United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with George Salton
October 10, 1990
RG-50.030*0200

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with George Salton, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on October 10, 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.

GEORGE SALTON
October 10, 1990

Q: Good morning. Would you please state your name, your date of birth, and your place of birth?

A: My name now is George Salton. I have used two other names in the past, but this will come out in...later in the discussion. I was born in Chemish (ph) on January 7th, 1928.

Q: And could you tell me a little bit about your parents and their occupations?

A: Uh my father was a small-town lawyer in Poland before the war. We lived in town called Pitchen (ph), which a suburb of a county seat called _____, uh _____ in German, and uh my mother was from a town called Chemish and when the time came for me to be born, she decided to go home to mother where her parents lived in Chemish and uh where the hospitals were better, so I was born in Chemish but I lived there for only seven days of my life, and then they brought me home and I grew up in this town called Pitchen. Uh my family consisted of my parents and an older brother, brother who was six years older and it was a as I remember it a nice life really for for us. While we were not very rich. They were kind of a good town to grow up in uh as a youngster with woods and rivers and swimming and going to school.

Q: When you were growing up, was was the town uh mostly a Jewish town or a non-Jewish town?

A: Well, it was a...the town was a typical eastern European or Polish _____...uh I'm talking about the suburb in which I lived, and it may...I I I suppose it had maybe five thousand people of...and of the five thousand, maybe two thousand or two and a half thousand were Jewish. Uh our family was relatively assimilated so I had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends. I spoke only Polish and not Yiddish so that uh immediately uh limited my association with uh youngsters from religious Jewish homes. And I I considered myself Polish as well as Jewish. Of course that view of myself uh changed very quickly once the war came, because my Christian friends reminded me very soon that I was not one of them.

Q: What uh...from the time the war began, what...how did your life change before you went into the ghetto, after the Germans came?

A: Uh the war as you know started in September, September 1st, 1939. I was eleven, eleven and a half years old and when the war started I remember uh as it was starting I remember the excitement of...excitement on the part of an eleven year old of seeing our parents uh you know getting ready and listen to the radio, listen to the news and there was something about uh I suppose exciting about it. Then the war started. My father who was a a reserve officer in the Polish army expected to be mobilized but before anything

happened uh the Germans came to our town and to the best of my recollection it was on the 8th of September, about a week or eight days after the war started, and uh things have changed from then on. First uh the day after the Germans came or maybe two days after, they uh broke into the synagogue uh and uh burned the Torahs (ph) and destroyed uh the the the contents and the furniture and they imposed restrictions on the general population, but more severe restrictions on the Jews, arrested a number of uh intellectuals or people that they considered to be uh leaders of society. Among them was my father who was arrested by the Gestapo about a week or maybe two weeks after the Germans arrived and and uh the life was changed. It was getting progressively worse. The restrictions were...that were imposed on us were were by themselves small but progressively more severe and the penalties were very, very severe, so therefore, for example, one was prohibited from shopping in certain stores or later prohibited from uh being walking on certain streets or later required to wear a white arm band with a blue Star of David on it, or prohibited from using the trains or the buses. While each restriction by by by itself was not all that severe, the penalty was very frequently imprisonment or execution and consequently life was changed. And as as time passed, uh life became more and more difficult. In addition to it, there were Jews, and my parents in particular were unable to exercise uh their professions or make a living and we had to sustain ourselves by slowly selling whatever possessions we had...furniture, fur coats, piano...and so the life was difficult and uh and in addition to it, my my friends, my former associates who were Christians uh now were quite uh sensitive to the fact that I was not one of them and made me and let me know about it. I remember the day when the when our synagogue was destroyed and when the Germans pulled out the torahs on the street in front of the building and burned it...uh we youngsters were observing this and wanted to know what the Germans were doing. My Christian friends stayed and laughed and said that that's kind of a funny uh incident where I and maybe one or two other Jews who were there felt a a sense of damage or destruction, and kind of laughed, you know, destroyed and so things like this have happened. So my life has changed both because there were restrictions on the Jews, because there was uh economic hardship, and because there was a general rejection by those of my friends whom I with whom I associated prior to the war.

Q: Now you then went into a a ghetto. Is that correct? Can you tell me about that?

A: Yes. I...let me just add something else. There is one something else that happened of course. Uh the the war started in September of 1939 and and shortly we were occupied uh mid-September or late September, the public schools opened again. Schools in Europe started usually the first Monday in September, and I went to school and I was...I think was in the fifth grade at that time and went to school because it was time to go to school. And I remember my teacher who who was known as anti-Semitic, my Polish Christian teacher, uh taking me aside with some sense of embarrassment and telling me that Jews were no longer allowed to attend school, so there was another change. That was another another restriction on my life. To to go back to your question, yes, uh life was getting more difficult. There more and more restrictions. My father, after a number of months of

uh being imprisoned, was uh released, came home a broken, sick man and uh the restrictions that the Germans imposed upon us were greater and greater. There was some terror. There was some executions. We were basically uh we were basically conditioned to to to obey the laws and the restrictions, the demands, until early in 1942 uh the ghetto was established in in _____ and uh slowly the various uh Jewish communities both in the town and the neighborhood, the villages were compelled to leave all possessions behind and move to the ghetto, so in the spring of 1942 my family uh was required to move to the ghetto and the ghetto was in the oldest part of town. It was very congested. There was lots of misery and hunger and uh uh sickness and it was really as terrible as one can imagine life to be. I was at that time fourteen years old. Let me talk to you a little bit about the ghetto if that's OK. There were always I would guess maybe fifteen to twenty thousand Jewish people in this very small section of the ghetto, uh small section of the town. It was surrounded by a very tall wooden fence which was guarded continuously by both German and Polish police. Food was very limited and there was really no room to live. We managed to to share a room with a with one of my father's brothers who was also an attorney and people were living outside on the street and it was just terrible and in those circumstances the ghetto was full of rumors or speculations. Uh people were speculating that something is going to happen. There were rumors that people who are not working will go to work, uh will be compelled to to go to some labor camps outside of the of the ghetto and to to work in the forests. There was other speculation that people will be sent here and there. It was a fearful, terrible time which was made worse by a growing terror on the part of the Germans who would come to the ghetto at night and execute people at random, just kind of break into a house and uh into an apartment house, enter an apartment on the first floor, on the third floor or in the basement and take out the two women or a man and his son and execute them, and then uh leave that apartment house and go to another one. If something in in their pattern that appeared completely random and execute some other people for no reason at all. It did condition us, however, to be really fearful and terrorized and made us realize that uh we have virtually no choices, because the community, the the Christian community, the Polish community outside the ghetto was not supportive or sympathetic. If anything they they be...they were active in in uh spotting and denouncing Jews who left the ghetto when a penalty for doing it was execution and as the conditions in the ghetto were getting worse and worse uh people thought about doing something else, but there were virtually no choices. One either had to stay and hope for the best or take a chance and jump over the fence and that was not an easy thing to do because uh unlike soldiers who really are responsible for themselves, most people had children or wives or parents and and one who was maybe willing to be courageous and put one's own life at risk, but few people are willing to do that to their own family, so that was the life in the ghetto. Hunger, misery, terror, execution.

Q: Did you have any particular daily activity? Did you try to continue your studies or anything?

A: No, no. There was there was no opportunity to study. Some people of course in the ghetto

worked. Uh my father found a some job in some social organization which really I I think had no other value than he gave him a a a some certificate that uh that that allowed him to be excused in any kind of a a raid for for workers to work on the on railroad and so on, but there was no education. There was no...nothing formal. Uh of course our Jewish and intellectual roots uh cause us caused us to continue doing it, so there was some private private teaching and former high school students who were maybe teenagers were uh busy teaching reading and writing to youngsters and I who was fourteen was also sometimes asked to teach young children of nine or six to how to read and write, so there was a little bit of act...there was some, there was some, there was a structure to deal with it but nothing formal. Much of the time was spent uh wandering through the ghetto looking for some opportunity to to do something that would secure some food or listening to rumors or just wasting time.

Q: Did any kind of an underground organization develop?

A: There was uh...first of all, you have to understand that as a as a fourteen year old, I wasn't necessarily trusted enough to to be taken into it. Uh I don't know that there was a underground organization that uh that had plans to enter into combat, but there was, there were many underground organizations that dealt with the cultural and social life of the people in the ghetto and and uh uh approved and...I shouldn't say approved...but uh supported activities that were really prohibited by by the Germans like teaching or having some religious services or having some social services that provided whatever little help one could provide to to the inhabitants of the ghetto. It was underground. It took courage. It took commitment, even though it did not involve carrying a gun.

Q: How long were you in the ghetto?

A: I was in the ghetto about six months, and...uh in in about June of 1942, the ghetto was fully of rumors. Rife was rumors that something is going to happen and uh it gave it it caused us all to be very active, to run from place to place to to listen for some rumors, and I remember being one day uh together with my brother who was uh twenty at that time...I was fourteen...in front of a building, in that house the German work office, labor office uh and people...whatever there were there...maybe two or three hundred people standing and milling around. There was fear in the air. There was concern and at some point some of the officials of the the German officials came out and started examining identity papers of those people that were ed...on the edge of the crowd and again people were saying (cough) oh this is good or bad and those whose papers will be somehow examined will be sent out to work and others were saying those that whose papers are examined will be allowed to stay here, and it (cough)...excuse me...and in in the course of that uh activity and that...all that was accompanied you must understand while beating and kicking and hitting...and they looked at the young man's paper, a man, a young man who was maybe sixteen or seventeen at that time...I I knew him...and uh his papers, his identity card which was yellow...that was specifically uh given to Jews...uh yellow because the Germans consider yellow to be a color of shame and they were very very

much involved with the symbolism of that...and his papers indicated that he had some physical limitation that uh excused him from random assignment to la...to to work groups, and one of the Germans looked at these papers and said, ah...in German of course...you didn't want to work before so the heck with you now. And that gave us, of course, all of us, a great crowd of a few hundred people an indication that having the paper somehow stamped, the process was a positive thing. Everybody started pushing forward with their papers in hand and the Germans, the...additional German officials came out and was shooting in the air and beating and pushing people back, and it it happened that the man in charge of that office was a a man of German origin who lived in our town before the war and was a teacher, a high school teacher, my brother's high school teacher. He recognized my brother and said to him, give me your paper and of course my brother also gave him mine. Our papers were taken away and we went...our papers and the papers of a number of other people, and we went home without them. Again, the rumors were they are not letting us know what what this is all about and the next morning the Jewish police...they were kind of Jewish police is really...that's what they were called but they more like like couriers and and and uh people who help keep order...anyway a Jewish policeman came to our house and returned mine and my brother's paper and they had a stamp put from the German Gestapo. We didn't know what it meant. We, again, were driven by rumors and speculation. Uh two days later there was an announcement in the ghetto. This is now late June of 1942...I have to take some water...(pause)...announcements posted on all the buildings in Polish and in German and in Yiddish I believe, basically saying that the ghetto is being being evacuated, being moved or the inhabitants are being moved to a big farm in Ukraine. Let me just point out that this was in June of '42. Uh the German-Russian war started in June of '41 and June of '42 was the height of German success in in Russia where the large segments of Russian were under German occupation, so it made sense when they said that the ghetto population is being moved to a large communal farm in the Ukraine that sits idle. There will be work there, that the trip will take uh three days and that people should take food along for three days which really silly because we had no food, and that uh what the climate is going to be and uh what clothing to take along and that everyone except those who have stamps on their ID cards, on their identification papers, are required to to be deported. Deported is not the term they used, but to be moved to that new new location. I didn't want to stay. I was fourteen. I was the youngest son. I wanted to go with my parents, but my parents said no, uh stay here. You have a home town. You'll be with your brother. We don't know what's going to happen over there. In retrospect, I don't know...they they had some premonition that that story was really a lie as as you can gather. Anyway uh a week later the ghetto was divided into two parts. The lar...it was the large ghetto. It was a small place but we call...they called it the large ghetto. One corner of the ghetto was uh surrounded by an internal fence and the instructions were given by the Germans that all those who had their cards stamped including their wives and children had to move to that small ghetto and no one in the small ghetto...no one can be in the small ghetto without a stamp on his card and if there is anyone found without the stamp on his card, he or she will be executed and all others are to move to the larger ghetto which was then in the course of four days with great violence, and great shooting

and blood, uh driven to the railroad stations on four consecutive days and driven and taken to what I believe...and maybe some people believed to...was this farm in the Ukraine. Me and my brother stayed in the ghetto. We were assigned jobs at the local factory. Uh that was kind of a random process. Those who who stayed were assigned to to work groups, and me in one...in a group that was doing construction on a housing construction on this large uh airplane engine factory that was built by the Poles before the war but was not operating, now was operated by _____ Benz or Mercedes Benz if you wish. They are the same company, and my brother was assigned to the same factory but in another group where they were doing repairs of damaged airplane engines. And so we we were marched under guard every day to that to that factory, about uh five miles or maybe five kilometers from the ghetto in separate groups and we worked. The work was hard and miserable but we worked and we came back and we met at night in the ghetto and uh hoping to hear something from our parents because we believed, or at least I believed...I had no reason not to...that they are someplace in the Ukraine. And of course that was...there's no suspense then and of course they all went to a destruction camp and all the people were driven naked into gas chambers and killed. After about three weeks of working in that factory, one day...and our group was maybe a group of hundred people...after about three weeks of working and the marching every day to that factory, one day when the work, when the job was over, the officials in that factory said to us you are not going back. We have built a camp uh within the factory, right outside the factory walls but kind of adjoining the factory and you're staying here tonight. You're not going back. So we were taken there and the name of the camp was Reischof, and I need to look at my piece of paper here to tell you how it was spelled. It was spelled R - E - I - S - C - H- O - F. And uh when we were marched to that camp in the factory, we discovered there were about three hundred other Jewish people from other towns. Most of them were people who were selected in the process of deportation and during the day's deportation there were people who had professions like watchmakers or watch repairmen or locksmiths uh because this was a factory in which they needed people that knew something about uh uh mechanical or metal working, either mechanical work or metal work. Apparently we were taken to that camp and uh a long period of three years, almost three years, started. Uh this was a camp of some that varied between three hundred and five hundred people. Virtually all Jews. Uh the work was uh was inside the factory and inside the the plant working on lathe or drill presses for some of us. For others like me, working outside in construction or sweeping the street, and before I tell you more about the conditions and what happened, let me say something about my brother. My brother continued to work in the factory in the building in which they repaired airplane engines. So I...so he was still...he was not confined to the camp. His group continued to come every day to uh to the factory, and since I was, my job was to sweep the streets, I managed to sweep the street under the window in which he worked and so we could say hello to each other, and that continued for about four months and uh sometimes in late uh late '42, his group as well as the remnants of the ghetto that the Poles, all those people was the was their was the stamps on their ID cards and including some other groups that was still going to work from the from the ghetto, they were put on a train and shipped on to that farm on the in the east. I I discovered it when I went to see my brother that the

group was not uh no longer working there, that they were deported. I was _____, and that week a man whom...this was in a factory in Poland, a man whom I knew before the war who went to school with my brother, came to see me and gave me a note from my brother and that note indicated that he jumped out the window and joined the partisans, so he continued to to exist in the woods together with partisans. I continued to receive notes from him on and off without telling me very much about where he is or his what name he was using for a year. In September...I think it was the 7th of September, 1943...he sent me a note through some people that worked in the factory that he is about to enter on a mission which will prevent him from uh contacting me and that we shall see each other after the war and that we should find each other by writing once the war is over to our uncle and aunt in New York, New York City and this would be a way to find out each other. Needless to say, I have never heard from him since then. I have no idea what happened but I can guess that he like countless others didn't make it. The camp was (cough) very difficult. Life was difficult. There was hunger. There was beating. There were there were the guards were Ukrainians and they they were quite cruel and and miserable. Our our overseers, our masters were were Germans, German civilians who were also unpleasant. Our Polish co-workers really didn't show any sympathy and given that it was the town...the factory was in the town in which I was I I was born in, the town in which I grew up (coughing)...excuse me...every once in a while I'll meet someone whom I knew before the war who was maybe...they were they were not my age because I was too young to to really be there, but they were maybe older brothers of my friends, and their reaction to seeing me was, are you still alive. And so that was a miserable camp and whatever whatever comfort there was, we found in each other. People who were strangers, people who maybe didn't like each other, found a special fellowship, special kinship with each other and we tried to support each other and tried to help each other. (Cough) Another thing...a thing happened to me which is one of those incidents that uh that reoccurred over and over during the war where something happened over which I had really no control or or when it happened I had really no way to project what it will lead to that allowed me, that that that saved my life and gave me an opportunity to continue, you know, with my struggle to survive. The first of them was this incident of finding a man in the in the labor department who was my brother's teacher. I mean there was really no way that I would have managed, especially at my age, to have my card approved. What happened in the camp uh I started working after maybe eight months of working outdoors, sweeping streets and working on construction, I was assigned to work inside the factory and I was marched to that large building and led in together with all the other people inside the building and was walking through the factory building to my assigned place of work (cough) and I noticed that in front of me there was a man in a white coat walking and something fell out of his pocket and instinctively I ran after him, picked up that envelope it was, and chased him and gave him that envelope, and he kind of looked of me and was pleased. The look appeared pleased and walked away. It turned out that night when the police came looking for me that it was his pay envelope and he was one of the German engineers working. Now they came looking for me because he wanted to tell me that he appreciated me returning his money to him, that it was really surprising that somebody who's Jewish would not steal it but return him the money, and

frankly when I discovered it was money I was had some second thoughts of whether I should have done it or not. About six months later I we I was working on a...cleaning windows, standing on a long ladder, because in addition to working twelve hours a shift in the inside the factory, we were required to work in the evening, on weekends and doing other work and I was standing on this long ladder cleaning a window above a entrance to an office building when one of the German guard guards kicked the ladder from under me. I fell down and there was a grate at the bottom in front of the door which are common in Europe on which people were able to scrape their shoes. Anyway I fell, uh cut my knee. It was very badly damaged and injured and since we had no physicians and no medicine, it was infected and my knee was stiff and I really couldn't walk. I was running high temperature and after a number of weeks of being sick and miserable, I was selected together some others uh to be to be driven to another place which we believed was really a place where they executed people that were not useful. And uh I was too sick and too beaten to really to care, to really be able to resist it. And as I was sitting on that truck or standing on that truck with maybe six or eight or other people, that uh German master came by, the German engineer. He recognized me and uh said oh, this is a very important worker that I cannot spare and took me off the truck and a job was assigned to me, a wonderful job...the best job one could have there...to be a janitor cleaning uh toilets. That may sound strange but this was a job that one had some degree of freedom because there was not a supervisor that stood over one. One could go walk and go and clean and and it gave me an opportunity in the next four or five months to recover, but again that little incident was one of those and there were others and I will mention them as I go along, that that were those lucky things for which I claim no responsibility because when I found the envelope and gave it back to him, I had no way of knowing that where it's going to lead. Anyhow it was one those lucky incidents that allowed me to continue. Uh we were in that camp, working. Uh there were a number of miserable things...some uh executions and killing and beating and hunger and misery. I remember one incident that I I remember it quite well because I could never really understand it and I still don't. One day...it must have been spring of '43 when the leaves were turning green and and uh weather was turning turn turning nice, when two young men and they must have been nineteen or twenty, young prisoners, escaped. They tunneled themselves under the fence. It was on a Saturday or on a weekend. On a Sunday it must have been because we did work on Saturday. They tunneled themselves under the fence and escaped and there was much excitement and the Poles living in the neighborhood villages joined the Ukrainian guards in chasing them and they were caught by the by the two, by the Ukrainian guards with the help of the Polish peasants, brought back to camp, badly, very badly beaten and uh somehow the the authorities, the guards sent for the German Gestapo man who incidentally survived the war and was not not punished very much but that's another story...sent for the Gestapo man to come to deal with this breach of of order. And I remember he came on a in a in a kind of horse-driven buggy with his wife who was...he must have been a young man in his thirties with his young wife and two little children, really blonde, pink (ph) children. Left them sitting in the carriage outside of the camp gate and uh the kids were running around. The wife was sitting over there while he went inside, tortured the two men and executed them, and I could never understand how a

person who obviously had tender feelings for his family, who thought that it was a good opportunity to take his wife and children on a Sunday spring outing, would just transition from by just crossing the threshold of the gate and to become a a terri...a terrible torturer and executioner, but these were the things that happened in the camp. And I'm trying to remember...it was a long period of about a year and a half. Difficult work. Difficult conditions. Hunger. Uh many tragedies, people trying to escape and being caught and and brought back and people executed but in the passage of time in spring of 1944 or maybe it was...yeah, it was late winter 1944 when...you understand that I was taken to this camp in July of '42 and about a year and a half later in spring of '44, the Russians were coming. The Ger...the Russian front was advancing and uh and uh they were not in our town but they were someplace in in eastern Poland, but anyway they were close enough and as you may know the Russian advances were kind of _____. They will advance uh a hundred miles and then stop for a few months waiting I suppose for their supplies and logistics to catch up with them. Anyway the Russians were advancing and the Germans decided to evacuate most of their key machinery in the factory as well as us, those four or five hundred Jewish prisoners who were in the camp who by that time were considered kind of specialists or important people. So one night in a great panic the trains showed up and the machines were being loaded and dis...(cough)...uh disconnected from the electric uh wiring and loaded on the trains and the train left and the next day the rest of us were put on another train that arrived and shipped west toward Krackow (ph). Uh however in the interim between the time when the machines were put on the train to be shipped out of the town and the next day when we were deported, a number of people managed to escape. There was a group of uh about eighteen people that escaped because the gates were open. There was confusion. They escaped, uh and I have met one of the escapees after the war and who...and he lives in New York now and it turned out that they escaped. They were hidden in the woods and hiding in the woods, I should say, and then encountered the Polish national army resistance group who looked upon hiding Jews as bandits and they were, all but one were killed by the Polish resistance group. Our group in our train moved very slowly west, and we were deposited in a camp called Pruschov (ph) which was a major uh execution camp outside of Krackow. It was a camp in which most of the Jewish community of Krackow was liquidated. It was located in a on the grounds of a Jewish cemetery outside the town and there we were given new numbers. Incidentally, I had...my number in the first camp 222, a very low number. In Pruschov I had the number of 25,113, and assigned to a barrack and made to work digging holes in the in the ground which was full of skeletons and and uh graves. We were just digging holes and filling them in but it was...it was really a brutal and terrible camp. Uh people were beaten at random. There were continuous execution, almost random execution of prisoners. We stayed in that camp maybe a month, and then sent to another camp that was even worse, uh not far from Krackow called Vileshka (ph). It was a town that was well-known for having major salt mines and uh my ancestors lived in that town. I didn't say that my my original name in Poland was Salzman (ph) and uh that means salt man and my...I, as I recall the story of I heard from my father, my ancestors lived in that village, that town, and their business was to buy and transport salt to the neighboring countries and when in the late 17th century or maybe it was early 18th century, the tax

officials decided that everyone including Jews must have last name for tax purposes, and they just called my...they assigned a name to my great-great-grandfather uh that he had...uh that was associated with his occupation, so that's where the Salzman came and it was at that town that this camp was located, with most of the prisoners working in the salt mine.

Q: Let me go back for a second, if I may, to Pruschov. Can you give me a little bit more information, more detail about what it was really like and what your routine was like and and how you survived that that daily trauma?

A: Well, OK. The camp was a very crowded camp. There were barracks, wooden barracks in which there were great crowds of prisoners uh sleeping on kind of a three tier shelves. Uh food was very very limited. Our work was uh basically hard like labor where it was really no skill required and which made anyone of us expendable. Working in the factory...if someone's working on a drill press there was some value to one's identity, because if that operator of the drill press was executed, the drill press would idle until they found somebody else that they could train, but digging holes in the cemetery was really black labor, labor that was, that had no identity. It was just uh kind of useless labor and we were all vulnerable to be beaten or executed uh and uh one just existed from day to day. One just had a a kind of a inwards determination and to one's mind and to one's heart to just kind of bear with it, to to somehow avoid being identified, never to stand in the front row and if one marched in columns of five to be in the middle rather than the outside, to to appear busy, to avert one's eyes, to to be driven by an instinct for survival which was I think is in all of us. The other thing that was different about that camp...in in that camp for the first time I encountered uh women prisoners, Jewish women prisoners. They were I believe from Romania and it was it was an additional injury to my humanity to see women about whom I have romanticized, because I was just a young man of sixteen you know, being compelled to work hard and being compelled to walk around half dressed and to not being given any facilities for sanitary purposes that somehow gave them some degree of privacy, and all those things kind of added together to make us, to make me feel uh less than a human being really,but feel as a kind of a uh uh...a a a machine that whose purpose was to avoid exposure, to avoid any kind of a risk and just survive by uh obeying and following and doing the kind of things that I felt uh uh avoided uh being singled out by people, by the guards and by the SS supervisors who uh amused themselves I believe or satisfied some of their sadistic uh drives by beating and and killing people for no reason at all and and what one had to do is somehow be both lucky and be sufficiently assertive to avoid that situation when one could be singled out. Uh I I avoided it, not because I was really more aggressive than the others, but because I I was lucky. So that...when I look upon those months there, just months of of of ailment, of a of a sickness of mind and body...

Q: You were not able to continue the factory work that you had been doing at Reischof?

A: Oh no, no...we were just there, working there. And then when we reached Vileshka we

were...in which we were for a very short time, uh we were just also kind of like working in the ground and sleeping and uh and we were now emersed in a large mass of prisoners uh with the German SS men who were over us walking through the camp, you know, shooting people at random and and uh there was, we were just part of the mass. I was part of the mass.

Q: Did they tell you why they sent you to Vileshka?

A: Nobody told us anything. I was st...the the the the the consideration of being ever told or being or having any kind of explanation or justification uh doesn't apply. I mean we were kind of like uh if one has rabbits and one has chickens, one doesn't explain to chickens why they are being put in this or that building. We were treated in that way, and of course people speculated and this and that, but most of the most of our energy was was concentrated, was was spent on surviving of...on somehow nurturing that little piece of bread we received everyday, or the bowl of cabbage soup and of uh trying to make sure that our shoelaces when they broke could be repaired because if one was broken, had broken shoelaces one would limp, and if one limped one was singled out as somehow being being uh disabled and that was sufficient to be killed, so that's where our energy went, to survive. I mean the the little daily things that gave one a chance...no guarantee, a chance to make it through the day. And if one was hit by somebody or injured or if one fell down and had a bruise, that was sufficient to be singled out and not make it through the day. So that's where our energy went. Uh no one told us why we were there and we re...we really didn't ask. We were sufficiently beaten up. We were sufficiently damaged that we somehow didn't expect any explanation, didn't expect any humane treatment, didn't expect to be treated as anything that was...that had any value.

Q: What did you do at Vileshka?

A: Pardon me?

Q: What did you do at Vileshka?

A: Uh, in Vileshka we were relatively short time. I would say maybe a week, and they made me work uh on a...breaking stones. They had piles of stones that were the size of uh a basketball and they gave us a hammer and uh sit on the ground and we breaking the stones into smaller pieces and it was it was suitable for paving unpaved roads, but that's what we did. And and and again I am saying this kind of unskilled labor was the most dangerous job to to do because there was no value in any individual worker. There were there were thousands of hundreds of thousands of people gassed and killed every day so there was basically unlimited supply of replacements. Things have changed. At at the end of one week in Vileshka, the four hundred or four hundred and fifty of us who came from the factory in Reischof were assembled and they had a way of assembling us, and put on a train and moved west, or we assume it was west. I really don't know that I could tell the direction but the others said we were moving west. It was first...it was the first indication

that the identity of that group that worked for a year and a half in the factory in Reischof was still retained and had some meaning. It was a very long trip and for people that survived the concentration camps, frequently the worse memories have to do with trips. Trips which maybe by car or by conven...normal train today would take three or four hours, took four or five days. The trains were sidelines and made to wait on on some back, back towns on the back rails and without food and water, very cramped and after four days of such a journey we arrived in a mountainous region uh where we were made to leave the train, those of the few people that died along the way...we were made to leave the train. We were surrounded by uh a group of SS. Young SS men was holding dogs and machine guns and turned out it was the camp was called Flossenburg (ph) and it is in uh now in in uh it is...it was in Bavaria in not far from the Czech border, not far from a town called Hoff (ph). Flossenburg was a well-known penal camp where most of the work was in the stone quarry. Anyway, we were caused (ph) to leave. The SS were very happy to see us. They were laughing, saying well these are the first Jews we are getting here since 1939 and we're glad to have you here. And they were really cynical. Marched us into the camp and you took a _____. As the train was moving from Vileshka toward Flossenburg, it stopped at a at a town which others could identify as being Auschwitz. It stopped. I must confess I didn't know very much about Auschwitz except that it was a big and bad camp. But others of those four hundred and fifty of us or others at least in that box car in which I was confined, knew what it was and there was a great cry and lamentation (ph) that we are in Auschwitz. They must have known what it was. It's just difficult to remember. People prayed and it's always a wonder wonder to me that in those circumstances when there was no God and no mercy, people prayed. Let me take a minute. (Pause - Drinking) We were in Flossenburg for six weeks and work was in a stone quarry, very difficult work and we had to go break stones and carry stones on our back and the guards were brutal. We were for the first time really exposed to to German kapos. Kapos were uh trustees. They were prisoners, frequently prisoners from criminal institutions, from criminal prisons where people who were come...were were there for committing some violent crimes like murder, something like this, and they were made trustees in in concentration camps and we were for the first time exposed to kapos who were also brutal and miserable and who I believe tried to outdo the German guards in order to retain their privileged position. Uh it was just one of those difficult nightmares that went on from day to day and one had to survive. One had to avoid again being somehow singled out or beaten or injured or or fractured. I worked in the stone quarry. I also had the job...and I was sixteen at that time I believe...I had a job carrying dead bodies to the crematorium where they were burned. These were people who who were either executed or died in the hospital or died of hunger or exhaustion. And I worked sweeping streets. I did all kinds of work. There was one experience that I remember that is not really cruel but philosophical. It turned out that people who worked at certain jobs, they would get additional meal at noon time. They would give us one bowl of soup for two people. You have to remember a bowl of watery soup with some leaves or some piece of potato in it for two people who each one of them equipped with his own spoon and and this was ready made for conflict and combat and and and and uh the the spilling of soup and so on, but somehow before I arrived a a custom was developed over there

where the two prisoners, skeleton-looking hungary prisoners who would be given this bowl of soup to share, would feed each other, so if you gave me half a spoon, I gave you half a spoon. And if you dipped down and found a piece of potato, I'll dip down and give you a piece of potato, and so that customs or that habits or that arrangement which had both philosophical and not religious undertones, people managed to people who were strangers, people who were dying of hunger managed somehow to be disciplined and to go through that daily ritual of sharing the bowl of soup. After six weeks of work and hard labor...oh yes...I'm I'm forgetting something...when we first came to Flossenburg, we were marched by this young SS guards with their dogs up the hill to the camp, we we were brought before a very large building in a kind of assembly area, and we were...there were four hundred and fifty of us approximately, and we were all told to undress, to leave our clothing on the floor and all our possessions and we go in to take showers. Now there was concern. There was speculation, because by that time we knew about gas chambers. We knew that our parents who were who went to the to the allegedly were sent to that farm in the east were really killed and sent to gas chambers. We knew about that, and there was great concern that we may be taken to a gas chamber. This was typical...this the thing...undress...go in naked. But there were really no choices. The choice was to resist and be killed, to run, to fight, to or to just hope and to do what one was told and hope that it was true that what they said that we will take a shower. I did that. I left my clothing and I left what whatever little possessions I had of my own that I carried through all the years of camps, and these possessions were a little handkerchief in which I had tied photographs of my brother and my parents, and after that we were really given showers and when the shower was over, made out...made to go out through another door where we were given new stripped uniform and uh and uh wooden shoes and all those things that we left behind we have never seen again, so I have not had a picture of my parents until I came to the United States where my aunt uh gave me a picture of my parents when they were first married. This uh...I remember them only vaguely that way, and I have no picture of my brother. We worked. We were in Flossenburg for about six weeks. Worked very hard and one time we were exposed to a selection. Uh selection was a process where everybody stood naked and the a few SS people, one of them I believe a physician, kind of went by and marked us with a green ink writing numbers or some symbols on our forehead and he did it to me too. I don't know what it meant and we didn't know or we didn't care anyway. Didn't know, didn't care, but that night again our group was assembled, put on a train...that group of four hundred and fifty. And sent to France. Sent west I should say. Or sent west. Again this terrible long journey and it was it was uh like late spring of 1944. You remember February, March and they sent us to Pruschov. We were there for a few weeks. Then Vileshka, then Flossenburg for six weeks and about April when I have to now really estimate the specific months...uh April '44 we were sent west and after a journey of about six or seven days we arrived in a town...we didn't know where we were. I mean I got...when I say France I mean that's in retrospect. At that time we didn't know. Along the way experienced great hostility from the Germans along the way. We knew we were being driven through...we were being driven, if that's the right term to apply to a train, through through Germany. We sometimes stopped in a railroad station and through the little windows, through the barbed wires, we would call for some

water because this was the greatest suffering...that we had no water for these days, or very little water. And the Germans would mock us and say, you know, this and that...wouldn't help us. There was great hostility. After that long journey we arrived in this small town...

Q: We're going to take a brief break and change the film.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: We left off with your having just arrived at Colmar (ph).

A: Yeah, I I uh I made...I stressed some of the unfriendly and difficult and and hostile ex...encounters that we had along the way to Colmar to contrast what happened in Colmar, which uh was special and I I I remember it with great emotion, so if I get upset, let no one be embarrassed by it. We were made to leave the train at some site, rail..railroad station in the town with a sign called Colmar. I really didn't know what it was uh or what the town was, even though some people said well, it uh it's France. I just...I must confess I don't remember at what point I found out that it was France, and then under SS guard made to march through this small town which is an ancient town of uh you know...it looks medieval and old buildings and cobblestones. We had wooden shoes and our marching made a tremendous clatters on the streets. It was early in the morning and as we were being marched people were, who were going to work, civilians, were stopped. The trolley cars were stopped and people were stopped to let us pass, a column of a few hundred people in stripped uniforms. (Crying) And the people cried. (Crying) For the first time I saw support. I saw people cared. (Crying) I have to stop.

Q: It's OK, George. Just take your time.

A: You know, I never cry when I am...remember sadness. I cry when I remember happy things. Anyway, people (crying)... people cried and they threw their sandwiches or whatever they were carrying in their lunch box, packages at us which we couldn't pick up and cigarette, packs of cigarettes... (crying)...and they booed. They booed the Germans who were escorting us, who made us take of our caps every time we passed a building with a Nazi swastika flag. It really was such a special experience, not only for me but for the others with whom I have talked. While most of us didn't survive the war...of those four hundred and fifty, on that day maybe twenty-five survived or thirty survived. Uh we felt human. We felt human for for a while and that was a special gift that the people gave us. And we were taken then to a small camp. It was kind of a temporary camp in outside of of the town town of Colmar where we were kept for a week. Uh we didn't do anything. Just sat there. There were hardly any food. We were eating grass, but at night fruit and (crying) bread was thrown over the fence by unknown people into the camp. After about a week of that, and it was special. I I get more emotional about it and I become embarrassed that I am that I am about those other places which were terrible because it was a a unique encounter with human kindness which I had forgotten about. After a week we were put in the train again, again after a few, two days of traveling, arrived in a kind of a mountainous area called uh in which which we discovered was called Orbas (ph). It's a small, small village in in eastern France in which there was a unfinished railroad tunnel and in inside the railroad tunnel there was a factory set up to manufacture airplane engines and most of the machines and many of the supervisors were those people back in

Reischof uh who were who left sometimes back in in March. Again uh circumstances of of luck that for which I take no responsibility and decisions that were made outside of my presence uh completely outside of any influence that we had, that some German officials in that factory or whatever, decided that it is valuable to retain this group of four hundred and fifty specialists which they considered us at that time, and had us catch up with the machinery that was being transferred to defense (ph) and uh uh absent that, we would certain not survived because working in stone quarries or salt mines or some other places was a job where one survived for only weeks and we worked with Frenchmen, uh guarded by Germans but working with Frenchmen in the factory and it was a better camp. The French workers that we worked with, the French worker I worked with shared his food that he brought with him...they used to bring a lunch bucket and they usually shared an apple or something like that. Uh on weekends I was made to work in the in the in a farm complex in which the SS were located washing cars for soldiers and as I did that strangers would throw apples or other things to me and uh and uh, you know, the countryside was pretty. There were hills with goats on it and little villages and uh we were still unhappy and miserable and the guards would still uh the SS guards that guarded the thing was still cruel. They have uh a few people were shot and killed. One man was told by a young guard I remember who was maybe nineteen to hey, run away and he ran and as he ran about six feet, the man killed him, but it was a different environment. It was a somewhat better camp. One night I remember I was walking through this tunnel. I was made to carry something and uh on the floor there was a piece of newspaper with a large headline, and my judgment wasn't very good at that time and I picked it up and stuck inside my jacket and then that night when we looked at it, it said in German, fortress Europe under attack. It uh really was the D-Day invasion and Normandy by the Allied Forces from England. It was very reassuring. We were happy about it, but we really didn't know exactly where we were. We didn't know how the Americans were doing and the the Allies were doing. The newspaper was not uh uh was not really honest. It's kind of said they attacked but they are being beaten back. But finally we didn't expect really anything good to happen to us. We didn't expect...the whole idea of being liberated or being free or being autonomous was strange. We were conditioned now to be prisoners, to live in barracks, to be given cabbage soup, to be told what to do, to be completely without rights, to be beaten, you know, and so anyway the Americans were coming and in August as you remember...the Americans landed in June of '44. They was landing in southern France uh by early in August as I as I believe, and in August of '44 they put us in a train again and shipped us east. First the machines left and then we left. As our train went through Colmar, we looked out the windows. On our train there were box cars with four hundred and fifty of us...there were box cars and we would looked...no, we looked. We were in the box cars. We were looking out the windows and we saw the train with all the machines that we worked on sitting on the side railing, completely destroyed by a air raid and we knew that that connection was behind us, that connection with the factory. Incidentally this is also the time of the...in retrospect when there was the last attempt on Hitler's life in August of 1944. I just remembered now. Uh was a long, long journey. Many people, a number of people died from hunger and thirst. We arrived in a camp outside of Berlin in a town called _____. The name of the camp

was Saxonhausen. It was one of the largest camps in uh in Germany and my number over there...just to tell you how big...was 107,081. I was under the name the name of Salzman (ph). We were put in a barrack and the four hundred and fifty of us were assigned to work in a in a in a warehouse where iron devices like uh axles for trucks and so on were being stored and we were caused to move it and required to move it and assemble it and pile it and so on. I don't know that there was really any sense to it. It was hardness of the work...uh same thing again. Beating, hunger, uh uh rejection again. I know I'm kind of not emphasizing here...that I'm...but you know, we just was there. That's how life was. There was nothing exciting that happened from day to day. One got up and one hoped that it wouldn't rain and one hoped that the shoe which didn't have a hole in. One hoped that one got into line to to get one's soup. If one was at the right point in the line so when one got the the bowl of soup it wasn't from the top but was from the bottom of the of the of the container where there was a little bit more cabbage and these were the things that occupied our life. There wasn't anything dramatic or wonderful. Was just to survive to and little things in life were the kind of things that allowed us to somehow sustain ourselves another day. Uh if one uh was required to move a big piece of iron, one somehow tried to do utmost to have six people rather than four people, because four people carrying that piece of iron would be so much more difficult that one's ability to survive, to somehow carry another day, would be diminished. So I don't know what others say, but I must tell you those monontenous terrible days were were occupied by the by the compulsion to survive, by doing those little tiny things, you know, by somehow uh being able to find a needle to fix one's pants or to sew on a button because one needed this button to be warm and one needed the button to look orderly and proper, to not somehow be singled out by a guard who could use that for whatever purpose he wanted to use. After...at at the time, the time, the days passed one after another. There were...it was a terrible camp. There were French resistance prisoners, from the French resistance who were made to...they were being made to walk all day long in leg chains and and there were random hangings. There were other people in a in a prison uh company that were that were caused to march everyday with a new pair of German military shoes because they wanted to...when they issued the shoes to the German soldiers they wanted the shoes to be worn for at least one day so these people had to march all day long, and it was just...it was an awful camp, but after about a number of weeks, an announcement, an announcement was made that our group of about four hundred and fifty who were somehow identified as machine machine operators or or lathe (ph) operator specialists, was being shipped, was being sent to two different camps, one outside of Braunschweig. Now I...we just knew...I I must tell you we are told we are being shipped to two different camps. I don't know that we knew at that time. I guess we knew that we...one group was going to go to Braunschweig and another group was being sent to a camp outside of Bremen (ph). And the way it was done that orderly would say well we need seven lathe operators to go here and five uh drill press operators to go there and because they allowed it that way rather than saying you and you go there, people that had some connection with each other, either because they were from the same town or because they knew each other, managed to stay together, and they would just be assigned and we continued going to work and about four or five days later there was a list posted

by number...all of us had numbers...I had this number that I said, 107,081, and there was a list posted of the people that were going to go to Bremen. I originally was supposed to go to Braunschweig and not that I had any knowledge of whether Braunschweig is better or not, but the people that I knew from before the war and some of the people I knew for a long time were going there and I just wanted to stay with people on whom one could count as a little bit of support. Well, I discovered that in the process of assembling the final list, there was some changes and about forty or so people were shifted and I was going to Bremen. Another person that was shifted with me was a young man who had a cousin by the name of Joe Senga (ph) that was allowed to remain in Braunschweig. I hope I'm not confusing it. Some of us that was supposed to go was shipped here and this cousin said I want to go with my cousin because we're just cousins and that's most unusual among those few survivors that that there was their cousins or brothers. Well, this cousin said uh I don't know what fate has for me. They assigned me here and I'm going to stay...I don't know what to do. Well, anyway, after much ado and much suffering, Joe Senga and I changed uniforms. He put my uniform with your number on the side and so on and I took his uniform. He told me his name and his date of birth. He was incidentally born in Chemish too, but he was eighteen and I was sixteen at that time and he went to Braunschweig with his cousin...I'm sorry...he went to Bremen with his cousin and I, under his name, stayed with my friends and and town...fellow townspeople in that group that went to Braunschweig. Uh of that group of two hundred or twenty or forty that went to Bremen, only one survived I found out after the war. And all the others uh died and uh Senga who carried my name didn't make it either. Again, one of those lucky incidents. Lucky. One of those fateful incidents where, you know, I really didn't know which one was better, and I did it, you know, just for reasons to please him and to go with my...the people I knew. Our group of some two hundred and twenty...I would guess about twenty-five, twenty-eight survived and I was one of them. None of the others. And I...remember I say twenty-five, twenty-eight. Maybe it was thirty-two. It was some small number survived and nevertheless I was one of them. I was sent to camp in Watenstedt (ph) is the name of the camp, outside of Braunschweig. It was a camp of about twelve thousand prisoners. Uh we were the first and only Jews, about two hundred and fifty of us and that camp was attached to a factory in which they manufactured the casings for bombs and therefore there was a need for lathe operators and all that stuff and it was one of those...as as the war was going on, the time was passing, conditions were getting worse and worse. There was much less food. The the guards were much more cruel and there was no clothing and anyway we we got there in October. I was now Joseph Senga, had a new number and my number was 107,028. I don't know why his number was smaller than mine and uh worked in the factory. Very hard conditions. Kapos, which were the trustees, were very cruel. They were...most of the people were uh from...well, there were no...very few Jews and people were dying like flies, either from hunger, from exhaustion. I have seen people arrive and be there for two, three weeks and then unless they were really hustling and competing, if they were trying to be some how accommodating of all the others who but all the other prisoners who by that time were very aggressive and would try to steal your bread or steal your soup just to survive, not out of villainy (ph), or they wouldn't make it. At one point there there were two French

people brought in who I was told were priests or bishops and they were just overwhelmed by the misery they saw around and were willing to share their food and they lasted two weeks and I'm not making any judgment about it but that's how it was. In January of...we got there in October...work in the factory, try to keep warm. We had very little clothing. We got wooden shower shoes and very thin clothing. In January of 1945 the factory was bombed by B-17's I suppose. It was a daylight bomb and it was on a Sunday and we worked all the time except Sunday afternoon was free. And it was bombed on Sunday afternoon. Was completely destroyed and at that point, from that day on...well, anyway, from that day on we worked rebuilding the factory, moving, building bricks, picking up pieces. It was just tremendous feel of gloom (ph) and also that night, the night of the bombing, snow for the first time, so when we went to work it was terrible. It was cold. We had no gloves. We had no socks. We had no shoes and we just worked outdoors moving bricks and moving uh moving uh stones and I have and uh this was the time when most of the people died, just from cold and exhaustion. We would sleep two men to a little bunk and I remember sleeving...slee... sleeping with a young man whom I knew for about two, three years now whose name was Hoffenflack (ph) and at night when I woke up, he was dead, and I couldn't push him out of bed so I just slept there the rest of the night, but he was dead just from cold and not eating. Uh I need to go back for a little while. I said that in January when the factory was bombed...in mid-December, the times were already very difficult. There was very little food. Someone recognized that I have some artistic talent and assigned me to work for those kind of two weeks before Christmas in a uh carpentry uh shop in which uh toys were being made for the children of the guards, so I worked designing drawing horses and ducks and the carpenters would would uh cut it out and assemble it into something they could draw on a string and all that. At one point one of the SS officers came in and said to me we need a star to put on top of our Christmas tree and design one and have it painted, but don't make it make a five-corner star because it's communist or a six-cornered star because it's Jewish, so I had to design an eight-corner star because uh that's how I knew how to do it, you know, because I just remembered that incident. During that time when I work in the carpentry shop I was getting some extra food which I shared with a friend of mine, someone by the name of _____, Julius _____, who was somebody I knew from home. He was three years older than I was and he was with me and I was getting more food. I was able to share it with him and uh then when the factory was bombed out, I was no longer working in the carpentry store. I was working...in carpentry shop...I was working carrying bricks and cement. So was he, but he found in the rooms a a box of ration cards and remember at that time Germany had food rationing. He found a box of ration cards and made some contact with uh with a Polish worker who was there who was willing to trade those ration cards for extra bread, and he was able to help me. Again, those special circumstances that allowed me to be drawing Christmas tree stars and have some food to share with him and then allowed him by accident to have access to some additional bread which he was able to share with me. He shared with me because uh well, because we were friends I suppose and because he had enough for himself. But it was a very terrible time. There was very little food. There was very little...there was no clothing. It was cold, miserable. The German guards were even more cruel and we would find in the rooms some old drapery

material because they had...and we tried to either fashion gloves or vests or something and they would search us and if we had any gloves made out of drapery material or vests, they would take the take it away from us or we would find paper sacks from cement and try to use this as something to keep warm. They would also take it away from us and we marched to work every day and every night when we walked back we would have to carry fifty, sixty dead people who died during the uh during the day. That is how it went. People were just dying, just dying. There was no hospital. There was nothing. People were just like flies. Uh those of us that survived uh again did the same thing and it it...there was no drama. There was nothing there. No no great things happened. There was no special danger. There was no special mercy. There was no...no one showed up to do anything good or bad. We just had to survive, day to day, survive. Find a piece of ____ to tie around your shoes. Uh uh try to have a piece of paper around your body to keep warm and and avoid the German searching you and if uh if there was jobs being assigned, try to get to assigned to a job that was less exhausting than some other job, because it gave you a chance to live another day. And uh early 1945...I would guess it was uh maybe in late February, March...we heard guns on the horizon. Now we had no idea what was happening. By that time we didn't have any hope. We didn't nurture any hope. Of those two hundred and twenty or so of us that came to that camp, there were maybe forty, fifty alive. We didn't nurture...I was...specifically, I was sinking. There was in...there was in concentration camp a condition called mussulman and I don't know what it comes from, but these were people who was...whose...who were so physically and mentally deteriorated that they no longer cared about survival. They kind of like wandered or staggered around. They fall down. They usually live for a day or two. I was approaching that condition. Times I was hungry. I was cold. I and I was sick. I know that and I remember talking to some people and saying I don't know if I can manage it another week or two, and they were saying come on...even though they were in the same condition. Even though some of them that said to me come on, you know, try, try...didn't make it themselves. Anyway, in early March...I'm estimating now...there were guns on the horizon. The Germans again put us on a train and after a very long and very deadly journey uh we arrived in a...in the middle of the night someplace. We were made to get out of out of the train and there were these mountains of bones, human bones, and it was kind of like something that an abstract picture of hell...just big piles of human bones. We walked into the camp. Turned out it was the camp was Ravensbruck (ph), which is a Mecklenberg (ph) which was a major, primarily a women's camp. There was a small satellite camp for men and uh we were kept there for two weeks, really doing nothing. Sitting in the sand. Uh all organization started breaking down. For example, when there was a distribution of slices of bread and they would they would have a ba...a basket of slices of bread and which you get one slice of bread a day and the the kapos who would hand it out would hand it out and as the people pushed, they would turn over the basket and everybody would attack it and grab it and and our belief was that the kapos did it because they kept some of the bread for themselves. They didn't have enough to to give each one of us a slice of bread, so then those that are a little bit stronger managed to have two pieces. Those that were either not in position or were weaker would die that day or the next day. I remember the sun was shining and I was kind of wandering around and

came outside and we had lice and we were dirty and we were just terrible and I came by a window and I saw my image in a window pane and I didn't recognize myself, and I saw that I was a mussulman already. I saw that I was not making it. After about three weeks in that camp they put us in a train again and shipped us someplace else and when we arrived there we discovered that the name of the camp was _____. It was a camp that incidentally was liberated by the 82nd Airborne Division and if one reads Gavin's (ph) book uh **Road to Berlin,** in the last chapter he talks about that camp and he says something that I don't remember...that you could smell that camp before you saw it. I don't remember any obvious smells. It was just a camp, one of those camps. But was half finished. We slept on the ground. There was no food. Dead bodies all over. People were eating the dead bodies and uh everyone who sur...wanted to survive would do whatever one had to do to to eat uh whatever was available. Uh more people were dying. There were just mountains of dead people. They didn't bury them anymore. It was late in the war. It was April of...late April of '45. Of our group there were just a few, but there were some other Jews now by then there and then on May 1st, and I know the date in retrospect of course...on May 1st, we were all told to get in a train again. It was this camp was assembled and we were all told to get in the train. We all were marched in a line. I couldn't walk anymore. I made the first first risky thing I did. When we were when we were assembled and were informed that we are leaving, they asked those who cannot walk will go on the train. The others will march. Those that cannot...that can walk step forward. And I didn't. I couldn't walk anymore. My head was hurting me and I couldn't walk. But it turned out they put us all on a train, so that fact that I accepted now, that being singled out, showing some weakness that I had fought for three years to prevent, really didn't harm me. We were put in the train and we were sitting on the train all night long and confined hundred, hundred and twenty people to a box car, and there was no locomotive and in the morning they made us walk out of the train and stand there between the railroad track where the train was and the front fence of the camp. The the way it was arranged the camp has two pieces, two areas. There was a camp of the prisoners. There were railroad tracks and on the other side of the railroad tracks there was an area where the guards lived, so we were there and uh my...I don't know...maybe four thousand prisoners although there was lot of death later on, and they said all Jews step forward. And we didn't. I mean I didn't. Uh some of the...well, of course this was not announced the way they announce it now. It was announced...it was de...demanded with threat and with violence and some of the non-Jewish prisoners started pointing us out. It was possible for us to be identified because we would have a red triangle showing that we are political, but there were little three yellow corners behind it to make that into a star of David and in all that tumult and confusion...this was now May 2nd...there was a...I'm again coming to an emotional time...there was a gunshot and we all looked down the railroad track which was kind of like a corridor cut in the forest and in May there were...the trees were already green and far away there's a tank. It looked kind of like a prehistoric monster with smoke coming out of it and was maybe a mile away, but the Germans just opened the gate, pushed us all in, and we were still guarded. There were still guards in the in the towers and they kept shooting at random at uh at the ca...at the prisoners and one had to find a place to hide behind a barrack not to be exposed to line of

fire and uh then they took the German trustees out of the camp. And we were kind of alone and I remember finding someplace three potatoes, because they...whatever supplies there were were no longer guarded by the German trustees, by the kapos, and cooking those three potatoes in the fire, baking and making little fires...others did it too...a little fire behind...and it was afternoon and then I hear noises. People running and shouting and I really didn't want to leave the three potatoes but I was concerned that maybe something bad is happening, and I was still, had sufficient instinct for survival that I needed to know what's happening. ___ I couldn't walk very well and my head hurt. I and I I suppose maybe I was stimulated by that tank and which obviously was a friendly one, or at least unfriendly to the Germans, so I ran to see what all these people were running and there were Americans. (Crying) They were soldiers. There was a patrol of 82nd Airborne soldiers inside the camp, standing among these mountains of bodies and thousand or two thousand crazy prisoners jumping and hugging each other and kissing each other and uh I really didn't feel it. I didn't know what it meant. And they were there. They were overwhelmed and they left. It was a patrol. They were not going to...oh yes, when they...when we jumped and screamed and saw the Americans, we looked around. There were no guards in the towers, and when the Americans left, when those...when the patrol of six or seven soldiers left, and we...some of us...people continued still dying. There were lots of people that were dying laying around and some people started leaving and me and five friends, _____, the one that I mentioned before _____, and another was a man I knew from my town who was an older brother of that young man back in the ghetto who had a certificate on his on his identification paper that he had some physical ailment and should be excused...we decided based on the stories we heard from the...from our parents on what happened in the first war when the Russians and the Austrians keep moving back and forth, so the Americans left and the Germans may be coming back. We really didn't know where we were. We left at night. We jumped...the door, gate was open and the five of us just left, went went walking in the woods and hiding over there. At one point we came to a town called _____ that was still in German hands and we hid in a little paint store and that night the Americans came and I was free. I didn't try very hard to...I was seventeen. I tried very hard to write a letter to my aunt and uncle in New York, and I didn't know their address anymore because among the things that I left behind in Flossenberg with the photographs was the address of my uncle. I knew that he lived in New York. I knew that there was MD attached to his name and I didn't know exactly what it meant or I knew that he was a physician and uh needless to say I finally got through to him. None of them...I I I asked every soldier, American or English, to send a letter for me and none of the letters arrived but one of the GI's came back and brought a letter with him and looked him up in the phone book in New York and called him and uh I just you know, I made contact with relatives in the United States. I discovered that no one else has survived, none of my family, and the part of Europe, Germany where I was liberated, became...was destined to become the eastern, the Russian zone, now part of eastern rather than East, Germany, and uh the Americans wanted to uh put uh on turn us over to the Russians because they were shipping people that were from France and Holland to France and Holland and people that were from Poland and Czechoslovakia back east and that day the Russians didn't...they put us in a truck and brought us out to

the town, outside of the town where the Russian's lines were. The Russians didn't want to accept us that day. I don't know if that would have made any difference in my life, but at least they didn't. So then the British picked us up and took us in a on trucks to a town called Lubeck, Lubeck, or Lubeck (ph) was pronounced in English which was right across the line between the English and the Russian zones where I stayed and waited to come to the United States. The only thing that I have from those days is a photograph of myself, how I looked uh about three or four months after I was liberated. I have no other photographs of of anyone else, but that...and when the war was over there was some already institutional things started and one needed papers and so I went to a photographer and had a picture taken. As you can see...I think there is a date on it. The date is...OK...here we're looking...1st June of '45 in Lubeck which would be a month after I was liberated and being seventeen and having access to food which the American soldiers around were kind enough to share with us, I was recovering. I mean my hair started growing. Let me just finish the story very quickly. I I stayed in Europe in Germany in DP camps for two years. It took that long to get uh...I had to make the arrangements for for to come to the United States. My relatives sponsored me. I came to New York in...October 2nd, 1947. I...

Q: Could you, George, could you tell us a little bit about what your life was like for the two years in the DP camps, what you did? And did you do some of your art work there?

A: Well, uh yes, yes, yes. I stayed in a DP camp. One was kind of abandoned. Many of the Jewish, my Jewish friends, went to to Israel or to Palestine at that time...uh illegal but arrangements were being made by the Brichah for people to to somehow smuggle themselves into Israel. I, who had already made commit...made contact with my relatives or who were making arrangements for me to come to the United States...there was still hope that my brother would show up somehow. I made a decision to come to the United States and there was really nothing done for me. I was just a young man of seventeen. There was no school. There was...I needed dental work and there were no dentists and I was kind of like sitting around and uh to occupy myself or to maybe to to give give vent to some emotional needs I had I started painting and I painted some pictures. Some of them were lost. Some of them I brought with me uh to the United States and have given to the Holocaust Museum for whatever it's worth. Clearly they are just my own images of what I remembered or what I thought, and and otherwise they were kind of wasted two years, waiting. There were no school. You know, I I was uh many of the people to survive were getting involved in in black market and some illegal activities which I didn't want to do because I was afraid that I would be tainted somehow and not be able to come to the United States so it was a time of uh waiting, of growing up. You know, I was...nevertheless I was influenced by that kind of a illegal illegal activities that were taking place. They were not activities of violence or villainy. They were activities of violating some economic rules, smuggling, dealing with the black market, finding cigarettes and selling them for this and that and I and in order to be...was affected by it. I'm saying this because when I came to the United States and moved with my uncle who was a successful physician, who had great uh had friends who were musicians in the New

York Symphony and who had candles at the dinner table and friends ____, it was a very difficult transition for me. A wonderful but a difficult transition. In the United States I worked as a delivery boy. I went to school in the afternoon to learn how to repair television sets. I went to school at night to learn English, one of those typical classical things where you go to school at night. There was a book whose name I now don't remember about it, don't remember any more uh to and was in New York. I went to school at uh George Washington High School in Washington Heights at night to study English. After a year of doing that and learning how to repair television sets, I got a job as a television repairman and then another year later or a year and a half, I was drafted in the United States Army. I served two years in the Signal Corps with a honorable discharge. This was during the Korean War, but this was a police action rather than a war so some of the provisions for citizenship didn't apply and I had to be in the United States for two years, for five years so in March of '53 I was discharged from the army and became a citizen. I was still in the army when I became a citizen and one of the questions that the judge asked of me was whether I if called upon I'd be willing to serve in the United States Armed Forces and I was wearing my uniform which was kind of funny and then in March of '53 I was uh married to my present wife, who to...to my present wife and uh shortly got a job and shortly thereafter taking advantage of my GI bill uh I went to Syracuse University at night uh because I couldn't afford to go during the day. The GI bill just paid for school. I received my Bachelor's Degree in Physics and Magna Cum Laude in five years at night and went to school, continued in school and received a Master's Degree in Electrical Engineering. I worked in a re...worked for industry and then worked for a government lab and in uh mid-sixties when McNamara was uh the Secretary of Defense, I was asked to come to Washington and join his staff as one of those whatever they were called at that time...McNamara's raiders or whatever. And I spent about ten, twelve years in Washington in the in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the last eight years as Director of Defense Communications Systems uh which required me to testify before various committees and so on and then about and then I went back to industry and I'm now a an executive in an aerospace company and still working. Uh I'm still married to my wife. We still still love each other and we have three children who are married and well, and four grandchildren. And I tried not to think about the war and tried to live my life as if the war never happened, even though I recognize that I am tainted by that fact. That's my story.

Q: Thank you very much. (Pause) Do you want some water? Can you tell me, with the benefit of hindsight, what effect that you feel the war has had on you?

A: Well, obviously it's most difficult for me to judge myself but I think uh it has had definite effects. I for example never cry when I'm sad. I only cry when I'm happy. And you have maybe observed it here, that I was emotional remembering good things like Colmar or the liberation. I suppose I'm too protective of my children and giving them what is commonly known as survivor children syndrome. Uh there are facts, clearly there are facts. Uh my willingness to accept risk in life is diminished by my war time experiences and therefore I have tended to be, to stay employed with the same company or the same

organization longer than I should have because I think that uh the war time experience when I was very young somehow conditioned me to to avoid risk and avoid and avoid uh maybe taking initiatives more than I should. But it's difficult for me to answer. I am sure that there are facts. I am sure that people who know me can see it much better than I can, so...

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much.

A: Glad to do it.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

END OF INTERVIEW