United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with William Luksenberg
April 14, 1991
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with William Luksenberg, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on April 14, 1991 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.

WILLIAM LUKSENBURG
April 14, 1991

Q: Please tell me your full name and where and when you were born?

A: My full name is William Luksenburg. I was born in Dombrova, Poland. Was born on February the 1st, 1923.

Q: Can you tell me about the town you were born in and about your family and your early recollections?

A: The town I was born in was a mining town, coal mining and smelters. The town where we lived, it was comparatively not as many Jews as other cities around us, and we...at at that time I had a big family, father, mother, just older brothers, but the family from my mother's side and my father's side was quite...a family about fifty, sixty people, which only me and distant cousins...two cousins are alive in Israel and one in New Jersey and from my family I'm the only one left alive. My recollection and my upbringing in Dombrova, Poland. I attended grade schools which were run by, in Poland we didn't have separation state and church, and therefore the Polish grade schools were run by the Catholic lay teachers, nuns and priests, most of them...very few laymen teachers and I want to bring it out because we had schools on Saturdays, but me my parents being orthodox and we could not...my father would forbid us to attend Saturday schools, and what happened that this...the that the school on Saturday what we had they usually would take...they would take new subject on Saturday and I think it was because just in spite anti-Semitic overtones and anyway I would come in Monday back to school. My room teacher or my classmates would not let me in what was the

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new subject on Saturday, so for me going to school, it was very hard because by the time I rolled in by Friday I caught up only with the new subject. Friday rolled in. Saturday was a day off for me. Also another thing...we had to attend mass every Sunday morning, the whole school. We had our...in uniform, the head it was shaving...the hair was shaved and we marched to to church every morning and of course the Jewish boys had to march too. Of course we didn't go into the church. We...a few of us standing outside in the courtyard in the church and that brought back memories I remember because we're like outcasts...the Jews and all, and said let us go, not to attend the church. We were to attend the church every Sunday even though we stood outside. Remembering some episodes in school...we had some singing lessons. We had high priests coming sometimes visit our school, our prelate and they would...we would sing religious songs. We had a teacher who played the fiddle, and he would...said sing. He would play along as we were sang, and we...we sang the religious songs. Well, I didn't feel like singing religious songs because I was not...I was brought up orthodox and I felt it was sacriligious to sing songs

like that, but I kept my mouth

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shut and he saw that I was not singing properly and he walked between the rows in the classroom and then got behind me and hit me with his bow hard into my...on my head and he said, _____. Will you Jew sing? And something like this...it's kind of stands out in your mind and other episodes were as merchants and Pollack would stay in front of the stores and say _____. Don't...don't buy from a Jew because they were...we were quite persecuted in Poland. The upbringing in Poland was very hard for us Jews. Matter of fact when Hitler came to Poland, he was very surprised. We were hardened by that because when...and during when Hitler came to power in Germany, a lot of the German Jews committed suicide. When he came to Poland, although we had the same hard times, maybe harsher, but we were hardened people already and we didn't commit suicide. We just stood our ground and took it sort of. And otherwise I remember another incident when my mother was an educated woman and she had a lot of Polish friends because the...she was brought to theater with them and so on. She make friends. The reason I'm saying that why is during the war, during the ghetto...

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about your family?

A: Well, my family...my my father was a merchant and I

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described my mother. She was educated woman. She had Russian matura which was a high education. My older brother was a dentist and he...he went to dentistry school and he had his office un Upper Silesia. He was very well to do. I lost him in Auschwitz, and we had an extended family where they were workers. They were merchants. They were educators.

Q: And what did your father do?

A: My father was a merchant. He had leather and things like that.

Q: Can you tell me about the Jewish life in your town?

A: Well, Jewish life in our town...we had a nice...quite a big synagogue. Also Jewish life centered in small, like at home synagogues and my father was a...was a head, what they call Hachnoses Kalla. That means he was the president where the young brides couldn't afford a dowry, so what they did they collected money different ways. They organized theaters and so on and made extra money and then when some young woman wanted to get married and didn't have a dowry, they would come to that organization which called Hachnoses Kalla. That means take care of brides in Hebrew, and they would give like

500 Zloty or that quite amount of big money they could not afford to get married, and therefore the bride had a dowry because those days it was hard for a young bride no matter how pretty she was to get married without a dowry, and that was a big plus for young maids to get married, and my mother, may her rest in peace, I...she was the head of WIZO and they were giving a lot of milk for..to poor children.

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They would come up to the house and my mother would give them a slip a paper to go to the milkman to issue free milk for the children, and they were quite... Jewish life was centered of course around the synagogue and of course organizations like this with had theaters, organized theaters, and...

Q: Did you go to the synagogue?

A: Of course. My father was an Orthodox Jew and my grandfather was orthodox and my grand-grandfather was orthodox. My grand-grandfather lived to be a hundred and seven and he died right before the war. My grandparents died during the war, and so Jewish life really centered around the synagogue and so forth.

Q: Can you tell me you recollections, your first recollections of what happened when the war broke out?

A: Well, before the war broke out, there were news...newsreels and the paper wrote about the Germans, how they arm themselves and so and my mother always said well, those people arm themselves. There might be a war. I remember the first day...September the 1st, 1939. Since we were right...living right hard on the German border, the German were right next few hours in our town. Being a young person, I went with all other young people to see those, because it's something like had never happened...something new happened in our town, and we did not expect anything that horrible. The soldiers stood around and passing around even some candy to the children. I was a little older than a child then, and I came home and didn't think much but, you know, was something such a terrible thing and I remember them Polish soldiers before they're walking back from the front and carrying those heavy backpacks and our army, the Polish army, wasn't at all motorized with a horse and wagon, and they were already surprised because the German army surprised them, went ahead faster than they can run.

Q: When did things begin to change?

A: The things began to change right the first night. The first night there were blackouts all over town. They would have a curfew. After dark, nobody's supposed to leave the house. The first memorable night is was when I...when some of our neighbors tried to...a young man tried to cross the street and he didn't realize just crossing the street would...would breach the curfew and a German soldier said:" halt," and he kept on running and he got machine gunned all the way across and he fell right in front of our house, so the Germans

started yelling, all the men 'raus, all the men 'raus to help carry the body in and made me carry the body with four other persons and because the way he was machine-gunned, he was completely like cut in half. When I got home I was completely covered with blood, and I remember when I got into the house, my mother looked at me completely colorless something...such an awful thing to see first time...I was just absolutely covered with blood and I always remember my mother's expression and my mother's fear and my mother cry out when she saw me completely covered with blood and that was the first night, the first expression what was...we didn't know what's coming and it was a horrible thing the first night. Well, weeks later and we had all kinds new ordinances. We...we had to give up our electrical appliances, radios of course. Radios unless you had a radio was...you could...you could go up to jail for a long time or even be killed right away, on the spot. There were...we have to...we have to give up our furs. We have to give

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up our silver, gold, whatever valuables, and of course we were rationed and the right first week you could see women, children on the street without food, without medical care and then institute now our hometown the ghetto where all the Jews living out in outlying areas had to come in and we happened to be in the part where the ghetto was established. And from our...we had four rooms and other people live in our three rooms and our place...my parents said we're going to live in the kitchen, but you know, everybody had to share and so we decided our room was in the kitchen. We had a big...quite a big kitchen. But whatever it was, we all stayed together. A lot of people dying and a lot of people were...and surviving.

Q: How did these changes make you feel?

A: Well, as a young person, I in the beginning I was still...as a young person you kind of take it a little bit lightly in the beginning but I felt very uncomfortable and I kept on talking to my mom, to my parents...what's going to be...what's going to happen? And we were completely cut off from news. We really didn't know what...what happened in the world, but my mother would say well the world can't stand still and see something like this happening. Something's going to happen. And then they were taking young people to...to work...to work camps in Germany. And my older brother never been outside the country and he wanted to see the world and he was already a professional. He volunteered to go to Germany because he wanted to see the world. He was a young man. He wanted to see the world but he didn't realize that he really volunteered going to a a working arm (ph) camp, but him being a dentist, he had it relatively well. He wrote letters. In the beginning we could get letters from him and so on. Later on everything stopped of course. And my mother took it very hard because my brother was in a camp and there were a lot of young people still in town. You know how a mother feels. And slowly we've seen what happened. A lot of people were dying. A lot of people were...then they start like grabbing people off the street and put them...send them into camps, so then you felt like you were a hunted animal because being a young man, you were the first to

be grabbed and sent out, and then the...what would happen, we would...the German made us organize special shops for the war effort and they would then they were given cards like for German war effort you got like a blue card and a lesser job which wasn't such a war effort was a yellow card and so forth. So when you got later on caught on the street, the the people who would catch you would...at that time they even organized a Jewish militia. The Germans did not want to get in and do that dirty work. They organized a Jewish militia and they come up to the Jewish head of the Jewish militia and say we need tonight so many hundred people...two hundred people. You deliver. I guess during the war a lot of people want to save themselves and their families, so whoever want to be militiamen, he felt that he can save his family being transported out that fast. They have special privileges, so the militiamen would come in, knock at your door, and try to find you and then you start hiding. You're hiding in the attic. You're hiding somewhere, so...

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Q: Were you hiding? Did you have to hide?

A: Well, in the beginning I had to hide but later on I start to work in one establishment who had a blue card, and it was for the German war effort, were making backpacks and so on for the German army, so whenever they would catch me and they would see the blue card, they would release me where somebody who didn't have a blue card would get in. And there was a terrible terrible time that time and you...you'd go up on the street and you see the people without food and people dying and young children on the street crying and then a lot of people were without parents already or who had died from disease because the whole city was crammed in like in two streets and the conditions were terrible. No food. We might have gotten ration food, like a thousand calories a day for a person which was...and the bread was almost not edible, and then you had to stay in line for the bread even though you had the coupons and I remember I did not want my father to stay, because I was afraid for them so I would get up like two o'clock in the morning and get in front of the bakery and the bakery would open up like nine, ten o'clock. They were never in a hurry to open up because the customers were there just the same, so you stayed from about two o'clock in the morning till the bakery opened up and you got the ration. You bring home the bread. As a young child I had responsibility. I didn't want my parents, my father especially, to stay in the line.

Q: How old were you at this time?

A: This time I was sixteen. I...to a certain extent I felt responsible at least with the bread and so on. I...then a lot of people would would think going out from the ghetto and get up on the Aryan side and I I speak very well Polish and a lot of people would speak Polish with a Jewish accent and I I spoke very well Polish and I would qualify to go as an Aryan paper and they had

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some connections where you pay money and you you get different name, so on. You keep on repeating over and over again a different name and my family...

Q: Your family was able to arrange this?

A: To arrange this...yes. And I remember coming...coming home for the last time to say goodbye, and I came home to say goodbye to my mom and she was just beside herself so she felt I'm leaving...she's never going to see me again and she decided where she would not allow me. She said what ever's going to happen to you, it's going...go to us, going to happen to you. At that time we did not realize...we didn't realize how bad the situation was and what's going to happen to us, and she just completely disregarded and we went so much trouble to get those papers, and I did not go out the ghetto. But I remember my mother really carrying on...crying over me and I remember my mother's face, the way she cried and the way she hugged me and she kissed me. When I say that I feel like a young person against my mother now, I don't feel that kind of age difference now and then. I remember my mother's face during my my ordeal throughout the prison camps, and even up today and the liberation. I remember my mother's face when I first came up...when I was covered with blood. I remember my mother's face that time when I came on the Aryan papers. My mother had a lot of...as I mentioned before, had a lot of gentile friends, Polish

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friends. She went to the theater with them and during that ordeal we were really starving. There was no food. There was no rations and one day my mother said why don't you go out because I took my arm band off...yeah. I forgot to mention we had to wear our arm bands. Later on we had our yellow Star of David...one in the front and one in the back so when you go in the back you can recognize that you're Jewish too, not just in the front. She said why don't you take...at that time we wear arm band...she said why don't your arm band off. By the way, if you...if they caught you without an arm band and you are a Jew, you could be shot on the spot. That was a death sentence. And I took my arm band off and I went outside. You know, there was a lot of open spaces all where they go through the wall and I went to her best friends, name was _____, and my mother said...they had a bakery...why don't you go...I'm sure...she's my friend...she'll give you some bread. Well, I came over and I knock at the door and they wouldn't even let me through the door. They said we don't have any bread. Leave. And I remember coming back home and again my mother was so disappointed that her best friend wouldn't give her child a loaf of bread, because she was sure they had lots of it and again I remember my mother then had disappointment and she was crying over it. Life in the ghetto was...had gotten to be so unbearable people would...would get up on the street and and almost live on the street, and there were terrible times and then we all realized it was really their own people. In 1942 they had all the people gather into a sports arena on the threat of that anybody be found at home would be shot on the spot and people would put

on their Sunday best, very best, and they go out with...they not really know what to expect but when when you...nothing good would come out that they want us out there, and I remember we went over to the table where the German sat and he made right and left, "rechts und links". I went this way and my parents went and I never see them again. The only thing I got from my mother...she left a note for me through one of these militias to deliver to me where she described where we had hidden some valuables...where we had...and that was my last letter from my mother, and they were sent out to Auschwitz directly because at that time they were old people. My my father was forty-four. My mother was forty-two.

Q: And that was old?

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A: That was old, yes. And coming back home to that one room kitchen without anybody was a terrible experience. I wouldn't even sleep on the bed. I would lay down on the floor. I I couldn't bring myself to eat. I...till one time I was even thinking about committing suicide because it was very hard. I was very much close to my mom and I...it was very hard for me to to stay back in the house and I went out in the morning after the curfew. There was curfew...constant curfew and I went in the morning and I walked around the town. I didn't know what to do with myself. That was a very, very hard time for me and lots of other people at that time were lost. Most of the population at that time went straight to Auschwitz.

Q: Did you know at that time what your parents' fate was going to be? Did you...?

A: Not really. During the war without the radio_ or anything else, there were all kinds of hearsay, where people said this and that, and there's so many hearsay that you can't believe what...which is right, which is wrong. We heard that they saw some people with shaven heads, working in the fields and then some people said they go....people put to death but such a horrible thing...you your mind don't want to accept it. We knew, but not for sure and then you really don't want to believe that something terrible like this could happen because it just...your mind don't want to accept that, that something like this could really happen. The only time I accept that when I first came to to the camp and I smelled the the burned flesh. That's when I realized that was true, but till then it's it's hard to accept it. Your mind just don't want to accept it.

Q: Tell us...tell us what happened to you after this point?

A: What happened to me... I always was mechanical inclined and I found a job in one of those factories in a ___ in another town. I got a blue card and I worked there, but I didn't have any sleeping accommodation. I would sleep in some hallways, whatever, and I went...they had like a kitchen where people could come in at lunch time, have some soup,

so I been wandering around by myself for for long time and not a place to sleep, not a place to really eat. I...and I had to go to work in order to stay in and I'm...I remember I made some friends. I went to the kitchen and a lady had...where there were three sons, and she saw me. I was sitting by myself without anybody so she invite me to...invited me to the table and she had little tablecloths and they all ate in the kitchen too, but she kind of felt sorry that I was alone, and her name was Mrs. Sinberg (ph). She kind of took me in like a...like a mother. She gave me a little bit warmth and it meant a lot to me and that was in big city Sosnowitz and again, same thing there. People were being grabbed from the street and sent in into the prison camps and the food was so scarce and life was really hectic. People were dying and people were on the streets and I remember that they caught some people. For some reason they sold bread and it was outside the coupons that for punishment and to show the the general public what they're doing with these people, they made people stay on on the main street and they hung these publicly...those people and they would catch you on the street and then make you watch. I remember there was like a about six or eight, ten gallows and they were hanged in front of our eyes and they were hanging until dark...till dark and they made you watch that...that which was a terrible thing to see. Things like that. I would...I would go back and forth, and then something happened. My older

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brother...he was a dentist and he knew a lot of people. The Germans...he was treating them and for some reason or other, he was the last one they sent from out that was not yet SS camp was an arbeits camp. It was different between arbeitscamp SS already went, they took over. Sent him home and they let me know that he is in the Jewish hospital in Sosnowitz and we all knew that every Wednesday they would clean the hospital completely...send all the people regardless, no matter who was better or real sick...they were all sent in directly to Auschwitz. We were in very close proximity from from _____. Then it was by car not even a half hour or three-quarters of an hour ride, so knowing that by Wednesday they might take him to Auschwitz, I dug out where my mother's left me the note we have our valuables...I dug out the valuables and I carried...there were special people who were...had some contact with the Germans for for money and I remember I brought all our valuables and I brought it and laid it down on the table and the guy looked at...it's not enough. I had tears in my eyes. I said that's all my mother left me. I said I'd like to save my brother. Well, he took it and they sent my brother home. Well, I had somebody to take care of and he had a broken leg and he...the doctor told me that he can't...his leg is broken in such a way, grew together. They didn't put it together the proper way. He says Mr. Luksenburg, if he's going to live through the war, we're going to break it again and then we'll straighten the leg up because it was too short, so I took care of him and I went out and I was at that time regardless what I had card, they took me and sent...to send me out to to the prison camp. I remember that night. There was an old school, school house. I was on the fourth floor and I was...felt so bad because I left him by himself and nobody to tend him and I was just so beside myself that I didn't...I could not sleep. I could not rest. Everybody slept like nothing happened to them, and I could

not really....I could not understand why they sleep so sound and I cannot rest. And I wanted...and I kept on looking out the window on the fourth floor, thinking about jumping out and every time I kept on looking down, I I seen the sidewalk further down rather than closer. I...then I've seen the day break and I thought to myself, if I'm going to jump, now or never, and without thinking I just went over the side and I pushed myself and I jumped. Now the fear was so great because it was curfew and I knew I had some relations about five, six block down the road and I was running real fast and on the way I was thinking that I'll go down the cellar and hide after the curfew because the front doors were always locked, and they might let me in, but I remember coming into the stairs. There were like ten, twelve stairs going like this. There...most of the homes had like a cellar where they kept potatoes and so on. I started walking down and I couldn't

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walk down. I fell all the stairs down because my left leg was completely swollen. And in the morning they heard me and picked me up. Now what they did...I was a fugitive so they put me in the attic. I remember the attic was like a thin attic. It was about maybe five foot high and it was so hot and I was completely stripped naked and I was just fainting and sometimes I took a rag in my own urine and I put it over my head to cool off. It was unbearable and they...they must have been fearing for their safety and they came up. They say you have to leave because we are afraid to keeping you here any longer, so I got dressed and I put my arm band and I went...took the streetcar to my hometown where my brother was laying there.

Q: How did you get to your hometown?

A: I took a streetcar without my arm band and went back, and I was glad to see him and he needed somebody to take care of him. He was just laying there but you have to go out and get something to eat or, you know, we would...either we'd sell our clothes...whatever was valuable you'd trade and sell and money...there was no more money left and I was a fugitive and I was recognized again and they...they caught me again. This time I put in a jail and I was there I don't remember how long. I can't tell because it was solitary and it was always night and then they...to a transport I was directly, separately carried on and was transport going...they took me and attached me to the transport.

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Q: Tell me about your experiences on the transport.

A: Well, the transport trains were freight trains, open cattle wagons where must be a hundred and twenty people...I can't tell..._____ we stood wall to wall, standing. The description of coming to my first prison camp...I remember we came in at night and it was a big, huge camp, and each cattle wagon would pull up to the ramp and then they would open the doors and I could see from three or four cars ahead of me, where they

opened the doors and they beat everybody [with] what they were like baseball bats ... ".raus ... schnell ... raus ... raus ..." the screaming, the yelling. I've seen the soldiers with their big backpacks with spotlights and the and the dogs and I've seen the huge electrified fence, huge camp with the bars. I remember talking to myself, looking down at it and thinking, my God, what I'm doing here. I could not understand it. The only cri...the only crime I committed...just being born Jewish, and then my my cattle wagon pull up in front of it. Of course I got hit. What they did, they dehumanized you. What they did they kept you stark naked without any services or without any food. I don't know whether it was twenty-four hours or forty-eight hours...I can't tell, but at that time we got dehumanized by standing naked without any facilities, without any food, wall to wall. I remember that because that was a quite a quite a bad experience. That was just...prison camp name was Blechhammer. There must have been about twenty to thirty thousand prisoners and I was put in the barracks, but when my brother came home, he was talking about the prison life and the people who are with. When I came to this prison, I heard that the guy who was the head, he was a German Jew. His name was Demmerer (ph), and I remember my brother telling me stories that he was with this man Demmerer, so I...somehow I got to him. Wasn't so easy to get to see the head of the prison, you know, from...he was the head of the...our prisons. He was himself a prisoner but he was...he had a separate barrack and office and so on, and I finally I got to the door. I tell him my name is Luksenburg. I'm a brother from...you know, tell him who I am Shlomo. He was a German Jew. I should come in. He right away give me bowl of soup, and he said: Haben Sie keine Angst". Don't wor...don't be afraid, he said. I know a good prison camp. I will make sure that's what you're going to go there. After being in the prison camp a few weeks...the the time whether it was a week or two or three, I could never tell. I just...everyday was grey and I I could not tell whether I was there two weeks or three weeks or four weeks. I just...

Q: What was a day like?

A: Well, they would...you would get up in the morning like they start you out four o'clock, five o'clock. It depends how they feel, and then they get you on appell...that means the they

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count you and you stretch your arms that way and that way that they can see you from the back and they count over and over again, no matter how cold, how rainy. Of course, your head is all shaven and you...at that time we still wear our clothes but your head was shaven, and they keep you for two, three, four hours. Sometimes they would put you to work. At that particular camp they were building some barracks. They put you on some carrying heavy wood and of course you were beaten constantly. If you didn't watch yourself...you always were beaten over your head...nowhere else and it was a trying time to begin with when then they had lists like and I was on the list. I didn't know where was Gleiwitz or was good or bad but I understood that this meant...Mr. Demmerer told I'm going to a good prison camp, so we came in where I had knew...

Q: We need to go back a little bit. How did you get from Blechhammer to Gleiwitz?

A: Well we were loaded on trains and we were again...this time there was no cattle wagons. There was just regular passengers trains what came in and got on load, of course. When you came into camp you got the big salvo: "heraus" and everybody got hit and everybody got counted and everybody got put in different categories from age and so forth. We were housed in about a barrack where must have been about two hundred people in one barrack.

Q: This is at Blechhammer?

A: This was not. From Blechhammer in Gleiwitz. In Gleiwitz they were building a factory, so we were put to work. The work consisted of twelve hours a day, and you cannot rest. You start with a shovel from the first minute on up and the man stays over you whether whether he got a handle from a broken shovel or some kind of bat and hit you constantly over the head. The first day, we were carrying so many dead people where they would mostly die from beatings and so on and when I got back into the prison camp, I ne...I was...I was going to school. I never held a shovel for so many...ever. But the first twelve hours when I got back, my hands were full of blisters. Not only had blisters here. I had blisters between my fingers and I felt if I go next day, I won't be able to hold nare a feather, not just a shovel and work twelve hours. And I spotted...they had some women in the in the office, and one was...my brother was older from me, seven years older so he he had some friends and I spotted her and I came...she worked in the office...and I said to her, Lola. I said look at me. I will not survive tomorrow one day cause I cannot work. I would like to, and it was lucky for me again. I always happened to be very fortunate that she had some pull and put me on a sick room, Krankenstube where they made, falsified that I had fever. The only time you could stay in the sick room if you had fever, and I stayed there for a few days and they bandaged my hand and put some grease and she managed to give me a job when I got back. They were looking for

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steamroller operator and me being...I always had a knack for mechanics and I was...and when I came up and I told the man that I would like to learn, he...and it didn't take me long and I was rolling this steamroller that that's why I was at a cushy job. I remember I was driving that steamroller down the road. It was a very heavy big equipment and it was an old piece of equipment. It didn't have up-to-date hydraulic brakes, had mechanical brakes. I'm trying to making a right turn going down hill. I've been pushing hard with my foot to the brake. I've been trying to make the right turn at the same time and I couldn't do it because the the the weight of my steamroller was greater than I can hold with my my foot and instead of making a right turn, I went straight, and I pulled down the the curb on the other side...just completely flattened it out. When the German...there was a civilian German...he he got angry and he took the shovel and he broke the shovel on the side of

the wheel and he kept on hitting me and the soldier stood there with a gun just waiting for me to try to make some kind of move when he would kill me, so all I could do is just put my arms over my head and protect myself being hit so many times over my head, and he kept on hitting me so long till he got tired. I almost lost my eye. I had a big gash over my head and got my teeth...front teeth knocked out and a big cut in my lip and I...next day I went back to work. I couldn't see my front eye, my left eye. It's funny...the episodes what we went through. Then the people everyday coming in from from work detail and the prisoners would bring other dead prisoners every single day into the camp.

Q: Can you tell me about your living conditions? Did you...?

A: The barracks were just bunk beds. One big barrack could contain about a hundred and some people, and we'd get up early in the morning. Again we'd get counted and we'd get a black whatever it was, like coffee. We'd go out on detail work. We'd get beaten by the guards, by the kapos, and you you go out on work detail. Again you get beaten. On on the work at lunchtime you get like a seaweed soup...just brown soup with some seaweeds in it. At night, we get a square piece of bread like that and the bread you could not eat like a bread. It was made like a clay. Every time you eat, you take a bite, you have to...you have to kind of remove it. The bread it stick to your the roof of your mouth because stuck like clay and Sunday used to get a little small piece of margarine and sometimes a spoonful of meat, and in the beginning when we left there were still some people left in the ghetto, when I was there, so they had like a that you could put a piece of bread into an envelope and treat it as such and mail it, like an envelope, and some people who had parents would send...would take a dried piece of bread and put in

01:48:

envelope like and send it to them. I remember in the beginning we used to get some mail like this, right in the very beginning. The reason I'm saying that because I knew I didn't have anybody home anymore and I would sit and stare, you know, go outside looking at the other guys getting some...something from the home and I would never even go...expect anybody to send me, because I didn't have any parents anymore. That was 1942. But then that stopped because they they liquidated the ghetto. There was...there was some Polish people who were in forced labor. They had to work but they could go home. They would tell us now there's no more ghetto. It's all liquidated. We would...sometimes some Polish people would get paid by our parents to bring some letters home while the ghetto was there and they would bring them back to us, but then we heard the news there was nothing. There was complete liquidation. And after the steamroller job, the road finished, we built a factory, fairly big factory which was called Deutsche Gas(aus?)werke. We were manufacturing raw material for tires and it's like soot. It's carbon. It's a black carbon which was manufactured and packed in like cement bags and and then they needed mechanics to to build the factory and then I was leaving there again and they needed welders so I became a welder. Just...I just could pick up anything and I was a welder and we were building the factory. That was 1943 that we

became part of the Auserkommando under

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Auschwitz. The SS came in. We all got stripped naked and we all got tattooed. Completely naked. Men, women separate of course. The being tattooed...it's not the pain. The pain is just to being branded like a like an animal. It's it's a it's a terrible thing to think that you don't have a name anymore, that you are being branded. That was a...quite a shock for all of us, especially...we had the women's camp and the men's camp separate, and I understand there was much more of a shock for for young women standing in front of the SS completely stripped naked. After...well, after we built the factory I stayed with that for quite a while and I said well, then I I counted some some Germans who who were sent from the factory to run the the building of the of this factory and certain specifications and I remember I was sitting in the corner and I was at that time welding pipes. I would...the the master would...call him master...he's overhead. He was a German. He would eat and then he...at the time he would feel sorry because he saw me all day long. I was there twelve hours with no food. He would...sort of afraid to give you a piece of bread. He would point with the eye whatever he left or he couldn't eat and he would lay it down and he walked out and I would I would get a piece of bread, because he saw that I would try and I worked and I also been sometimes in there I was a human being. Then after this factory was built up, they needed prime mechanics. We had big like Toledo scales where we would weigh that factory...I want to describe the factory, the condition we worked in the factory. In order to produce the carbon soot, it had to be a certain temperature on the...in the in the factory grounds. It had to be like between a hundred to hundred ten degrees. If it got cooler, the machine would not produce as as much soot, carbon than it's hotter hotter temperature, and we would get stuck with clothes like you would freeze and there were people who wouldn't and I don't think and not being a prisoner like we were, and free work...could work without having a mask on their face, and a lot of people would die from lung diseases because we were spitting out...we'd we'd come in. We were completely black and the women got some soap but the men hardly got any soap. You could scrub your...your body was hurting just from scrubbing your your body just with a brush without any soap, but then they they needed prime mechanics for those scales. There were like the big Toledo scales where we would weigh the production, the the soot and I volunteered that I I will repair this. What happened those scales would get stopped up by the

01:54:

accumulation of carbon and I was issued a lot of tools and an electric car so I would pick up from one part of the factory to the other and bring it to my workshop and clean them and put them back in place. And I worked twelve hours a day, twelve hours a night. One day I noticed they built a kitchen on the grounds factory for the Germans and they unloaded a truckload of potatoes. I remember driving by in my electric car. It smelled so sweet like, like you go to te best bakery. It smelled that good to me, so the next shift at

nighttime I decided to go inspect the cellar where the potatoes were. I thought maybe some potatoes would drop down accidentally. I would pick up and there was a big iron door with a big padlock. I put the padlock in my hand and I looked at it. I went back to the shop and I made a key. I was hungry. I wanted to eat, something to eat, and to my biggest surprise I opened up that lock and I just got in on the first try, just like that. I opened the heavy door and (sniffing) took that deep breath and the next day I told my buddies from work...I said hey, we're going to get some potatoes, so we took some empty bags from cement and we loaded them. But you don't think and you don't realize that if one eats and other people, hungry people know it, everybody got to eat, so I couldn't hide it. Everybody worked in this compound had to go get the potatoes at night because if I would not let them, then they would tell on me and I wouldn't have anything, so first night we went like twenty of us. Next night went thirty of us and load potatoes, sneaked out one by one, so the Germans noticed that the heap got to be smaller, so one night I opened the door and they planted SS and they caught me. I got beaten on the... by the SS Wacht Stube, then _____ come into the camp on the big appell. I got on my naked behind beaten twenty-five with the bullwhip. The first three, the man hit you as hard as a man can hit you. The first three whips...that's all you feel. Later...later on it's just like novocaine. You can hit a hundred times. You don't feel any more. It was ___ when the bullwhip goes around here and hits you right here, and I was all bloodied up from hard hitting and I remember they dragged me. I could not walk and all these guys who I helped carried potatoes, they carried...they had cold compresses putting on me to to keep me cool and the next day I had to go to work. I literally would not...could not walk. They actually picked me up and dragged me to to to work next day, and when I came in, my my German master saw me and since I had a cushy job he let me there stay a few days, but that was a bad experience because I couldn't walk, I couldn't bend down for a long time. A matter of fact, this small piece of margarine we used to get on Sunday, all my buddies donated and put it on on my skin so my skin would kind of soften up. Had a big scar. That's one of the things you have to go through. Also there were constant beatings and you had a krankenstube, a sick room, where for anybody would get sick again they would once a week come in a truck and load these people straight to Auschwitz.

Q: We're going to take a break now, change tapes.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: OK. Why don't you continue telling me what you were telling me before.

A: I want to also mention that besides being hungry and work hard, we also had a lack of vitamins. All of us had those terrible boils all over your body...big boils on the arms, all over your knees, so on, which was very painful. I want to mention we had a French doctor who they pressed into as a doctor. He he didn't have any medication. He would cut open the boil, clean it and then all he had is like toilet paper, would wrap it up, and then you you just make first move and it breaks and falls off on you, and you go into such a dirty work with open wounds...we all had a lot of wounds because of lack of vitamins. That was another, another hardship we we had. No medical treatment whatsoever. If you had a toothache or something like this was very bad. He had a layman pull tooth...a tooth without any, any kind of pain killers and so on. During my imprisonment in Gleiwitz, I had electric car where I was transporting those scales and the women would work on at service those machines, Jewish women prisoners, and I had...I I was the only one from the from the few men...I could talk to Jewish girls which was a...and I would befriend my wife. We talked once in a while. We would get...talked with hands or would write a big letter, take a big bag from the from the cement and write a big love letter and throw it over the fence to each other, and it gave a little bit of sparkle to your life and that you talked to somebody. We never touched...could never touch. God forbid if you would. It would be a death sentence. But I would drive by and talk to her on the side and she would smile and talk to me and it would kind of felt like we were for each other but not in...and I would write her love letters and maybe someday we'll...which I I believe I didn't believe that we would live the war through

02:03:

because we used to get some scraps of newspapers, German papers, that the the German people would throw out their food into the newspapers. During the war you wrap all the food in old newspapers, and I would understand some German. The Germans were winning the war. Not only this, I remember they would describe that they had shot down so many Allied planes and all their planes would come back, and of course already went to France and they and they were doing good in Africa and also there was like a death sentence from what I read, from the scraps of paper, they were doing very well and they they were winning the war and just like a death sentence because you know if they if they're winning the war, sooner or later you'll have to die. And many times I would lay on my bunk bed and I would try to picture myself how I'm going to die, what's going to be like, and then I would say to myself, maybe I won't die. I'll keep on fighting it as much as I can, and for a young person it's a horrible feeling to have like a death sentence, not knowing what's going to be and especially we did not have no inkling that how how the war was going. That was 1943 and I understand after the war that the Russians, they had such a great victory over the Germans and we didn't have no idea. In 1943 when the Germans were loosing on the Stalingrad and so on, they took us, took more revenge on

the Jews than ever before, what I read after the war. I...I...and continues like this. We were in the Gleiwitz prison camp for two years. A lot of people die. A lot of people were sick, were driven off to Auschwitz, and I kept on, continued writing letters and seeing my girlfriend. At one time an incident...on Sunday we'd get close to the fence. There was a fence separate us, and I would speak to her from far away and then the Wachte, the soldier would see us and then we would run away into respective barracks, and the head, the German head of the compound, went on the German, on the women's barracks and he wanted to know who was seeing the Maenner, and nobody came out. Well, then he said, if nobody comes up, every tenth girl is going to get...the women had some hair, short, but they didn't had their hair shaven completely, so he said every tenth girl going to have her head shaven for punishment, so my wife thought why some women who never went up, talked to a man, why should they have their heads shaven so she volunteered, and she came up...yes, I have been the one that spoke to the man. And to show him that...to show the other girls that she was so brave, he said because you came up so brave, you go back out. You're not going to get your head shaven, and then he took every tenth girl and got her head shaven. The next morning we were...the girls were working three times eight hours. We worked twelve hours. The women worked eight hour shifts, so sometimes we would pass each other coming into camp and other and I I wasn't sure whether...I didn't know whether they had her hair shaven or not because they were all wearing scarves over over their heads because the work, it was so...the girls who did not, did have their head shaven, they would put a piece of hair just in front of it to show they had some hair, and I wasn't sure whether my friend at that time had had her hair shaven or not. Later on I found out she was the

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brave one. She volunteered and then she didn't get her head shaven, and the women had the same problem. Women weren't as severely beaten as the men. The men were cruelly beaten for any chance worth giving, for any reason, by the guards, by the we had...by the Germans who were criminals or homosexuals. They always had the high status in prison camp as Germans. They were beaten by them, and and so life was miserable and we didn't know what what really was going to be. What we didn't know in 1945 that the war was really coming to the end and one day was announcement that we should...if want to the _____...the warehouse where they kept the clothes and food and so on, if you want to get...all we want to take all the bread we can carry, all the clothes we can put on...they open up the warehouses and then they line us up on the march. We're marching out of the prison camp and then unknown to us, the Russians were about two days away. We didn't have no idea. We were marching and I remember the first night there was a...we wind up in a big barn. It was a very dark night, and I heard from far away noise, noises from women, so I figured my girlfriend must be there, so I plough on through, stepping on all kinds of people and everybody cursing and so on, and I finally found her. It was January 1945, very cold, and everybody had his own bread tucked away and make like a little bag out of towels and so on. Today's today's wife, sitting there, she lost all her bread. She was sitting there and she was just helpless like, so I did...I split up my bread in

02:9:30

half. I said now don't loose it anymore, and ____ and I said be careful and see what's going to be. After walking a few days, they decided put us on transport trains. At that time, afterwards we knew it that a lot of people were...same transport trains were from Auschwitz, from all over. What happened is the place was overrun by the Allied armies, and they didn't want us to fall into their hands, so they kept us away...I don't know...they didn't know what really what to do with us, just away from the Allied's hands. Then we were put on trains and my wife happened to see which train I was in and happened to be the next train next to ours was for the women train. The women were separate and the men were separate. And we were driven all the way across Czechoslovakia, Theresienstadt, but I must say that the Czech people were very brave about wherever we drove over overpass, they would stay and would throw bread, and it was very dangerous for them because there would be...the German soldiers would shoot at those people throwing bread at us. Well, I I was always trying to figure out better way how to build a better mousetrap, so I got on on the side the the open cattle wagons so I'll be higher than everybody else, and I would catch my bread in mid-air and then I went over and I want to share that bread with my girlfriend, today's wife, and you can't just break the bread and throw it over to the next train, say give it to Helen. You have to deliver it in your own hands, otherwise they'll never see the bread, so the train was moving and I went over to the side and I say you stretch your arm out. I want to make sure...throw the bread over to to her so she gets it personally and we stayed for a while practicing, make sure she catches it and I threw the bread and she didn't catch it and it was quite a loss, something like this, and it means...means a lot to give...that time when you're that hungry to give half the bread to somebody you really care for.

Q: Tell me about the conditions aside from the horrible conditions on the train.

02:12:

A: On the transport, we got loaded up again wall to wall, standing room only. When you're on a transport without sleep so many days, you're standing up and your knees are bending. You're half asleep, but you're afraid to lay down because you get tramped by others. When you're like this, you you...one human being doesn't care about the other. You just step over. You...when you lay down, you never get up. They...people just stamp over you, everybody just like in a transfixed. You know, when you loose your sleep, you loose complete like consciousness. You stay and your knees keep on bending completely back and forth but you are holding on when you're afraid to fall asleep and we'd dri...driven on the trains for about two weeks in January '45. All we had is blankets. Lucky for us, that we had some snow falling and then you would gather one from another's blanket snow...that was...at least we had something to drink. Was...otherwise you ...it's very hard to be without food, but it's much harder to be without water. And by the time, you know, we're driving...people were dying with...whoever died they were

thrown overboard. By the time we came to the destination which was in Berlin, Oranienburg, there weren't too many people on the train. I like...I want to describe the first time we realized that the Germans...Germans are losing the war, we were driving in our open cattle wagons right through the heart of Berlin and we saw all the destruction and we didn't believe our own eyes. Finally we seen that the Germans really are getting what's coming to them and there were big slogans...we're going to fight to the last drop of blood, and so on. We went...few people who were left on the on the freight train were embracing each other, who couldn't believe that really Germans really got something in return for our for our pain, for our..... We were unloaded in the big hangars in Oranienberg. There was aircraft factory and aircraft hangars and because the Allies bombed them every day, the the hangars, the roof is all made out of glass and there was one single pane of glass left...all knocked out and we were laying on the concrete with the water and snow on sheer concrete and water and I I lost so much weight. I I must have been way down and I had...I got sick. I had diarrhea and I was laying in that wet...on the wet floor, snow on the concrete, and I thought

02:15:

this was it. I really gave up and I felt so cold and I was so sick and then I heard a voice calling me, and there was my friend who I slept with in in Gleiwitz. He was a barber and being a barber, he...apparently he cut some hair for the SS and they gave him some scrap of food, and he picked me up and he saw that I was already on my...laying there and dying. He took my clothes off and he cleaned me up and he gave me a dry pair of pants and he brought me a hot bowl of soup. When I drunk the soup like somebody gave life into me. I felt so so different, and I gained some confidence, some more strength. We were there for a few weeks. Again we were marched back and forth and carrying stuff back and forth and beatings and and there were...they had some...at that time they had some non-Jewish prisoners. They would stay inside and the Jews had to go outside and being marched back and forth and and ran around the back, just just to torture us, but when you...at that time, you're just like numb. You exist but you really don't...don't exist. To a certain extent you're just like punchy. You don't care and you...you're just not a human being. You're stripped from everything and it was just...you weren't thinking much more than just...you you had a pain in your stomach and you were cold. I remember laying and dreaming if I would ever be a free man, all I wanted to have is a hot glass of tea with a big loaf of bread, cut very thick slice, and I would just drink the hot tea and eat the bread, one by one. That was my biggest dream. After I got liberated I never done it. I...after...from...when we were on...off the trains, when we were unloaded first Oranienburg...I want to come back...when I got down from the train, we were...all snow was on the ground. You know, I've seen all that snow and I was yearning to catch a little bit, so I stood there and picked up a handful of snow and put it in my mouth, and at that they marched the women by and that's the first...last time I saw my future wife. She said, don't eat that. You're going to sick,

02:18:

like I would care. (Laughter) And that's the first...last time I saw her till after the liberation. Coming back to Flossenburg, we got loaded up again in open cattle wagons and driven to unknown. After a few days we arrived in that terrible prison camp Flossenburg, which is in Bavaria. That's at top of the mountain. There were stone quarries. Very cold. There were so many people...all a lot of nationalities...Russian, and any kind...Greek and you could hear all languages, and we were laying on barracks. It was very cold and there was no food at all, so one day I walked by and I have seen some Russian carrying big kettles with food and I saw them going outside the camp carrying to somebody, so next morning I got up real early, like three o'clock, and I followed them. What they did they were carrying food for the German guards but while they're carrying the food, they would open up the kettle and everybody had their little pot. Everybody hang it on the string...they would dip in. So I went with them carrying it and they would dip in. I would dip in too, but since you are afraid to carry it for a long time, you have to consume it right away and that soup was so hot and I drunk it, being hungry. It's like swallowing a flame. As hungry as I was, I could not eat for a few days because all my inside was burned. The piece of small bread I was given once in twenty-four hours, I could not eat. I would hold it in my...behind my shirt because my...my whole inside was completely burnt. That prison camp was one of the worst camps, and I knew this was going to be my last one. I never expected to live through that camp. There were beatings daily. There were hangings daily, and I could smell the burned flesh. They had...when you get up in the morning, you go to the wash barracks. They would take all the corpses, un...undress them and they were laying down like a collection in the wash barrack and they would take the number here, tattoo it big letters across the chest so they can check them out. When you get up in the morning, you go to the wash barrack, you step over some corpses and you wash your face and they had like a big row, just one faucet and a urn like to wash, and because the crematoria was too small, they would...down the hill they would burn it completely, and the stench of burned flesh was always in the air. You would smell it completely. It's a nauseating smell, and you would see the smoke rising from this. It was like down the valley, down the hill like...day and night it was a terrible smell and it was an awful thing to live through, and I I was down so much that I I thought I'm not going to live through it. It's so cold, so they send me to work...one day they sent to me to work at the stone quarry. It had long wagons running on on rail, like railroad, small railroad track, narrow ones. They would load the stones. You would go down the

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hill. You step on...you ride down the hill with it. Then on bottom of the hill to get out of the way, you had to jump out and pull the the wagon out of the way because next one is coming, depends on how much weight they have. Some of them went further. Some of them went shorter and the next prisoner to me, I don't know why he got away or from me and I could not push the wagon far enough from the next one coming not to hit me and I got hit from both sides, and I broke my ribs, got mine smashed. I remember I come...I came into the barrack that night. My whole side was swollen and I was loosing

consciousness and I'm coming back. I was like on pins and needles and I was...they took me out in the morning to work and I...and I was in such terrible pain and I...somehow or other I lived through, endured, and the swelling went down. I put some cold compresses and I endured it. I used to put some...when I went on the on the stone quarry, I used to take some paper and put it under my...under my jacket. I only had a jacket and a pair of pants to keep warm, and I used to take paper and wrap around your wooden shoes, but when you get back into the prison camp, you had to take it off because they check you and you cannot have anything under you, only just your jacket. They want to make you that you stay cold because the the paper did keep you warm. The paper in the morning is stiff. By the time you get through all day long, it's nice and soft already and we had to take it off and get cold again. And I knew that this is going to be the end. It was very hard, and one day they were looking for strong men, and I figure I got to get out from there, so there were a lot of clothes what they took off from the

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people who had died. They were laying on the side. I put on about three coats and I got in line and I blow my cheeks and they look at me. Strong...I had three coats on me. I looked like a strong man and they picked me to the transport, but I remember (cough) we were fourteen days on an open cattle wagon with no water. I had seen some empty bottles so I ran away from the transport and I grabbed two bottles, fill them with water and stuff them in my...behind my belt and I come back. The transport left already. After the war I found out that that transport was put in a barn, was torched. Poured gasoline and torched and whoever was trying to escape got machine gunned. That's another just sheer luck in the chain of my survival. I really believe maybe my mother was there watching over me. The next transport I volunteered and went up. They put us on trains. We wind up in a city named Regensburg. They put us on the floor in a in an old movie house. We slept one next to each other. Went marching every morning to work on the main station where the Americans

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would at that time bomb every single day the railroad. That was the main railroad tracks, and we would fill the the craters with dirt and carry the railroad tracks and we would march and a lot of people would die. A lot of people would die. When you're a prisoner, you learn to tell the time by the sun and just about noon time the Americans, planes would come very high. You could see just a tiny little spot in the...up in the sky and they would make like a wide smoke circle and then they would throw bombs, and I would...after a while you would learn from the from the noise the bomb...which way the bomb, how close you're going to get it or how far you're going to get it. You hear that whistle...far or closer. (whistling sound) And I would...you would hear too close...I would run that way or the other way. You learn by experience, and I would run on the bridge, and the one bomb fell next to me and I got half-way buried with dirt, and I been screaming and yelling. Some other guys would pull me up, but I left one shoe inside and

on that shoe I I was mourning so much because I could not walk without shoes and it was a big loss just to lose that one shoe. Later on I retrieve from somebody who who I found laying there dead and I put the shoes on. Laying there in the in the (sniff) theater, we were completely covered with lice, you know, laying with each other. We didn't have any kind of hygiene or any kind of water to wash for so many weeks and we were completely overrun with lice that our flesh were eaten with lice and you couldn't get rid of it anyway. There was no, nothing provided for us. When we were marching, everybody been trying to march next to the curb because as much the Germans didn't have cigarettes, they smoke up to a little small stump, so when sometimes the wind would blow the stumps next to the curb and you would pick up that stump and I found this can from shoe polish and I would loosen it up and put it in there and sometimes I would find a piece of newspaper or a piece from a telephone book like, fine paper, and I would get up in that movie house

02:28:30

like three o'clock in the morning when everybody would sleep and I would roll up a big cigarette and that was my biggest pleasure and I would smoke that cigarette and one day I came in and a big, big guy...kapo, a German prisoner also...he smelled it and he came in. Not only he took the cigarette away from me, I got a terrible beating from him, not...I don't know all the reasons. He just took, took his anger for some reason out on me because I was...I was brave enough to get up three o'clock in the morning and smoke a cigarette. There was a buddy system (cough). We would sleep two, because everybody had one blanket and it was cold, so if you find...you always find somebody, a buddy. It was always the buddy system. Nobody would walk alone. You always go together, two. When you sleep you put one blanket under you and the other blanket you cover both of us and from breathing you keep warm that way. One night I was...I don't know who the person is...all I knew is that he was another prisoner and I slept and then I touched him, and he died right sleeping with me. And although I've seen so many people die around me, that was a terrible experience that I slept with somebody that died right next to me. And next morning I was standing alone and somebody else looked for for buddy system and we would pair up again and we walked together. Just unknown...just anybody...just being together. After a few weeks in Regensburg, apparently the Allies must have been pushing, unknown to us...we were we were marching nights and I guess the reason they didn't want to go daytime maybe the planes would spot us. We would sleep whenever we would stop close by...in a barn or whatever and work, walk nights. My feet were swollen so I couldn't take my shoes anymore. I was afraid...be afraid take my wooden shoes off because the swelling was over...like over-flowing my shoes. I would not walk. I

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would slide my feet going back and forth. I remember one...one night we pulled...in the night we pulled in into a farmer's big barn. We came to this barn. There was a lot of rotten potatoes laying there...real rotten...and they were all running to it, starting eating

those potatoes, and the farmer's woman could never see how a human being could eat stuff like this, so they shoved it away from us and as they said they're going to give us some food. And I remember hearing from far away she was arguing with the SS that she want to feed us and they wouldn't let us to feed us, but finally she won and they they boiled the potatoes, you know, and peeled, and they were peeling it, and the farmer stood there with a big pan and gave everybody a pan full of boiled potatoes and she would stay with a big loaf of bread and cut a big loaf of bread and give everybody a slice of bread, and I guess the woman never seen human beings like this because even being German, she stood there. She had tears in her eyes and gave everybody a big slice of bread, because she'd never seen human beings like that, but the...I'd like to describe the condition of the march. When you march, and most of us would...couldn't hardly walk. We just keep on going like pushing our feet, sliding. For myself, I had my feet swollen and I knew the end was going to be soon because I I just could not walk anymore and I was walking like my nerves were carrying me. I was

02:33:

just, just going like this and the way you march is when you look around, you find yourself to be the last one in the column. You don't want to be the last one because you get the last one, you mostly get shot, so you push forward. You constantly without anybody prodding you...we were moving fast because nobody wanted to be the last. The minute you look around and you find yourself the last in the column, you go beyond everybody, push forward, till you fall back again, and me being so emancipated and couldn't walk anymore, every time I heard a shot...you heard shots all night long...I would have instinctively such a...in...instinctively such a reflex because I felt...I was like like an animal...I felt it's going to be me next. And as I walked my wooden shoes...somehow or other my feet got...hit each other and I fell, and I closed my eyes and nothing happened and I look out of the corner of my eyes and I've seen the column walking down the...down the road, and I I felt good. My feet, they couldn't carry me. I was laying there on the side of the road in the snow and I could...could have died there. I felt real good. I was at peace with myself. I didn't have to walk. And apparently in in the morning a farmer walked by...must have heard me moaning...and he picked me up, put me on the wagon and brought me into this barn. The German tried to feed me. They gave me milk and piece of bread with a pad of butter on it. I couldn't eat. I couldn't drink milk anymore. And I...and the funny thing is they would open up the barn door and they would ask other women to come to see human being. I was sitting there and I had a beard from January and that was May. Never shaven, never cleaned and I must have been about sixty-five, seventy-five, seventy pounds. They would open the door and they took one look at me and they would cry and close the door again. Well, fortunate for me the American Army, 6th Army came in. Next day I was liberated. Right hard on the Austrian border. The time was...the town name was Lebanau (?)bei Laufen. Next day the Americans came into town and the farmer took me back in and they brought me to the Americans. Now, anybody who didn't live through being eaten alive by lice will not understand that but when I came to the American, they undressed me and they threw

DDT and like the whole world stood still. I must go back, because when I came to the farmer, they took my...my striped jackets out...off, and they gave me some...some of their civilian clothes and they buried it' it_ was so infested with lice, but I remember when they put me back me on the wagon to carry me to the Americans, I took like a visual picture of the farm because when I was lib...liberated later on I came back and I...and I retrieved my pants. Had the German woman dig out my pants and boil it outside and I carried it till...till now...

02:37:

Q: Your...your jacket?

A: My jacket. But coming back, I...when I was deloused there was such a great feeling when they threw the DDT like your flesh is like in a heat, eaten by lice and I always felt the DDT stopped it, just like all of a sudden you're like in space. You don't hear, nothing...just all of a sudden it's all quiet. Well, fortunate for me I was liberated by the Americans. They converted a woman's prison into a hospital and they they pressed some doctors from this from the town into helping us and the first morning...the first morning there were rounds. I've seen some American colonels and German doctors making rounds, and I was laying on a white sheet and I hadn't slept on a white sheet since I left home. I remember just touching the white sheet and I knew I was liberated. It was a funny feeling to lay on a white sheet again, and as they came to me I...made the rounds...I felt at that time I'm just going away. I'm just dying. I felt such a funny feeling and I knew I was liberated and I was laying on a white sheet and I have to die now, and I felt sorry for myself and I start to cry and I remember the German doctor walked over to me, held my pulse, and he says to me: "Weinen Sie nicht, weinen Sie nicht, Sie sind nur verhungert". Don't cry. Don't cry. You're only...very, very undernourished, and they fed me on the intervenious because I could not tolerate any food anymore. I remember many times they would come in, whatever some big authority would come in and visit. They would come to me and they would uncover and to show how human flesh can be eaten up alive, especially here...you didn't see any flesh at all. It was just one black spot next to each other eaten up and I couldn't stand looking at my legs because all you could see the knees and all the bones. You know, whenever they uncover me I took the sheets and would cover back up. I couldn't stand looking at myself, but I was very fortunate. Being young I did not get any any major sicknesses except I was really undernourished and after they fed intraveinous, the nurse would walk with me under arms

02:40:

and carry me out...walk me out in the sun. I slowly recovered but I could not stand being in the prison. There was a prison. It was the bars, but we were free but I just could not stand being...as soon as I felt better I left down the valley and there were Americans stationed there and there were a lot of Americans from Chicago speaking Polish. I would speak to them and they say well, why don't you stay with us, so I I...they at first gave me

a mop and I fell over the mop. I couldn't push it. They say you stay and I would help out in the canteen, pour coffee and so on, but what they did, they would throw the food away, they would dig ditches because they wouldn't...at that time they wouldn't give it to the Germans, the food. They would rather put it in the ground and cover with dirt, and I says to that...in Polish to the guy from Chicago, I say I got a lot of guys who are hungry there. Why don't you let me have some food? And I managed to trade him for some food from German motorcycles, and I would load myself with turkey, with chocolate cake, with all kinds of goodies. It was hanging with strings all over and I would come in, driving in into that big prison yard and everybody would yell here, here. Everybody was hungry. And it was...I was already feeling much better. I had a motorcycle and I was already...and the Americans, the Polish Americans, they gave me a lot of...you know, I got dress and I got a watch and I was already...one day I pulled into the prison with some food and I seen a lot of people of standing around the office and I say hey,

02:42:

what's going on here. There's a Jewish girl there. Well, I haven't seen a Jewish girl since I left for so many months. It was a novelty. I didn't even believe that any Jewish girls would be left alive after going through such an ordeal. So I just pushed the crowd to see who it was, look at a Jewish girl. To my big surprise, it was my cousin, and of course she was looking for her husband-to-be and then and at that time was just traveling like we know it now. We just hitchhike rides with the trains. Maybe would go from one town to another, further. Then you hitch rides by truck, by bus and so on. It was...and then well, he say well are you coming with us, so we was hitch-hiking up north. That was south. We went all the way north to Bayreuth (ph) and there I had an uncle from my marriage, married to my to my aunt. He wasn't an uncle anymore, but it was more a communal life and the people were getting together and we get...we had some more better privileges because of being Holocaust survivor from the Germans and things were already more livable and I had a room in a German villa and the lady was very nice to me and she been trying to...sometimes the Germans Germans were funny because they mostly, when you talk to them they would never kill anyone. They never knew about anything and most of them had some kind of Jewish relations surprisingly. It was...kind of struck me very funny.

Q: Can can you tell me how you find your wife again, your wife-to-be?

A: Yes, my wife-to-be. Where I was then in Bayreuth and my wife...you you would hear sometimes where you can get some...one said some shoes because you couldn't get anything, so she heard through through somebody...she lived not to far away in Oberpfalz(?) that in Beyreuth you can get some shoes, somehow or other trade it in for your clothes and so on, and they said that she knew that one name, named my cousin what she found me by name, and my wife on her transport...my cousin was in Auschwitz. She met her on the transport and when the women got unloaded together, my...she knew the name and they got to talk to each other, so she remembered the name so she says who

is she with, so she said she is with a cousin. She mentioned my name and my uncle, so she knew that I was alive and she send me a note that she's in Weiden, would like to see her, because we really...you know, we liked each other but there wasn't any of my connection whether I could say it, so I I was away. After a week I I came driving into the town and somebody showed me where they...she lived with somebody. They all...at that time people...there

02:45:

weren't accommodations. People invite...people would sleep ten people on the floor and everybody would sleep on the floor. We were just happy to be alive. And I came up and I and we embraced and I said to her something...we're going...soon we're going to get married and we would court each other and we met in 1946 and we court each other until 1947 and I went to school, part school anyway. At one time my wife even got papers through some relation in New York to come to America but she wouldn't leave me that time because we were serious getting married. And then we got married in 1947.

Q: Where did you get married?

A: We were married in Weiden, her home town. We made our own wedding with...she cooked and we prepared our ownself and we got on onto the Chupa and we got married and you know at that time were that the custom is to fast before before you get married. You eat after you get married, so we were completely worn out and we were fasting because we had a real orthodox wedding at that time. At that time not only you had orthodox wedding, it was a custom to say the prayer for the dead right at the wedding ceremony. That's...right after the war was the custom. Was kind of happy and sad to remember your dear ones you lost. And one time I been I been visiting in Munich and I seen a line and I asked these people what is the line for. He said we're registering to go to America, so I got in line and I registered. What it was...at that time, 1948, President Truman signed into the law to let in a hundred thousand displaced persons to America. Till then there was nowhere you could go. Can you imagine we were liberated after such a tragedy. When we were liberated in 1945, you couldn't go to Palestine. You couldn't go to America. You couldn't go anywhere. We were just stuck in the barracks and DP camps. It's a terrible ordeal to go through, to to go through what we went through. There was no homeland, and we didn't want to stay in Poland, to remind...

Q: Where were you living in Poland, in in a camp or...?

A: In Germany?

Q: In Germany?

A: In Germany. No. I...when I left there I went to my uncle who had already went in the private...they were like given private villas, ___ the German took in so many

Fluechtlinge. Well, in 1947 we married and we lived in Weiden, Oberpfalz and then I went to Munich and registered. Three months later we were called and we were...we were stayed in Hamburg for about a week until we got on an American troop ship. The American troops were coming to to Europe and the empty ships were going back. We were coming on those ships. The ship's name was the General M.G. Steward and I was very sick. I was so seasick. I thought I'll never make it to America. I was the first one to get over the gangplank. I was so sick. And we came to the Jewish Service and they dispersed people who came to America, not to all be stuck in New York, so we were very fortunate and we got tickets to Washington, D.C. Were given two tickets and we were met by a caseworker and they gave us first night a room in a hotel and then we were given an apartment and then we went to both to American ____ school. We were both didn't speak any English. We...I went to school about two months and it was hard for me to get checks like I could not stomach...I wasn't used to somebody gives me a handout, so after two months I told them to look for me for a job. I'm young and I I'm able to work and they saw on a construction to work would be good for you to be in plumbing.

Q: And you came to which city?

02:45:45

A: To Washington, D.C. We lived in Washington, D.C...Spring Road...one room...and that was already a good time because we have our own room and our house. I remember the first day going shop. We went to a big Safeway. We would look at the can. We would not know what the contents is and we just look at the pictures. Many times we would bring the can and open up and it was the wrong thing what we thought it would be, from on the picture. But it was a good thing to be in a self-service because nobody stood around you while you stood a long time pondering what's inside, what's not, or how to read English. And it...it's not easy to come to a strange country with no friends, with no language, with no skill. I...I went, after two months I went on construction and it was very hard and many times I would, I would take the guy who worked with me and I would take his tool box out and put it on the floor and he would tell me what's the name of each tool and I would write it down, so he wanted me...I was a helper. He wanted something. I would look, see what he wants, and I would hand it to him because I felt disoriented. I I been trying to to have eye contact, see what...what's he pointing to, and many times I would get home and I would say to my wife, you know, I'll never learn that language because it takes a long time. It sounds just....ho ho ho something. It doesn't go...doesn't enter into your brain, and all of a sudden just like that I started to understand. And then it got to be much easier.

Q: I want to go to back just a minute and have you tell me about how you retrieved the jacket, because I know you contributed that to the Museum?

A: When I was that time in the barn, the farmer took my clothes off and gave me some civilian clothes, and they buried the jacket into the ground. Well, after I was out in the

hospital and I was helping with the Americans, making the food, I wanted the Americans...they had a lot of surplus from the German army...motorcycles. I managed to get one of those big motorcycles. That was a...that was a great thing to drive, and I was just driving around just for pleasure. That was the biggest thrill for me, and then one day I decided I'll find that farm when I was there. I remembered the farm. I made a visual memory how the farm looked like. I was driving around and I spotted that farm and I came in. When I came in, the farm woman thought I'm going to harm her. She was kind of scared. From beginning, the Germans was the beginning were afraid for people from...and I said no, don't be afraid. I'm not going to harm you. I'd like to have my jacket, so she pointed out and we dug it up. I just... didn't want the pants, just the jacket and she made a fire outside in a in a big kettle and we boiled it up, and meantime she want to feed me very badly, just to appease me. She still was afraid of me, and I said don't be afraid now. Just...after the water boiled real good and I just rung it out and throw it in my backpack and I drove off, and somehow or other, I had a vision that someday, somewhere, somebody's going to want to see how we looked, and that's going to be part of the story, and for years I had it in my closet. Sometimes friends would come in and I would show them my my concentration camp jacket, and they would look at it and I would explain to them that this is not an ordinary jacket. It's made out of ersatz instead it was made out of wood. We used to kid that's all that Bayerisches Holz, means from Bavarian wood made out...it's made out of it, and even one day I saw friends come over and I tried to put it on and of course it was too small for me, and I still...it's ripped right in the back because I ripped it where I already grew to be big. But I somehow or other I I wanted to carry it on and at one time I was thinking about taking it and sending it to Israel by my kids, wanted it to have, leave in the family, but then when they started the whole thing up, the Holocaust Museum, I decided that's where it belongs and I called them one day and I said I've got the jacket. I'd like to donate it to you, to you. And I brought it over and that's how today.

Q: Can you also clarify how you were reunited with your wife? It was a little unclear to me where this happened and how this happened?

A: Well, I lived in the city in Bayreuth and my wife lived in Weiden, Obepfalz which was like sixty miles away, and when she heard about the news that you can buy in Bayreuth some shoes, trade them for some goods, and that my cousin whom she met on the transport...she mentioned her name...she said...she knew that she was my cousin. They introduced themselves on the transport. She says I knew in Luksenmburg in camp who were friends, close friends, so she asked her who is the lady ?_____, so she said who had cousin Luksenmburg, ____ Luksenburg and my uncle, so she was...she didn't know exactly how I feel about her, but she just wrote a note that she's here if I would like to see her, and then I came up and I right away I said yes, I love you and we kind of get married, and for good will I had a watch at that time. A watch was a big thing. I left my watch with her.

Q: And that was...I want to ask you one other question. You had mentioned at one of the camps that there were homosexuals, and I was wondering did you see these people? How were they treated?

A: Well, homosexuals were only the Germans. They had...you know, we had a red star and they had a black...black triangle. In other words, if a German soldier would look at you, he knew what you're in for, whether you were Jewish or you were homosexual or you're a criminal. Well all the Germans, no matter what they were, they were always kapos high up, and if they seen a young person and they wanted him, they could have him. If you didn't go, you got beaten severely till you're dead so there was lots going on. We've seen it...you just keep away and who was very unfortunate had to suffer through that too. And there was also _____ a lot of suffering for a lot of people. Of course we've seen it and you can drop your head down. You don't want to see the person too, because we understand. There is a lot of thing you have to understand for some...something is unfortunate for somebody. Maybe he looked better. Maybe he had some more flesh on him. He was appealing to him. He actually took him. There was nothing for a person to do then to give in and maybe help you to breathe. Sometimes you do a lot of things to survive.

Q: Thank you very much. Very interesting story.

A: And I want to add...I want to add that I feel if there would have been an Israel, there would be somebody to speak for us. There would be some kind of spark. There would be somebody speaking for us, because there was...even if you want to go somewhere, there was...everything closed for us. I feel that Israel must live because not only then, now is a lot of hope, a lot of people...where would the Russian Jews go now if there wouldn't be Israel. There is...I feel there is a must that Israel must live and also living in this country, I appreciate very much for the President of the United States and the American people that they gave us a chance...not only me and my children. I am very grateful because my children would never attain what they did and my children are all professionals and that's my crown. That's what I live for. I'm very grateful and I want to thank you, the American people and the government, very much.

Q: We want to thank you. We appreciate your sharing this story with us. It's a very good story.

A: Thank you.

Q: Do we want to do the pictures?

End of Tape #2
Conclusion of Interview