And I didn't want any of those two. I just felt I don't want to be subservient, somehow. I just...I just didn't want to serve. I mean, it through...so through my cousin I got a job in S. Klein Department Stores, at that time. And I got a job, I think, six days a week, 10 hours, a day; because I need hours. And I came home with a big 22 dollars a week. And something interesting thing is, for months I was living on salami sandwiches. The reason was S. Klein had a cafeteria. I hardly spoke English. Matter of fact, if I went to the elevator, if anybody spoke to me and if I went up the elevator, I used to point down. And if I went down I used to point up; so long I don't have to travel with them, because just in case they spoke to me. So I went to the cafeteria. And I see on the boards there they have salami. I say, "Salami! Salami in any other language has to be Salami." And so this was at that time a cafeteria; and I go to the window and I say, "Salami." And he says something to me. And I don't know what he's talking to me. Except by luck there was bread on the...on the counter; and he was pointing with his big knife to breads. So when finally he got the rye bread, I shook my head. So he made me a salami sandwich. To make this long story short is, for months I was eating salami sandwiches and a container of milk by the register. They thought I was nuts. Because I had a fetish for salami sandwiches. So whenever I went, I already had...before I got to them, I had my salami sandwich and two containers of milk. And this what I lived on--salami sandwiches and two

containers of milk-- because I didn't speak. So eventually, it got better. And my sister lands in Canada. So I had to forsake salami sandwiches, because I couldn't afford to eat salami sandwiches and send money to my sister. So I learned not to eat lunches. And which I still doing now, just because...because of my sister's salami sandwiches. And...and...and that's how I became... And this is my whole escapade, I think. Oh. Let me tell you something else. When we walked away from the Kruppwerke, we went to another...to another camp, at that time. Because after bombardment, seems like they didn't safe...feel safe, whatever it was. We marched through the city. And it's the most amazing thing is, we marched as a disheveled group. I mean skinny, dirty, filthy, no shoes and no nothing. And we marched finally...the first time we marched was a German town. There was a most compassionate... compassionate people I saw. Not compassion in...in outpouring of...of sympathy some. But in their faces. In their faces. There was no hatred. And they knew, obviously, that we were Jewish. I mean, shoulders with the star and all the other garbage on it. They knew about it. But they were...they were compassion. There...there was humanity in their faces. Which was very, very seldom. I never saw it, because I never encountered human...a population itself. Only the SS and the soldiers. And I want to say something else. I was very hungry when I got freed out of the camp. And when I finally I got to the camp which they took me as a Polak to Poland, to become a Russian soldier, I was quite hungry. Because the American didn't give me...threw the meat to the dog, and so forth. I met a Russian soldier. And I don't think he looked better than I did. But anyways, he was a Russian soldier. And I was very hungry; and I ask him for food. I don't know why I ask him for food. So he had a knapsack in the back. He opened his knapsack, had a big round bread. Big bread. Big bread. Took his knife, took a knife and cut the top of the bread--which was maybe two...two inches thick. I thought, "Oh, my God. This is the biggest meal I ever get." Took this two inches of slice for himself, and gave me the whole bread. That's right! So who needs so much bread? So there was... there was a little German fellow there, a little German boy. So I didn't have a knife. So I broke my half and I gave him the other half. And at that time, I stop hating them. (Crying) Yep.

Q: Beno.

A: Yah.

Q: What do you think the effect of...of all this has been on you?

A: On me?

Q: Yes.

A:. I don't know what effect it has. I...I don't dwell on the past. Matter of fact, so in all honesty I'm doing this just to perpetuate; my children should remember it. I personally, I don't want to remember too much. I just can't dwell on it; because if I dwell, I have to hate. And I have no time for that. I absolutely have no time for hating. I mean, it's... my father used to say hating is...takes an effort. And I don't want to take this effort. I'm a firm believer now also,

it's start to pay back. And I'm paying back through charity. Not only as much financial charity; I mean, it's something I cannot afford. I'm involved with the Lubavitcher movement, I'm involved with the Holocaust Museum, I'm involved with the UJA; but I've become a volunteer. I'm a volunteer for an old age home. And I became their feeder. And I go to most sickly people who nobody wants to help anymore. Because when I took the job... I'm also a volunteer in the hospital. And when I took the job in the old-age homes, "Most geriatrics," the lady said to me, "in the hospital, 99 percent go home. Here, nobody. Nobody goes home." And they're pillars of the society. We have people there which are are vegetables. Vegetables. We have a friend of the lady who used to provide the soaps...soaps for--not only soaps--Imogene Coca and Sid Caesar program she writes. We have a editor lady there, was editor of the Palm Beach Post. I mean, we have a young, a fairly young, man in the early 50s, which is a sculptor--quite a renowned sculptor. I mean, it's people, it's...it's...it's unbelievable. People who were active. People who were brains. People who used them. People who did. And the bunch laying there. There [is] Shirley...in the fetal position. I mean, it's nothing. There's a tremendous gorgeous garden named after her. And it's amazing. So anyways... My only problem is... I have a problem with this also. I see my mother in them. I don't know why I see her. It...(crying) So sometime I don't know if I do it through compassion, or do it because I want to cleanse myself. But anyways, it's...it's gratifying. I find it extremely gratifying. And I can't wait to go there. I can't wait to go there. And everybody says, "How can you do it? You have to be strong. You have to be something." (Softly) You don't have to be at all. You don't have to be at all. (Crying - pause) It's enough.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you. Oh. (Deep sigh - pause) Can I mention my children?

Q: Yes, please. Bonnie, let's turn the tape back on.

A: Yah. Let me tell you something. There's better stories.

Q: Okay. We're on. Tell us about your children.

A: Let me tell you about my wife. It's a fabulous girl. She is a physiotherapist. I...when I worked in this S. Klein Department Store, I met a fellow who was a buyer for lingerie. His name was Carl Boxer. And I don't know why it possessed me. He showed me a wallet of his. And I don't know why men like to look through wallets. He showed me a wallet, and he showed me a picture of a girl sitting on a chair. And I said, "Who is this girl?" He says, "This is a neighbor of mine who lives in the same building where I live in Brooklyn." I said, "Carl, this the girl I gonna marry." He says, "Beno, you are nuts!" I said, "Carl, this is the girl I gonna marry." He said, "Never in a million years. She wouldn't even go out with you." So anyways, on the circumstances by then I hurt my back. I was in a cast...in a cast from top to bottom. And uh Passover, he invited me for Passover meal. In that time, I lived in Newark, New Jersey and he lived in Brooklyn. And he invited this girl to come to dinner. And to make a long story short, this is the girl I married. The girl he said I'm not gonna ever marry.

And after this we had three children. The first name was Debbie, my daughter Debbie--who plays mommy now in New Jersey; my son, David--who is going to become a daddy in December--lives here in Alexandria; and my youngest one, Donna. She's going with a nice fellow. I've never met him, by the way. I'm going to meet him next week. A fellow from Israel; and I think she's in love with him. Which is lovely. So actually, we have something to look forward to. And we have two fabulous grandchildren. Fabulous. Our granddaughter is Stacy. As matter of fact, she is going to camp this Sunday. And Michael. So life is fairly good. Not only fairly good; life is pretty good. Something to live forward, but to live for. That's it!

Q: Wonderful. I'm glad you told us.

A: Thank you. _____. So nobody's left out. OK. Thank you very much.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION