United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Stefan Czyzewski
April 8, 1998
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Stefan Czyzewski, conducted by Katie Davis on April 8, 1998 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Minneapolis, MN 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.

STEFAN CZYZEWSKI
April 8, 1998

01:00:29

A: …eyes and when somebody open up with a Schmeisser[1] from a side, it hit me right in the top of the head, it practically scalped me. There was a big scar across, it was blood all over. And my friend got hit, apparently the same set of bullets hit him right here and took a top of his head. So I grabbed him and I ran with him for about 400 feet. And I could never lift him because he was a big boy, about his size – your size.

Q: And you lifted him that day?

A: I lifted him, I grabbed him, I had his gun – his rifle and my rifle and some other items, and him. I must have – I must have run about three or 400 feet before I ran into my own boys and we put him down and tried to get help and of course he was beyond help because his top of a head was gone. So I had my head fixed and then after war in Germany, I got a good German surgeon and he cut it open again and left only a little, tiny – I mean, it was a scar, I'm – it was enormous scar. So he left only a little, tiny scar there. But I still – when I take my hat off, I kind of remember that blood running and the whole, horrible, open thing there, just like my top of a head was completely open down to the brains. But it wasn't, the –

Q: But it was also seeing him, too.

A: It was, yes. So I keep my hat on, just about everywhere. I take it off in church and I – I take it off when I go to bed. I keep it at – on at work. Everybody is used to it or if they are not, they better be.

Q: Right, right.

A: There was – went to Miss Batchelor's wedding. I had my hat on, and they had skullcaps. And I was going to have a special skullcap made for me because I was the honorary grandfather…. Right, an, an English speaking person can't.

Q: How – how do you pronounce it again?

A: Czyzewski.

Q: Czyzewski.

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[1] Schmeisser submachine gun

A: See, a "CZ" is "ch," "Y" and then "Z" has that dot above it, which makes it into "Ż." Polish language has three "Z's." It has "Z," "Ź" and "Ż." The "Ź" has an apostrophe, the "Ż" has a – a dot above it. It's a funny language.

01:03:02

Q: I see, that's why the dots are above it.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And we have seven extra letters in our alphabet.

Q: Oh, you do?

A: Because "Ź," "Ż," "Z" – is as "C" and "Ć" and there's "S" and Ś and it has "L," "T" and "Ł." "Ł" has a crossbar slanted on the top of it. There's a "A" with a tail, which is "Ą." There's E with a tail, which is Ę.

Q: Yeah.

A: Anyway, when Heather went to India – when Heather went to India she discovered she said, "All those Polish songs, Polish words – I mean, in Sanskrit."

Q: Okay. This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski. It's April 8, 1998. We're in Minneapolis, Minnesota, or nearby. This interview is conducted by Katie Davis and it's tape one. And if we could just begin by having you introduce yourself and then also tell us where you were born and when.

A: Very well. My name is Stefan Czyzewski. I was born in 1922, in a little town of Lesnogóra, Poland. Lesnogóra is in central Poland, about 45 kilometers east of Warsaw. It's a small hamlet, you cannot even find it on a map, but it's still there. Last time I wrote to somebody there, it still was there.

Q: Tell us what it looked like. What it was like to grow up there?

A: To live there?

Q: To – in, in Lesnogóra.

A: Oh, it was a farm – a farming community. There was no industry of any kind, just farms. There was one little store, kind of a general store, one room little store, ran by a Jewish family. The rest of the people were all Polish peasants working on a farm.

Q: And what did your parents do? Maybe tell us their names and what did they do, were you farmers?

A: Yes. My father was Jan Czyzewski, he was a farmer. My mother was Bogumila Czyzewski, nee Boruc. My mother was an – was a schoolteacher. And she was a frustrated schoolteacher. When she married and had a first child, which was me, she would not be hired to work any more. So she was really frustrated. By a time I was three, she taught me how to read and I never stopped. I fell in love with books and I have been reading ever since.

01:06:05

Q: What was your family home like? Did you have land? What did your – just tell us a little bit about that, what did your father farm?

A: Yes, we – the farms in that part of Poland were a kind of a variety farm. The land was rather poor, so they planted just about everything that they needed and in – everything they could sell. They planted a lot of cabbage and a plenty of potatoes and some wheat and also a lot of rye. Our land was in many little pieces, so we had to travel from a village to work on, on the land. My father – just about like me – spent a lot of time in strange places. The part of Poland that we lived in before 19 – in – before 1900's, were occupied by Russia, Czarist Russia. My father was conscripted, or drew a lot and spent 12 and a half years in Czar's imperial army. He came back home for six months and the first war – world war started. He was called again and did fight on the western front against – against Germans. And of course he heard some Polish people speaking across the front lines, so he walked across one night and thought he would join them. Instead of that, they put him in a prisoners of war came – camp. And they sent him way, way out west, close to the western front line betw – a li – a front line between France and Germany. And again, well he was – at that time he was a sapper. He was a fortification specialist. So the Germans gave him a group of people, group of prisoners and they built fortifications – a kind of a front line fortification system at Verdun. And probably everybody heard of that horrible battle at Verdun, where more than half a million people were killed. So he did, and the Germans of course, were very appreciative, so he put him in a fr – one morning they put him in a front of a squad that he was in and gave him German Ritterkreuz[2] or, or Eisern—Eisernekreuz[3] – German, German decoration, because the part that he built there – the French could not overrun it. They tried several time, they couldn't overrun it. Anyway, a few days later, he heard Polish people speaking across the line on the French side. So he walked across. And the Po – he joined Polish Legion that was fighting on the French side. Couple nights later he led the French into the part of the fortification that he built. They overran it, they kicked the Germans out

[2] Knight's Cross (German)
[3] Iron Cross (German)

and the French gave him the Croix de Guerre[4]. So he had German decoration, he had French decoration. Later on, the Polish Legion gave him Virtuti Militari,[5] Polish cross. So when my father came back home after the wars, he didn't brag much about it. As a matter of fact, my family didn't know about it. I was the only one that he showed the crosses to and he told little about what happened. When he came home, he brought some things. He brought a French army coat and he brought a pair of American army boots. And he had those boots until 1940's. They were pair of clodhoppers. They had a big, round toes, but he said, "Those are the best boots I ever had." They were ugly, but he said, "They are sewed, they are glued and nailed. You can never wear them out." Occasionally on – on a big holiday, he would put those boots on and para– shine them and parade around it. And everybody was look and said, "Jan, where do you get those ugly boots?" He said, "You better shut up, those are American boots, those are the best boots I ever had."

01:10:54

Q: So your father, when you were growing up, would – would talk with you about his military experiences?

A: He talked a blue streak to me, but he would not talk to anybody else. And of course he talked about all the girlfriends he had. The great Russian girlfriend he had. And the great German girlfriend he had. And of course, he had a great French girlfriend.

Q: Tell us about your siblings. You're – you're not an only child. Who else was in the family?

A: Yes, I had two sist– I had – have two sister, who are in their late 60's or early 70's. When I was arrested, they were a –

Q: Their names, can you tell us?

A: Yes, the older one is Henryka. She is about 71. The younger one is – or was – is Eleanor or Eleonora. She's about 68 or 69. When I was arrested, they were like 12 and 14. And two years ago, they came to visit me. And I said, "Well gee! I left two pretty little girls, what do I see now? Two old, little woman." And my sister Eleonora is outspoken, she said, "Who do you think you are? You're a old, little man."

Q: What was a regular day like? Did you work with your father? Just describe a regular day at your home.

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[4] War Cross (French)

[5] Courageous Soldiers (Latin); Polish medal awarded for courage in the battlefield.

A: We did get up at the sun raise, or before. And we did little work, like taking care of the livestock, feeding the cows, feeding the pigs and watering the horses and preparing. And then of course – then after that I went to school. And first three years, we had a village school, was a one room village school. Later on I had to walk to the town of Grebków, which was our district, little village, which had seven grade school. So my time was spent mostly in school. I would walk at seven in morning to get to be – to be in school by eight and I didn't come home until about three. So then I helped around the farm. And on weekend, on Saturday, I would work with father in a field, but on a weekday, I did not.

Q: And what – what kinds of things did your family do in the community? Wh–Were there political parties or any kind of small organizations in the village that they took part in?

01:13:43

A: There were political parties, but they were just practically two. There was the Nationalist party, which was very small and hardly anybody joined it because they were kind of chauvinistic and there was the so-called "non-party" party, which was the government party. And most people were kind of – not exactly joining it, but supporting it, because all the politicians and all the representatives were members of that party. There was quite a lively social life. There were mostly – mostly religious holidays and feasts that people took part in it. Like for instance, when the month of May came, every night after supper, everybody went to a little shrine and they would be singing lot of hymns and they would sing a litany to all the saints and then you would walk home and sing loudly. There was a fair, one or two or three religious fairs, that special preachers would come to the church and we would walk to church and listen to the preachers and there were booths and souvenirs toe – tables. And food tables, where you would spend little money to get some food that you normally did not eat at home. Well, every Tuesday there was a marketplace, market day. You would – father would hitch a horse and we'd take some butter and eggs and some grain and some potatoes and drive to Kaluszyn, where the market took place and the people from a city would – housewife would come and buy your butter and buy your eggs. And Kaluszyn was a town of about 12,000 people, of whom about 10,000 were Jewish people. Jewish people were merchants, they were professional, they were attorneys, they were doctors. They were tailors and shoemakers. And we traded with them throughout our lives. We always had a family or two or three that we're very friendly with and visited when we went there. We would start their place and maybe get a cup of tea. When they came to see us, we would give them a dozen of eggs and when they came to visit on the farm.

01:16:25

Q: Well, how would you describe the relations in general between Jews and Poles at that time? First maybe think about your village.

A: In our village, there was one Jewish family. It was actually first a Jewish man, only, who opened a little – like a grocery and needles and thimble store. Later on he had a wife and two children. And relations were not strained. We kind of tolerated one another. All Polish Jewish people were Orthodox people. They wore special dress, they had sideburns, they had peyse[6], the long side hair. They wore gabardine coats, they wore little hats, with a – little tiny, black hats with a tot – little tiny visor. And they spoke very broken Polish.

Q: For instance, did the children go to the school that you went to?

A: The Jewish children would go to public schools that all of us had to go. But, they would spend little time there, but most of the time they spent was in a cheder. There was a Jewish cheder, they went and they learned to – how to write Yiddish and some of them would learn Hebrew. And socially we did not have much to do together. Socially, we kept completely apart. We did not mix, or if they did, it was very little mixing between the Jewish people and Polish people.

Q: Did you understand why? Was that ever sort of spoken, or was that just how things were?

A: That's was how the things were. It was not a – because one hated one another, but was simply because the things were. People gravitated to their own and they did little association business-wise and also occasionally visited. For instance, we had had a – a Jewish peddlers come. There was a Jewish lady, whose name was Golda, who came carrying a big bag and she was trading. She brought sacharyna[7] to sell, she brought needles, she brought thread, she brought little pieces of material. She brought occasionally a dress or two. And she would take in – in exchange, she would take eggs and butter and some potatoes and maybe some grain.

01:19:20

Q: Tell us a little bit more about your family and it's religious beliefs. When you were growing up, how did your parents explain those to you? Wi-Wi – you know, in church and that sort of thing.

A: We took the church for granted. We just went to church on Sundays. We went to religious instructions, which were taking place in public school. Once a week, a priest or a nun would come and take a – actually the priest or nun came every day, but took one class, for one hour we received our religious instruction. And we went to special preparation like for first communion or confirmation. We would go to church in groups that – which reached certain age and were prepared. We prayed at home frequently, we would say a rosary. Probably not every day, but at least once a week. And we kids hated

[6] Earlocks worn by Hasidic Jews (Yiddish)
[7] Saccharine (Polish)

it because we had to kneel for about 45 minutes on a hard floor, so we squirmed and we complained, but quietly, because father did not take any guff from any kid.

Q: So it was a part of your home life and it was certainly a part of your parents beliefs?

A: Very much so, yes.

Q: Was there a time, as you started to get older, that it became more something that you believed in and it wasn't that your parents were kind of asking you to do?

A: No, it became – it was given – it was given. We did not question. We knew that if you went to college later on, if you went to university, you lost your faith, in parenthesis. You lost your faith, because you started questioning. And you started not really believing the stories. "Well, those are just stories, you know, Bible is a story and religious stories is a story and life's of saints, oh, just nice little stories. And the Christians and the lion s, of course, were also just stories. Maybe true, maybe not. So you don't have to believe any more, huh?" But there were not many people who went to college and there not many of those who went there, who lost their faith.

01:22:04

Q: You say you were in school, were you thinking about going to college, were your parents talking to you about that?

A: Yes, they were talking about going not to college, but to go into middle school, which back there, it was a gimnazjum,[8] it was equivalent of American college. And I was one of the students who was halfway bright and I di– gi– did get grant. They call it stypendium.[9] I went to – for two years to the city of Wegrów, which was about 15, 18 miles, it was our county seat. I went to this – I call it gimnazjum, before the war came and ended it all.

Q: So how old were you when you went?

A: I started at – I was 15 and I ended when I was 17, when the war came, I was almost 17 when the war came.

Q: And was it obviously – how did your parents feel about you going?

A: Well, they wanted badly to go – to let me go, but they could not afford it. The fees were steep. So I did get a so-called stypendium from the county. There were two kids from the county who passed the examination and I was the second one. The first one was a girl

[8] Grammar school (Polish)
[9] Scholarship (Polish)

who was bright and I hated her. Competed with her all – all my grade four, five and six and seven. And she just almost always beat me to it, except in the literature.

Q: So, was it hard for your parents to let you go?

A: Not really. They were so proud, they were so damn proud, I was ashamed sometime when they bragged about it.

01:24:03

Q: Tell us what they said, what would they say about you?

A: "Well, he's bright. See, he can read. He could read when he was four." To take it back, when I was about eight or nine, my uncle Bronislaus got married. They lived in a big, ramshackle house. His wife brought a bunch of books. Those were th– those were the books I was not supposed to read. They're called in the French Romances. Of course I did, I sneaked out and read them, I mean I just read them day and night. And of course I got caught. My mother said, "Aha. Those books you are not supposed to read, but I guess I won't prevent you from reading it, so to counter with, every night after supper, after you eat supper, you are going to read the Bible, aloud." "Bible? What do I want to read the Bible for?" "Well, you are going to read it if you want to or not." So I did, for half an hour, then 45 minutes, then one hour. The neighbor's kids were laughing, "Hoo, he is reading Bible." Pretty soon the neighbors kids started coming in to listen, because the Old Testament stories are fascinating, bloody and murder at times. Especially if you come to the Book of Judith, I mean that was a real story. So, after supper, there'd be a bunch of kids sitting, later on, in winter, I mean and we had no electricity, just a ga– a kerosene lamp there. Adult neighbors would be coming and listening to those stories of Old Testament, especially the Book of Judith when she – she went to sleep with him and got up in a middle of a night, I mean the leader, the whole affair and this leader of the Philistines – got up in a middle of a night, chopped off his head and took it with her. I mean, those were great stories. By the time I was 14, I read the Bible aloud twice. So I pretend to know something about Bible.

Q: What – at that point, what were you thinking your future might hold? Were you think – did you have any idea of what you might do?

A: Well, it was a given that I was going to be a farmer. I would inherit most of my father's farm, pay off my sisters. I had different ideas, I wanted to live in a city and get a job in a city, especially af– I, after I went for two years to gimnazjum, I was – I knew everything. But I didn't – we didn't talk much about it because my father was a choleryk.[10] He had a short temper. If you said anything that he didn't like, you got walloped.

[10] Spitfire (Polish)

Q: It sounds though like a very unified family.

A: Very much so. Kind of, but not exactly on a defensive, but very close-knit family.

01:27:03

Q: Think back to maybe six months or a year before the war broke out. Did – do you remember a time when you noticed a shift in the tone? That you began to be aware that something might be happening, and how – how did you become aware of a change – possible change in your life?

A: We were very much aware that the war was coming. I mean, we – we just – we just felt it in our bones. And the political shenanigans, negotiations and so on and so forth, we knew we were going to fight Germany. We never expected to find the Soviets. We had, of course, Non-aggression Pact with the So – pact with the Soviets. We did not expect to fight them, but we knew we were going to fight the Germans. There's a Polish joke, later on developed, you know, when times were the hardest, the most difficult, people were being killed, mutilated, arrested, sent to camps, gassed – the Poles made the best jokes. We made the best jokes ever. Scenario – the Germans come from the west, the Russians come to – from the we – east, who do we shoot first? Russians. Pleasure before duty.

Q: On that note, let's change tapes.

01:28:32

A: You have to have a Catholic Bible.

Q: Okay. My mom does.

A: Does she? Okay, look in a –

Q: Yeah, she's Catholic.

A: – the Book of – of Judith does not exist in a Patterson Bible.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: See, when the Bible was being translated –

Q: Right.

A: – the group of Anglican scholars appointed by Hen – King Henry, looked at it and they say, "this, this, this and that and that–"

Q: Right.

A: – are not necessarily inspired, so we will leave them out. There's Belgium and Reims, France, they translated the Bible, the so-called Douai-Reims translation and they said, "Whatever was good for Saint Jerome is good for us." So they translated the whole kit and caboodle.

Endo of Tape #1

Tape #2

02:00:13

Q: Okay.

A: Consequently –

Q: No, I'm sure she has that.

A: Consequently, 11 parts of Old Testament do not exist in a –

Q: Eleven? Eleven books?

A: Eleven parts, ele– not, not complete books.

Q: Okay, okay. Parts, right.

A: But the Book of Judith –

Q: Right.

A: And the Book of Daniel in lion's den and few others don't exist. Part of a –

Q: Okay. This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski. It is April 8, 1998. We are outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. This interview is conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape two. Think – if you can think back to – you were saying that you knew that war was coming. To think back to – you know, place yourself and how did you know? Did you hear things on the radio? Were there conversations that you had or heard? If you could tell us some of those.

A: It was mostly news on the radio and also newspapers, also newspapers. We kind of watched closely, all the political shenanigans. You know, our Ministers of – of Foreign Affairs was going back and forth, was going to France, was going to Germany, was going to England, negotiating and negotiating and Germans having more and more power and asking for more and more of – of Poland. We knew that time was coming and of course we knew we're going to beat the bejesus out of the Germans, turned out differently.

Q: What did your father and mother say about it? What was the feeling back home in Lesnogóra, you were in school nearby, what wa– when you went home, what were people saying?

A: It was a vacation time when those things went on, so I was at home. I was back in June and there was June, July and it started at the end of August or first of September. So we

talked about a lot of it and father said, "Well, we can beat them easily." And he wanted to join – he wanted to join, but they wouldn't take him. Said, "You old man, go back home."

Q: So, was there any fear?

A: There was apprehension, but not real fear. We kind of felt that, "Well, regardless how bad it is, it's going to be on the Western border. There may be a stalemate, they may be going for some time, but most likely they won't come here." Of course, later on we, we learned better.

02:03:14

Q: How did you understand what Germany was doing? I mean, how did you understand Hitler and Nazism?

A: Well, first of all, we heard a lot of that perse-persecute-persecution in Germany. We had some Jewish people who came and lived with our Jewish friends in Kaluszyn, who came from Germany and told a lot how they were being "kicked around," as – as they said. The Germans had demands – wanted to have the northern part of Poland, the Polish corridor that we had, going to the Baltic Sea. First they asked for free passage back and forth between East Prussia and Germany. Later on, they asked for the corridor, they just wanted there – they wanted Gdynia, they wanted Danzig, they wanted the whole territory. And of course, Poland was not about to give it to them, so we knew that a war was on-coming.

Q: When you say you heard about how the Jews were being treated in Germany and that you heard from people that had been kicked – kicked around, how did you make sense of that? Did you have any idea that this was a – a policy in Germany?

A: Yes, we did. We knew it was a policy of the German government. We knew – our press – Pola-Poland had quite a free press. I mean there were Socialist papers, there were extreme Rightist papers and the general press was kind of in between. So there was a lot about the persecution of minorities in Germany. And also, we knew a lot about the hoodlums who came to rule Germany. And we kind of wondered, especially in school, when I was still in school, that winter and spring before the hostilities started. We talked a lot with professors and we were greatly impressed always by the German scholarship, by the German philosophy, by the German literature. And then we thought, how could that ever happen, that the Germans let themselves be led – those intelligent, those bright, those advanced Germans can be led by a group of hoodlums of that kind – of that sort.

02:06:10

Q: So think back to that summer of 1939 and tell us where you are, what you're doing every day and as we get closer to September, 1939, what's going on? Are – are you being recruited, are you talking with your friends about fighting, what's going on?

A: That summer, we work on farm. I work – help my father on the farm, we – we it was – everything was almost planted when I came home from school in June, but the harvest came soon, first the hay. And the haying was done all by hand, even the mowing of the hay was done by hand. And the first day of haying – of mowing the hay, when you came home at night, you didn't feel like eating, you could not sleep, your bone ached, every muscle your body ached. You were pulling the scythe, mowing the hay all day. Second day was better, the third day was nothing to it. Then the harvest came, of course and it was a hot, dry summer. The harvest was quite good, so we harvested first the rye, then the wheat, then the potato picking did not come until September. By that time, the war was over, when we picked the potatoes, so it wa– else, was just about ending. It was a summer of apprehension, a summer of some fear – what is going to happen? And of course, when the war started, things started happening.

Q: What did you think was – was going to happen with you? What were your plans?

A: My plans were just about broken. I knew that I probably wouldn't go to school any more. And I was very reluctant to stay and work on the farm. And when the war came and we – when we lost the war to Germans and the Soviets, I knew I was going to be stuck and work on a farm with my father, which – I was quite resigned to it. Said, "Well, hopefully the war will end and maybe I wi– I can go back to school and perhaps live – even live in a city. But for now, I'm stuck here, so I better make the best of it."

02:08:53

Q: Tell us where, where you were in those early days of September, in 1939 and when you first felt the presence of the invading army?

A: It was – we knew that it was going to start soon, like in August. And we knew that Germany was going to attack soon. And then we heard the news about the Polish – a small group attacking Germany, in Silesia – it was a little town of Glewice, where a German dressed up a group of their own soldiers in Polish uniforms and attacked their radio station, took it over. And of course they had brought bodies from concentration camps, dead bodies and dressed them in Polish uniform – uniforms and had some casualties there. So we heard about that and of course, few days later, September first, they attacked.

Q: I'm not sure I really understood what happened in that little town in Silesia?

A: In Glewice?

Q: Yeah, in Gle-Gle–

A: Ah, it was a p – a put up affair by the Germans. They dressed up Wehrmacht[11] people in Polish uniforms and attacked their own radio station. It was the incident that created the war. They had the pretext, "The Polish – Poles attacked us and now we have to, of course, defend ourselves."

Q: How did you hear about it and how did you know exactly what had happened?

A: It was on a Polish radio, it was in – was in Polish papers. Polish intelligence at that time apparently, was quite keen. And they knew all about it.

Q: So where were you – where were you when you first heard about that and what were your thoughts?

A: I was in my village, listening to a crystal radio and I thought, "Well, it's inevitable, the war is co – war is coming and we'll have to fight." I was too young to – to be conscripted. My father was too old. He, of course, wanted to go and join. They said, "Go – old man, go back home. You had yours."

02:11:20

Q: And when – how quickly did you feel the presence of Germans in your town?

A: Within about three weeks, they were, in our neighborhood, the – kind of a pincer movement went around Warsaw. The – Warsaw was still fighting, but they went around and approached our neighborhood. There was quite a sharp firefight in my village. Started early morning – the Polish cavalry came in and some infantry came in. The cavalry dismounted and sent horses back and they dug in on the periphery of my village. They had a whole bunch of little, anti-tank artillery. Was two fat wheels, and a horse and they could pull it like the dickens. Two men could pull that little thing. It was very effective against German tanks. So they dug in and they were waiting, and of course, the Germans attacked. And it's kind of strange, my father said, "Well, why don't you take the cows to the pasture?" And my father dug a dugout for the family, in a garden in the orchard, so they were – went all there and I took their horses and the cows to the pasture in the back – way back, beyond the village – it was a communal pasture. By the time I – I did get there, I couldn't come back because there was a – I mean, was honest to goodness firefight. It was long distance artillery German – German artillery shooting. And a – a kind of bombarding the neighborhood, there was a – more machine guns going all over, so I just stayed behind the village, there, for about two hours. In about two hours, the Poles retreated and went and then came two cavalry men, who said, "Hey, little boy, do you know that little wood across the hill, there?" "Of course I know it." "We have horses

[11] Armed forces (German)

there, about 15 horses, can you go and get the horses here?" "Oh, sure. Why not?" So I started running, kind of over the hill – I run over the hill and there was lot of firing and going and then I see – all of a sudden, I was kind of running on the border of a hi – of a – of a field. The border was kind of a strip of grass, it was higher than a field and I see right by my feet there, dust flying. And I didn't think – think much of it, but it was somebody shooting machine gun from a way, way distance there – German machine gun and hitting right where I was running, below my feet. It was several times, right below my feet. Apparently, whoever was shooting, was shooting little too low, thank goodness. When I ran to – I ran over the hill, the horses were gone.

02:14:34

So I laid down behind a bunch of trees, big Olszyna[12] trees. There were such trees here. And artillery was shooting and hitting in – in transit was hitting a top of a trees and branches were falling down. So I just laid there for about half an hour, then it slowed down, I went back to the village, village was on fire and about two-thirds of the village was burned. There were nobody – no civilian casualties. There were about 35 Polish soldiers, who were killed. There were about 100 of Germans who were killed, back in approach the village. There were about 11 tanks that were mashed to smithereens by those little ca – Polish cannons. And of course the Poles ran away and the Germans came in. We were taking – getting water in pails, out of a – out of a well and I was – I climbed up on a top of a roof to prevent our house from being burned, because the neighbors house were burning, so I was handed the pails of water, I was pouring on the – on the roof of the house to prevent it from burning on. And the refugees who are running around the Warsaw, the bunch – were a group of people from Warsaw who were running around, "What will happen to us, what will happen to us? The Germans are going to kill us." Well, the German patrol came down the village and they just came, they didn't bother anybody, went across the village and went into the woods beyond the village, where the Polish army escaped. And more patrols came and more patrols came. But they were very correct, they did not bother anybody. They questioned a few men and they took document – asked for documents and they did not bother anybody. In – in other places, they would take young men and – and kill them. In our village, they were quite correct.

Q: So, almost your first – well, your first interaction with this war. You were essentially involved in it. You got asked to come into it.

A: Well, kind of, but I was almost a bystander, but I was little foolhardy running over the top of a hill where the shooting is going on. Of course I can – I could run. I said, "I can run – outrun anything. Nobody can hit me – aim and hit." And they didn't.

02:17:17

[12] Alder tree (Polish)

Q: Did you tell your father this story?

A: Well, yeah, sure, of course I told him, I bragged about it. And he said, "Good for you." Because my father went with horses to the forefront, where the Polish soldiers were dug in, he was doing some field work. And when there started shooting, he just stayed with them. And he went to talk to them in a – in the – in foxholes, said, "You better go there. Get on this side, get on this side." "What do you know, old man?" "What do you mean old man? I'm an old soldier. Right here get mutilated, get behind that bush. Dig – dig a little foxhole there." So they did and sure enough, long distance artillery shell came right where they were and made a hole you can drive – ride horses in it. So they turn and said, "Well, you old man, you – you knew what you were doing." Well, they retreated. So he went back with them and he wanted a rifle, but they said, "Why, we don't give rifles to civilians." So of course he came home and my sisters and my mother and some of the refugee from Warsaw women were in our dugout there. Of course, everything was burning. The pigs were burning and squealing and – it was kind of a bedlam.

Q: That the animals were burning and dying?

A: Yes. We were lucky. Our house and our barn – animal barn – I mean cow barn and our grain barn were not burned, so. We had a lot of people living with us for – after then. Some were relatives who were burnt out, some were neighbors who got burnt out. We had probably 35 people living with us. Was a three room part of a house. We cooked a lot. We rescued some of the pigs that were burned and we lived high on the hog for several weeks.

Q: What were those few weeks like right after that first firefight? Were, were the Germans a presence in the village?

A: The Germans were not around at all. There was some German police, that went and stayed with the Polish Blue Police in the Grebków by middle, my school village where I went to grade fourth and up. And there were Germans in Węgrów , the county town. There was a – a small army detachment. And later on – later, later on, there were Germans – German cavalry standing in neighb– sitting – staying in neighboring village, but to my village, it came only for a visit. It was a time when they were apparently preparing for the eastern front, but of course I wasn't there then. I was way out of it.

02:20:29

Q: Well, what, what happened in those weeks that you – there were refugees living with you, what was going on around you and what were people talking about? How were they preparing to cope with their situation?

A: People were quite bewildered. They didn't know exactly what was going to go on. The civil administration was left intact, as it was. They had German supervisors, but on our

little district, there was not even a German supervisor. There was a count and there was a district secretary and couple helpers, couple typists. There were a three man police force, which was staying there and they got orders from a Germans, but not really any orders to do anything unusual, just to keep peace. And of course, bunch of little boys – I joined the underground organization immediately. I think it was in early – late September or early October. We had a swearing in ceremony, one by one, in a cemetery. I can still remember it by heart. That was the – that was the O.P., Obroncy Polski,[13] the Defenders of Poland.

Q: Describe that and what – what – how did they swear you in? What –

A: Well, you swore in that you are joining the defenders of Poland and, "I'm going to obey all orders by the organization. I will not disclosed any secrets to the enemy, regardless of whatever happens and I will fight to the end for the freedom of my country." That was about it. I still remember it in Polish.

Q: Can you say it in Polish?

A: Not really. And we did – not much, but we did get together once or twice a week and we talked and we collected arms and ammunition that was dropped by the Polish army, or by the Germans. We had a German light machine gun. We had a Polish light machine gun and we had a lot of rifles. I even found a six-shooter. It just – looked almost like a American six-shooter. Of course I gave it away to my commander later on, because he had to have a side-arms and I didn't need to.

Q: How many people were in this group?

A: There were 12 of us. Just a litt– from two small villages, from Lesnogóra and Zarnówka. And of course, the swearing ceremony was very young and moving, you know, in a cemetery.

02:23:32

Q: Could you describe it? Was, was it at night?

A: It was in the evening, yes.

Q: What, what was it like?

A: Well, the commander came from somewhere, I don't know where, we're not supposed to know. And he administered the oath. You would swear upon your grandfather grave. And of course I wasn't with it for too long, because I took a little side trip.

[13] Guardians of Poland (Polish)

Q: So 12 young men got together and decided that they would fight?

A: Yes. Just a bunch of kids shooting off their mouth. I have glaucoma on my eyes on occasionally. But it's under control and my doctor says, "I'm going to make you see until you die."

Q: Do you have any particular friends from that group of 12? Were they your – were they your–

A: All dead.

Q: All dead.

A: None alive. Mostly were killed. Most of them were dead by 1943.

Q: So what did you do? I mean, did you get into any –

A: Well, see when I – when I took my little side trip, they were in their organization. They became an active, so-called active group. And they went on so-called wet works, attacking German patrols, German moving troops, German riding on a freeway toward the eastern front. And they did get mutilated. They got shot and killed and apprehended and killed in prisons and – out of those, I don't think anybody is still alive.

Q: So, very quickly you formed a sort of a secret underground resistance group and then you awaited orders?

A: We awaited orders. There were group in almost every small village. Every two villages they had a group. There was a overall command. We don't know who they – we didn't know who they were. They came for a visit, they announced, by runner they would come for a visit, we'll talk to you and they came and talked and gave us instruction and send us trainers, who trained us for the things to come. But I took very little part in that, because I went on a trip east.

02:26:39

Q: Tell us about that.

A: We had relatives and – who were in the Soviet zone, so-called, and it was – well I called the, the man uncle, but he was just a distant relative, he was not an uncle. We had some family things to do. I brought some documents to him that he needed. And when I came, it was the night where they came. The Soviets NKWD[14] came with lists and took everybody who was anybody in the Polish administration, with their family. There was a

[14] NKVD

judgment night in a marketplace. There was a town of about 18-20,000 people. They took 1,800 people. Men who were in administration, who were teachers or preachers or policemen or anybody who were representatives to Polish legislation. And the judgment time took about four and a half hours. It was about like 37 seconds per person. There were three men. There was a man sitting behind a table with a long list, civilian, kind of weasely little person. There was a man sitting in a middle and a big, Russian officer overcoat and a big hat, with a face, with a face – there's a little Russian saying, "Morda kirpicha prosit.[15]" "A face that asks for a brick." He had a face like that. On the right hand of his, sat another civilian with a list, writing sentences. The person on the left, the group of people, or a family, or a person would came that he would look up his name on the list and he would tell – the person in middle that one looked up – and then he would said – would say, "Twelve and a half, five and five. Next. Fifteen, five and five. Next." The one on the right would write a sentence. Twelve and a half or 15 or 20, means 12 and a half, 15 or 20 years of hard labor in a prison camp, in gulag, in most cases, in Siberia or Outer Mongolia or Kazakhstan. Five years of external exile, you could not come back. Five more years of a loss of citizenship. "Next." Some people questioned it. I said, "Sir, but I haven't done anything. Why?" He said, "This is Soviet justice, you don't question it, you questioned it." "I haven't done anything." So, he said, "Well take him out and shoot him." "Okay, okay. It's all right, it's all right, I'll stay 15 years. I'll se– I'll serve 20 years."

02:30:06

End of Tape#2

[15] A mug that asks for a brick (Russian)

Tape #3

03:00:00

[Pre-interview conversation]

03:00:44

Q: This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski. It's April 8, 1998, we're outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. It's conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape number three. Just want to get you to say the name of the town where this judgment was going on, that you were just describing.

A: It was Szczuczyn.

Q: Can you spell it?

A: S-z-c-z-u-c-z-y-n. It was in eastern Poland and a little town.

Q: And at that time controlled by the Soviets?

A: Yes, it was on – in the Soviet zone.

Q: And this is November, 1939?

A: November, 1939. Anyway, when we came, I mean when they came to my uncle's pla– I mean to my relative place, said, "You are ready in 15 minutes, take whatever you can carry. Your wife, your daughter, your son and who is this?" I said, "Well, I am a distant relative, I am just visiting here. So my suitcase is still un– not unpacked, so I will just go." "Where do you think you are going?" I said, "Well, I go back to a German – into German zone where I belong, where my family is." "Oh no, you are relative? This is Soviet justice, you go with him." "No, I'm not going. I'm going back home." "Oh, you are not going, huh?" "No." "Take him out and shoot him." "I am going."

Q: They really said that?

A: Yes. "Take him out and shoot him." "I am going." So my suitcase was packed and I – we went together. Anyway, his daughter, who was almost sevent– almost 16 and I was 17, we got light sentence, 12 and a half only. Twelve and a half. And my uncle got 15, his son got 15, my aunt got 15 years. We were – after the judgment we were loaded on the trains and we went and we went and we went, for about five and a half weeks. We went across the Soviet Union, we went across the Ural Mountains. We went at far – as far as

the River Lena. It goes – I think it starts in a Balker – Bikal Sea[16] and goes up into the North Sea. And then we went up the River Lena, some in a train, some in boats. We got to within a short distance from the Arctic Circle. We're put in a camp and we felled trees.

03:03:17

Q: Can I ask you what those trains were like? Were you standing, did they give you food?

A: No, those were a – those were cattle trains that bunks were built. There was a pot-bellied stove that you could feed as much as you wanted to. And there were triple bunks and I don't remember how many people, about 50 people in each car. You know, like that 18 men and fo– and – and six horses, or six horses. There were about 50 of us, I think about 52. They kept the famil– let the families be together. Yeah, we did get to the camp and we f –

Q: Were you scared then?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Were you scared?

A: Not really. We stopped places, they gave us food sometime, there were Russian people who were a – on little stations looking and talking to us. And if we – some of us had some money, they wanted Polish money or they wanted goods. They figured a piece of clothes, they could get some good food. We bantered, we laughed, we sang a lot. It was just accomplished fact, nothing to do – you can do about it. The guards were not very bad. If you wanted to run away – if you tried to run away, they shot you. That's about all they could do. They did not mistreat us. We just went like on a nice vacation. Slightly apprehensive.

Q: Where – what did you think was going to happen? Where – did they tell you where you were going?

A: We didn't know a thing. We didn't know a thing. They told us "Idyosh na poselenie.[17]" You are being exiled. "Na poselenie.[18]"

Q: Your parents didn't know where you were?

A: No. My parents knew I disappeared.

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[16] Lake Bikal
[17] You are going for settlement (Russian)
[18] For settlement (Russian)

03:05:56

Q: So tell us what it was like when you did get there.

A: We put in a – in a barracks. Some people were put in a tent, I was luc– because there were not enough cabins. They were log cabins like barracks. But we kept building more of these log cabins. There were two, big pot-bullied – bellied – pot-bellied stoves that we fed as much wood as we wanted to. If you were close to it, you were sizzling. If you got little away from it, you are freezing. You know it's a nice cool place there, huh? Forty-five below zero, is nothing to it. It used to get to 72 below zero. We – it was 72 below zero and heavy wind, we did not have to go to work. So every night we would kneel down and say, "Good Lord, let it be 72 below zero tomorrow and heavy winds, so we stay in." Well, if it was 71, nothing doing. If it was 72 and – and wind, you went anyway.

Q: Did you have warm clothes?

A: We had clothes that we came with and also they had the prison clothes, which is quilted kind of a gaber– I mean, kind of a poor material, like a – like a lining on a poor jacket, quilted, with a cotton in between. The down stuff is quite warm. And we had walonki,[19] which were felt boots, which were issued to some of us. So you could survive. You could survive.

Q: So what did you think when you got there? I mean, what did you think was – was going to happen?

A: We thought that we will try to survive. Since they are not taking it – us out and shooting us offhand, as they frequently used to do, that we knew of. The damn Communists used to do that to people frequently. We thought that we would try to survive.

03:08:05

Q: So what – what was a re – describe a regular day.

A: Waked up in su– before sunrise, counting – Appell[20], counting. You got a pot of tea, which was made out of birch leaves. You got a little, tiny piece of bread, maybe half an ounce or so. You ate it. Then you dressed up and you went walking. If you remember, about four or five years ago, where there was a Olympics in Sarajevo, they showed the Russian Siberian man, who was a weightlifter and a wrestler, how he ran a mile in the snow that deep? This is the snow we walked in. It was two guards and about 50 of us and we walked. And the person who walked ahead was changed every hundred feet or so. If, for – sometime for punishment, if they made one person walk all way, a mile or two or

[19] Felt boots (Polish)
[20] Roll call (German).

three miles to the place of work. He – by the time he got there, he was dead – breaking the snow. So we went – we cut trees for about five hours, then came soup at noon. People came with sleds from a camp, with big kettles of fish and cabbage soup. It was mostly water. We sat down and ate the soup, then we cut tree – trees again and stacked them and came back. Six p.m., we started on the way home, we got there by seven or so. Were counted again, got another pot of tea and a little slice of bread and of course to sleep. We had a good guard. I mean he was a damn Soviet, but he was a good guy, the guard. I mean, he was just out of this world. When we did get there, said, "Tea. Make fire." So we made fire. "Make big fire. Sit and rest." So we sat around and rest. And he looked at his watch, he had a Polish watch that he stole during 1939 campaign, said "polsky chasy.[21]" Polish watch runs well. "Go and cut." So we went and cut for about, oh probably one hour. So then, "Hey, come on back." So we came back. "Sit and rest. Soup coming." Oh, in about one hour, soup came. "Eat." We ate. "Sit and rest." We sat and rest. "Go and cut." So went and cut for about one hour. And he – then he went – came to us there where we were. "Now, go and steal." So we went stealing. A prisoner had to cut a cubic yard of wood a day. And regardless how young, how strong, how big you were, you could never do it. If you didn't cut a square yard per person, your group didn't, at night your soup was cut, your bread was cut accordingly. Next day you were weaker. In a week you were gone. So we would go and steal the wood that we cut day before and day before and day before stack it up, he would measure it. "Okay, now we sit down and rest, we go home soon. Make bigger fire." So we went home. That Ivan Ivanovich was a damn good man.

03:11:47

Also, I was lucky. I spoke some English, I spoke some German. I spoke Russian quite well. When my father and mother wanted us kid not to know what was going on, they spoke Russian. My mother was a Russian teacher in middle school before she got married. My father was of course, Russian speaking person. So we kids learned it in a hurry. We knew exactly what was going on. On the train for six weeks, by the time we got to Siberia, my Russian was almost as good as my English. Much more colorful because I knew a lot of swear words. So they found out and I was called to the commanders office and he said, "You stay here, you translate." And he got the German word, "You dolmetscher.[22]" "You interpreter." I don't know how he got that German word, I knew what it was, but "You dolmetscher." When new prisoners came, I would get up on that barrel and I would shout, "His Excellency, Commander so and so says this and says that and says that. You don't do this, you don't do that. You get shot for this, you get in solitary for that. You get hunged up for this. So remember." And of course, after a few days, I – one time a group of Czechs came and I got up on the barrel and I became kind of – took it for granted, became rambunctious – young, stupid kid. And I said, "Commander Mika-Mikhail Ivishenerovich, that son of a dog says this and this and

[21] Polish watch (Russian)
[22] Interpreter (German)

this." And in Polish it's skurwysyn,[23] in Russian, it's sukin-syn.[24] In English, of course, you know what it is. So he came and he knocked me down and he kicked me. Said, "You little so and so, you called me sukin-syn." Said, "I called you Excellency, and Excellency in Polish – in Czech, and sukin-syn sounds almost close together. I call you Excellency." "Oh no, I know Polish and I know Czech, you call me sukin-syn. If you say that again, I'll shoot you, you little so and so." Said, "Commander, I did not say it, but I will not sa– ever say it again if I did." I thought my goose was cooked, but it wasn't. So I stayed in barrack, I peeled potatoes, I swept the barracks. I had a norm man, a man who wrote the norms for the people, what people did during the day. I helped him do the norms. The classification, how much soup at night everybody gets. And I learn how to cheat, how to write up – how to cheat so that people made more than they did. Anyway, I made it.

03:15:12

Q: You were with your family still, right?

A: I was with – I was with my family still. About 11 months later, when Hitler attacked the Soviets, Polish und– government in exile in London, negotiated with Stalin and those of us who received less than 50 years were – 15 years, were released. So my little cousin girl and I were released. It did not make any difference to my uncle, because he was dead. My aunt was dead. Their son – who was as big as this young man, and strong and sportsman, he was dead. Two little weasel-y thing, that little girl and I were still alive.

Q: How did they die? Did they die in – in the work camp?

A: Died hard – hard work. Mistreatment, beating occasionally. Some guards were vicious. Some guards were not as good as Ivan Ivanovich. I still say a prayer for him occasionally.

Q: For him?

A: For him. We did get out. We were allowed to go to southern part of Russia, where Poles are being collected and Polish army, to fight with the Soviets against the Germans, was formed. Some of us crossed into Iran. The Soviets had a hard time taking care of all of us. Iran was run by the Russians and the British. We did sneak into the British part. The British trained us, armed us, fed us – formed Polish second corps under Polish General Anders.[25] They went to fight in North Africa. In Egypt, North Africa, all way to Tripoli. Later on they went fighting in Italy, all way to Monte Cassino.

Q: At this point were you still with your cousin?

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[23] Son of a whore (Polish)
[24] Son of a bitch (Russian)
[25] Gen. Wladyslaw Anders

A: My cousin – women and – and children were bundled up and sent to India and South Africa. They build camps for them to stay for duration. After the war, they were all sent back to Europe.

03:17:42

Q: How was your strength after 11 months? Your strength?

A: Mine was all right. I had enough to eat. I had a sideline. After about seven weeks there, I was allowed to go out. There was a little settlement, winter settlement. They wer– they were the Samoyed people. Siberian people like American Eskimos. Samoyed people raised reindeer and fished. So I went and wandered around and a young boy came and talked to me, he said, "Who you are?" "Kto vy takoy?[26]" So I said, "Well, I am Polish." And, "Chto eto takoy?[27]" "What is that?" Said, "Well, I am from a country way, way west. Just like your Samoyed country, the damn Soviets took us over, they took you over and beat the bejesus out of us and sent us here to work in a camp." "Uh-huh. You hungry?" "Of course I'm hungry." "Come and eat." And Samoyed build, build – live-in yurtas. Yurta is a kind of a conical tent made of bearskins, double bearskin – four out and four in. And it's kind of a good size, about the size of this living room here, about 12, 15 feet in diameter. But if you get into the yurta, if you – they use a – long handed hatchets, like American Indian tomahawks. If you pick up the hatchet and put it like this and take your hand off, the hatchet will stay there, the air is so thick. The Samoyed had people wash twice a year, if they have to or not. And they cook, they sleep, they make babies, they do everything in the yurta. I mean the smell is overpowering. But they say, "Never mind, pribyknyesh[28] – you get used to it." So I ate a lot of fish and the young man said, "You come tomorrow?" "If I can, I come tomorrow." So he gave me some fish, I took the fish to the camp. I shared some with the guards, I shared some with fellow prisoners.

03:20:16

Next day I couldn't go, so third day I went and, "What is your name?" "Stefan." "We call you Stepka. Khorosho, kak Vas velichat'?[29]" "How do we call you?" Velichat'[30], it means, you use you name, your father's name. So I said my father was Jana. "Okay, Stepka Ivanovich, come on and eat." So we ate. "Yi– How much time do you have?" "Oh, some time." "We'll go fishing." So we went fishing. So they gave me – gave me harpoon and we walked, on the River Lena. And I fell in. I didn't know what was what. River Lena is a very brisk river. The ice that time was probably 20 feet thick, but there

[26] Who are you such? (Russian)
[27] What is that such? (Russian)
[28] You get accustomed (Russian)
[29] Good, what are you called? (Russian)
[30] To be called by name (Russian)

were wash-outs, little bubbles. If you step on the bubble, you go in. I was lucky, I had the harpoon. So I fell only in – that way I got wet. It was not very cold, just about maybe 25 below zero. So two of them grabbed me and ran back – ran to the – back to the yurta where I s – I stripped. And he said, "Well, I loan you my suit." His suit was made of silver foxes. Big pants up to here and a big parka, with a big, huge hood – silver fox outfit, and reindeer. It was soft as silk. Because this man had three suits and he had three wives. Good Siberian women can make only one suit at a time. She has to chew the skin. Siberian wives has teeth just about three millimeters long, where they constantly chew the skin. You – you tan it and then you invert it and you chew the inside of it to make it soft, and becomes – either the chewing process or the saliva makes it as soft as silk. So I wore his suit. Went fishing again, we caught some sturgeon. They made a hole in a bubble, we got some sturgeon, we came back. We cooked some fish, we ate some fish. My suit was still wet so he said, "You wear my suit." So I went. I was the best dressed prisoner in the whole damn Soviet system. I came, everybody's oh-ing and oo-ing and the guards and especially the chachainsis.[31] There were bunch of chachainsis. Chachainsis is a bunch – a bunch of son of a guns. They are cutthroats, they are thieves, they are murderers, everything. They kept looking. "Oh, too bad he is so small. Oh, too bad he is so small. We would take it off you." "You wouldn't take it off me." "I wouldn't?" I said that, "What would you do to me?" "Cut your head off, you stupid so and so." "You little so and so, you would cut my head off? We cut your head off." They frequently would – if somebody wa– had something they didn't– didn't want to give, they would come and cut his head off at night and took whatever they wanted. Anyway, they became my friends and protectors. I don't know why. I was just like a, like a little to– a flea, in comparison with them.

03:23:50

Q: Did you get to keep the suit?

A: Of co – oh I kept it for duration. Later on, that man said – well he was a chief's son, he had three suits and three wives and 700 reindeer. So he said, "Well, I got enough, two suits, you can – Stepka, you're my brother, you wear my suit." So I wore his suit for the duration. And when I – I was ready to leave, I went to visit him and he said, "Well, you're going to stay with us – I mean all the time, stay with us. You can marry one my sister, you can marry two my sisters. You can marry three of my sisters if you want to. You my brother, you stay with us." So when I went to say goodbye, I brought his suit back. I said, "I'm sorry, I have to leave. I want to go and fight for my country." So we had a good cry and I went away.

Q: What was his name?

A: Was –

[31] Chechens (Russian)

Q: His name?

A: Krugly.[32] That means the round one, Krugly. I could not pronounce his Samoyed name, but he was Krugly, the round one. He was a tough, young Samoyed, with three wives. He didn't have any children yet.

Q: So you knew when you left that you would probably go back to your country and try to fight?

A: I hoped so, I hoped so. Well, we're told by the political officer, by the politruk[33] in a camp that, "You are going to join Polish forces, you are going to join our victorious Red Army – are going to fight the damn Germans."

03:25:59

[Technical conversation]

End of Tape #3

[32] Round (Russian)
[33] Political instructor (Russian)

Tape #4

[Technical conversation]

04:02:54

Q: This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski. It is April 8, 1998. We are outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. This interview is conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape number four. If we could start with the last day or two before you left the Soviet work camp, how did you find out you were leaving? How did you leave? Where did you go?

Q: It took about say a we – about a week before we could leave. We were – there was an announcement, you know, in a square, very official – lot of high rank officers came and said, "We did not want to hurt you – you – we knew that you are our friends and now – from now on we will be allies and you are going to fight the – fight the German aggressor, so and so and so. And those of you who are not really criminals, traitors and all – all of us were tr– tried under clause of high treason, paragraph 150. Even I was under high treason – 150, 150 sub-paragraph – subparagraph 12, subparagraph 17 – high treason. What for? Anyway, it took us about a week before they went – we went down the Lena river. We were up the ri– Lena river. And then we got on the train and we got collected – assembled on – close to Iranian border. And there was such a multitude of us, they couldn't take care of us. So they said, "If you want to volunteer and go across there, we have our people there, too." So we sneaked – we went across and then we sneaked into the British part. And of course, British were forming Polish army and everybody who was anybody wanted to join it. Instead of joining those damn Communists.

Q: Did you say goodbye to your cousin? Did you realize you might not see her for awhile?

A: Yes, we said goodbye and she was whisked away. In about – after we moved to the British zone there, we were together for about a week. And we – they collected all women and children and she went to India. Some went to South Africa, but she stayed in India for the duration of the war.

Q: And when you say – tell us a little bit more about sneaking into the British side. Who did you do it with, was it a – a night that you did it? And how did you do it?

A: Well, we just – actually, we just walked. And the Soviets stopped some groups. Some groups were not even bothered with. Especially groups that had women and children and they didn't want to bother with. We just walked and hoped for the best.

04:05:50

Q: So if you – if you could just describe it for us. Where did you walk to and – and when – I mean, where did you spend the night, how did you find the British officials?

A: Yeah, it was close to – it were close to Teheran, it was west of Teheran. It was kind of a desert area and there was some local people who traveled with herds of sheep and such, from place to place, so we would stay overnight with them. We just sleep outside, it was – you know, subtropics, it was warm and the – the British built camps already, so we went to the camp that was built for the refugees, by the British. And of course, pretty soon they started asking young men to come to lectures and come to training and, "Do you want to fight?" "Of course, what do you think? I'm going – I came here for it." And many people joined. And then I don't know if I want to divert. I think I will have to divert back, before I – I left Siberia. About six months after we be – were there, they fished out 17 young boys, between 16 and 19. And I was one of them and we went through a heavy indoctrination course. Eight, 10, 12 weeks, eight hours a day. Heavy indoctrination course. And if you – if I get the three of you in a secluded place, that you are not allowed to leave, in about two weeks, you'll believe any – everything that I will tell you. They – there's nothing better than Communism. Dialectical materialism is the only doctrine that works among peoples. Soviet Russia is the most powerful, most wise, most – the best of all, the richest. We have the riches in Siberia that you never heard of. We have enormous Ukrainian plains that we can – if we – planting our grain, we can s – we can feed the whole world. This is the best. You had to listen closely, you have to listen attentively. If you smirked, if you made a face, if you make a funny remark, you were thrown – your shoes were taken, your jacket was taken, you were thrown into solitary, which was six – what – four by four feet. Your shoes were taken, too, overnight. You had to dance, jump, run all night. If you sat down, you never waked up. Well, I was lucky, I spent only three nights. I couldn't keep my tongue. I mean I couldn't keep my mouth shut. I had to make remarks. I made faces, I laughed in his face, the politruk was a big man, had a face that was asking for a brick, too. I just sm– laughed in his face. And I told him once, "How little you know." So he was lenient with me, but still he, still he throw me in, in the solitary, one night at a time. If you spent two nights, you didn't make it. Some people – there were a few people who made it for two nights. Three nights nobody made, in a row.

04:09:33

Anyway, by the time we graduated, we had a talk, 45 minute talk. And if you missed two words, you were thrown into solitary, had to repeat it. You had to give a lecture that told everything about the dialect – dialectical materialism. You knew all about Engels[34], you knew all about Marx.[35] You knew everything about Lenin.[36] And you most about Stalin.[37] I mean those were the holy – not a trinity, but a quadruplinity. And you had to talk about them in glowing terms. Your tone of your voice had to be just like a great

[34] Friedrich Engels
[35] Karl Marx
[36] Vladimir Ilich Lenin
[37] Joseph Stalin

sermon on a mount. And you know, by the – by the end of it, I believed, strongly. I became a honest to goodness believer. So when we were later let go and I think it was somewhat with premeditation that this little group was let go into the British part. Because we going to be the avant-garde of Communism. We are going to get introduced into armed forces or whatever groups there were and we're going to propagate it by going – we are going to be the true believers. And there – for some way or another, the British knew it. They collected us again. We went through a heavy indoctrination by the Polish political officers, by the British, who some spoke Polish, some worked with the translators. In about three weeks we lost the faith. We lost the true faith. And then they formed the armed forces. Yes, let's say they went to fight, they fought, fought all way to Monte Cassino. By Monte Cassino – when they took Monte Cassino, the second Polish corps – after British and the Australians and the Americans couldn't take it, they were so bloodied, they were sent to recuperation–

04:11:40

Q: Remind me where we are at this point. I know where we are, but I mean, what year is it? You're now – it's–

A: It was 1941. 1941 summer–

Q: And you're outside of Teheran?

A: Out of Teheran, last – late summer.

Q: And you're getting – you're getting training from British and from Polish?

A: …and from Polish, we're getting training. So my 17 were re-indoctrinated, re-brainwashed and trained in sabotage and demolition. The whole 17. They were bright ki– I mean, of course we were bright kids. We got to brag about it a lot, I mean we used to brag a lot about it. "We are the best of the best." Were trained in sabotage and demolition and the underground work. We were put in small groups. We went back to Poland.

Q: Before we go back to Poland, I want to know a little bit more about what the training was like. Take us through a day of training.

A: The training was in the morning, was calisthenics. There was a five mile run. There were four hours of lectures, in – mostly about small arms training and the firefights. Mostly firefights, being surrounded – being surrounded by a superior group and getting out. Constantly, constantly, constantly.

04:13:10

Q: You mean how to escape when you're surrounded?

A: How, how to fight your way out. How to fight your way out. Then in afternoon was another lecture, which was a political lecture, whom we have to fight. Then of course, kind of a – the lecture would, would tell about how we do fight the Germans. "But, if you want to, you can fight the damn Russians, too." And by nightfall, you fell sleepy, you fell off your feet, you slept. And the same and the same. And then sabotage, blowing up bridges, blowing up trains, blowing up buildings. Demolishing rail – train tracks, if you did not have explosives. And a lot – a lot of training with semi and automatic weapons. It was a time when the British introduced a sten gun and we trained a lot with the sten guns. We trained little with regular rifles, but they said, "When you get there, we will provide you with sten guns, you will have a lot of firepower." And a sten gun is similar to American Thompson submachine gun. But it's a piece of junk, actually. You shoot about 1700 rounds and you throw it away, because after 1700 rounds, becomes more dangerous to you than to your pos– opponent. Anyway, seven of us went on a trip. We walked, we rode trains, we hitched up rides on the tracks. We rode donkeys most of the time. We went through the western Iran, into northern Iraq. We went through the Kurdistan. By the way, the Kurdish people are the greatest people ever. They can cut your head off, if you have – if you have something they like, but if you come in, it is so much like in – in Poland, "Guest in, God in." They treat you like you were a god visit-visiting them. They give you food. They give you – what they have, they share with you. If you are ragged, they will give you shirt or pair of pants. But don't look at anything good they have, because they will give it to you. If you look at something, "Oh gee, this is so neat." They will let you sleep with his – with his wife if you like her. But you get out of a tent, they will follow you, cut your head off and take the stuff back. So we're told, "Be careful with the Kurds."

04:16:00

Anyway, we walked through part of Turkey, we diverted into Syria and backed in Anatolia, Turkey, Anatolia. We did come to Bosporus Straits and we were kind of pursued at that time, we knew something was happening. We were being hunted. So we met a old fisherman on the Bosporus and he spoke Russian. He was an old Turk who spoke Russian. And said, "Grandpa, please take us across." And he said, "Lords, night is falling, there's going to be storm tonight, we cannot get a – go across." "Grandpa, please take us across, because we – if we don't leave here tonight, we may not be alive tomorrow. We know something is happening." The German had a Intelligence pe– Intelligence people in Turkey and they organized pursuit parties, we overheard before then. So he said, "Well, Lords, I'm old, my boat is leaky and if you want to risk, what am I to say?" So we said, "Grandpa, we'll pay you." "I don't want to be paid." So we said, "Grandpa, we'll give you the donkeys." "Donkeys, they're not worth anything. They are worn up completely." Said, "Grandpa, you give them on a p – good grass, they'll be as good as new in two or three weeks. Leave them here." We got in the boat, he gave each a – each one of us a piece of rope. "Tie yourself ti– s – well." Storm came. It was the scariest five hours I lived in my life – scariest. I was in dark places, but this was the

worst. I think I fell out about four times. If it wasn't for rope, I wouldn't be talking to you tonight. The Mediterranean fish would have eaten me up. Anyway, we did get to the Turkish side on the north side of – it was almost morning. Beautiful, quiet, sun was coming up. And the old Ismael said, "Lords, the Allah was with you. I don't want to be paid." But before we left, the British gave us some gold pieces. "Case you're in a tight spot, trading, whatever." So we said, "Grandpa, we don't want to pay you, we just want to give you baksheesh, a gift from the heart." And each one of us gave him a gold piece. He looked, said, "Oh my Allah. My granddaughter will get married, my younger daughter will get married, my grandson get married, I can pay dowry to every one of them and I'm going to live high on the hog for the rest of my days." He got in his boat and a little breeze came, he just zoomed out of there.

04:19:05

And we walked across a part of Turkey, went into Bulgaria, we caught rides on trains – tracks, we head into Romania. We sneaked into Nazi occupied Poland. You know, the front li– eastern front was way, way out. By that time, on Polish territory, the Germans developed Einsatzgruppen,[38] special forces. They call them Einsatzgruppen or Vernichtungsgruppen,[39] the exterminators. So they were killing lot of Jewish people and they were killing all the Jewish people they could find. And they were killing a lot of Polish people. So the Polish underground suffered for a time. But then, when we came, they provided us with arms and ammunition and some unstable Polish dynamite. And we – each one of us – I was given 17 people. Seventeen plus two, plus – plus me. That were 20 people. And we became the exterminators of exterminators. We would create false alarms. Because when something happen in certain village or little town, they would just swoop upon it. They – those groups were about 100, 75 to 125 in each group. They would swoop around, swoop in, surround it, burn it down, kill everybody. That was their standard procedure. And when they went to a ghetto, they would just kill all the Jewish people in the ghetto. Of course, ghettos were already fenced in – barbed wired in. So we did few things with them and we blew up – we could not blow up – blow up complete bridge, but we blew up parts of a bridge. We demolished a lot of railroad tracks. We blew up some trains when we had explosives. And I was – oh, my gosh, my commander was a – I still don't know his name. His name was, was "B. Dab" – "B. the Old Oak." He said, "You little shit, I'm going to shoot you, I'm going to court martial you, you missed it." I would sit in a field with the two wires and a battery, holding here and I would touch it and the damn thing would not explode and the train would go by. Or sometime I would blow it up before the train came. So after each incident – mishap like this, he would gave me a dressing and threaten me with, with an execution and court martial and God knows what. He was a big, fat man with a very sharp temper.

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[38] Task forces (German); mobile killing units, employed especially in the destruction of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe.
[39] Annihilation group (German)

04:22:03

And we slept in bunks. We slept on farms that were far away from habitations. We had dugouts in half a dozen different forests. Run around constantly. We did get surrounded a lot of times. We had to fight – were in lot of firefights with those groups. Were surrounded frequently by them and had to fight our way out. And about – in 1943, it was '42, fall and winter when we started. Forty-three, in late spring, we hijacked German army bank on a street of Warsaw. We lost three people out of about 25 or 30 that were – but we got a lot of money. We got about 15 million marks. Each one was – one of us was given a bonus, and you were given operating expenses. I think we – my group got about half a million marks. And I had a drinking buddy, who was a young, German soldier, supply officer. So we had drinks, we met few times. I introduced him to some Polish girls. And we talked and he sold me about over 100 Schmeissers. Schmeisser is a light, automatic weapon, similar to American Thompson submachine gun, but much, much more effective. Much more effective. And I don't know how many, probably about 12, 15 million rounds of ammunition. So from then on, my little group of 17 plus three were carrying 27 Schmeissers, because some of the boys said, "I don't trust that damn German weapon, I want to carry two." So I said, "Well, you know, we have a – we join – we shared those with some other groups, but we have plenty of it in places, hidden places. If you want to carry 17 extra pounds, what am I to say? Go ahead, be my guest." The German groups – ordinarily each squad had one Schmeisser and the rest of them had manual Mauser rifles. So when we – from then on, we – on purpose, did – when it cato– came to firefight, let ourselves be surrounded. And then when we opened up, we went just like a hot knife through a piece of butter. They had to keep their heads down, or they lost them. And anybody who stuck their head up did not get up again. So we went out and went out and went out and – course we were losing people. At the start we lost like 11 people in two months. So the boys who were in my group said, "What do we do?" I said, "Well, I tried to train you, you refused to be trained. You think you know everything. You were as full of beans, you want to fight, well do – surely we fight, but are going to lose people constantly if you don't want to train." So they said, "Do anything that – to train us." So we did. For about four weeks, we got the guts out of ourselves. We did it the British way. The way the British Major Thompson did to us, we did to ourselves. From then on we became almost invincible. We would lose a person from time to time, but very, very seldom.

04:26:00

Q: You took some time and sort of dropped back in the countryside and –

A: We drop back to countryside, we took a week or two off, then we – most of the time we found the places we wanted to take care of ourselves. Sometime our commander would contact us and gave us – gave us an order to do this or to do that. And there was a – one of the Eisengrupp – Eisens – Eis – Einsatzgruppen in neighborhood where my – not exactly my own family neighborhood, but close by. It was in a town called Biala

Podlaska. It was about 100 kilometers east of Warsaw. There was the group that was large, it was very well entrenched. Very, very foxy, we just couldn't do anything to them. So he called me the carpet and he said, "You are supposed to take care of that group. You don't sa– you don't have to kill all of them, but really give them a good thrashing." I said, "Commander, I tried – we tried everything, I tried everything, nothing works." Said, "You have to do something." "They are entrenched. They stay in a solid building, which used to be monastery, with a great gate. They built a wall around, there's some barbed wire on the top of it. There's electricity in the barbed wire. We just can't touch them." So he said, "Well, we can, come on here." Led me to the next room, open a wardrobe and he said, "Look at this. You see this nice, little Hitlerjugend[40] uniform?" And I said, "Oh, no you don't." Said, "Oh yes, I do." And as you can see, I was a little blonde boy – little blonde boy, this one on the right. This one here, with blue eyes and very, very bleached, bleached hair. So he said, "Put it on." So I put the thing, fitted me just right and a little – little – little jacket, shorts, you know. High socks, hobnail boots, little dagger, little hat. Said, "There, you look like a damn German Hitlerjugend." So I didn't have much choice.

04:28:40

In the afternoon, the boys brought me within about two or three blocks from that monastery. I just walked toward the gates, there were two burly SS men with the Schmeissers standing by the gate. And I said, "Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler.[41] Wie geht's denn, Junge[42]" "Ganz gut.[43]" "How are you young man?" "Very well." "Wie geht's denn, Herr Oberst.[44]" How about you, Commander? "Ganz gut." So I said, "I - Ich wünschte mit ihre officer gesprochen.[45]" I want to speak to your officer, your commander here. "Weiter-weitermachen.[46]" "Go right in." So I went in, I went through the corridors, I went up the steps, I went to the back there and there was an outside window, I unlatched the window. I went downstairs again, I went to the back and I notice there's a gate there with a bolt, so I pulled the bolt slowly out. Then I went to the corr– second floor again – again had to go to second floor to go to the front, so I walked. There was some secretaries running out and some officers running back and forth. "Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler, Junge.[47] Wie geht's.[48]" I walked out. Said, "Auf wiedersehen,[49]" to those nice, two, big son of a so and so in the front. Walked out to the corner, walked beyond – about a block away, the boys are waiting with the car, they grabbed me, we ran away. I was so mad at myself. I wet my

[40] Hitler youth (German); Nazi youth organization.
[41] Hail Hitler (German)
[42] How are you then, young man? (German)
[43] Very good (German)
[44] How are you then, Mr. Colonel? (German)
[45] I wish to spoke [sic] with your officer. (German)
[46] Continue (German)
[47] Young man (German)
[48] How are you? (German)
[49] Good-bye (German)

pants. My pants were wet, my socks were wet, my shoes were squelching. I must have been afraid. And strange enough, I was in tougher places. I was being shot at, I was being hit, I was being mutilated, practically, but this must have been scary time that I had had. Was first and the last time that I wetted my pants. That night we came in and the commander came with us. B. Dab came with us. He said, "You know where everything is, so you go in." So I went with my big rucksack. And then we came with a ladder, we're going to climb to that window there.

04:31:05

End of Tape #4

Tape #5

05:00:06

Q: This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski. It is April 8, 1998. We're outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. This interview is conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape five. So you were going into the–?

A: Yes, lucky enough, they did not board the back door. But we came with big oil cans and we oiled all the hinges, you know, and – and my commander said, "Well, you know where everything is, you will go in." Said, "Me? Was supposed to be somebody else going in." "Oh, shut up and go in." So I went in, I set sev– set up 17 charges, one for each boy in the outfit and we blew the place sky high. It just blew up. There was a armory, and I notice where it was, I put a charge on the door to the armory. Whatever they had there – it must have been a lot of explosives – blew up. And of course, some of them were running out of the front gate and the back gate and we met them in the street, too. And I don't know how many were left, but there were some left, I presume. And of course, then we took off and – and got the hell out of there. That was a feather in my hat.

Q: Where would you go after something like that?

A: We just went out for – far away from it, as far as we could from the neighborhood. Sometime we had horses, sometime we had horse-wagons. Occasionally we would have a truck, produce truck that we "borrowed" from the Germans. Well, we would just stop a driver and take him away and appropriate the truck. Take his uniform and one of us would dress in it and we would have it ready after a job like this. And actually, this thing, strange enough, did not have many repercussions. "The armory blew up. There's – something happen, the armory blew up." The German papers were saying, "the armory blew up and some of our people were hurt."

Q: Maybe they didn't want to acknowledge that there was –

A: They did not want to acknowledge, apparently. So then we had a week of rest. My commander said, "Now you deserve a rest." And I said, "Are you going to gift me with that Hitlerjugend uniform?" "Oh no, that is useful – that will be for somebody else. You pissed it, you so and so." I said, "Listen Dab, I was scared." "Well, I think you were scared, but you should have been scared before hand, not when you were right there."

05:03:10

Q: What did you do when you had a week off? A week of rest, as you put it.

A: Occasionally, I would visit my family, but very seldom. But most of the time I would stay in the forest and enjoy it and bring some good food and have a drinking party. And

occasionally we'd have a drinking party with the Mongol people. Wanted –wanted to demolish a track, or a trail, demolish a train. And the Germans had the Mongolians, from outer Mongolia, who volunteered to serve the Germans. They placed them along the railroad tracks to guard it. So, when we wanted to blow up a train, we just go for about two or three kilometers and collect bunch of those people and invite them to a party. Course they had to come if they wanted or not. They didn't want to get shot. So we would provide a few gallons of moonshine and some smoked meat and a lot of bread, we'd have a party with them, get them roaring drunk and then we would wait for the – we knew when the train that – in question was coming in there, with armament or with a group of soldiers going to the eastern front. And we would try to blow it up. Sometimes succeeded, sometime not. After we – after not, my commander would call on me and said, "You little so and so, what's the matter with you? Losing your touch?" I said, "Yes, sir, I am losing my touch." "Let that not happen again." "Yes sir, it will never happen again." If it happened next time, he said, "You forgot you said never again." "Well", said, "well, I thought I – maybe I would be dead before next time."

Q: Were you wearing uniforms at all, or were you –

A: No.

Q: – just –

A: No.

Q: You were in – how – how did that work? Were you – and then in civilian clothes?

A: We had civilian clothes. We had kind of a sports – like a sweatsuit set, something similar to it. Somebody of a got hold of German overalls. Occasionally – later – later on, after we appropriated a lot of German uniforms, those that were not very bloody, we would – we would wear. Matter of fact, we had them tailored, beautiful tailored. We had a Jewish tailor, Mr. – Mr. Grzebien, who could make a beautiful fitting outfit, regardless what it was. And poor Mr. Grzebien did not make it.

Q: So – so if you – I guess what I'm trying to get a sense of is, were you openly an army unit in Poland?

A: No, we were not.

Q: Or were you – you were passing as civilians and then at certain times you'd go–

A: We were passing a – we were passing as civilians.

05:06:02

Q: Okay.

A: But most of the time we stayed a unit – we stayed as unit and went constantly from – we did not stay in one place for more than two nights, went from place to place and found the places to hit and found the places to demolish or got orders to move here or to move there. And then, after we felt that we were too unnerved, we would st– we would take a few days rest. Occa-occasionally some of us would go for a short visit, but very seldom because Germans had also quite good Intelligence. And they had a lot of local people who were reporting to them. So you had to be careful where you go, when you go. Like, for instance, I don't know if I was that religious, but frequently on Sunday I would sneak into the church, to my pastor. And he was friend of mine, I read all his books. I read all the books in the public library and school library and I discovered he had a big library, so I read all of his books and I served Mass. Oh my God, I served Mass forever, I was 19 and 20, I still served Mass. So he would say, "Oh Stefan, come on, serve the Mass." "Father, I can't. I messed up last night, I blew up a train. There were people on that train –," or else I did something. "Come on, I'll listen to your confe– I'll hear your confession. Come on, serve the Mass." "But I'm too old." "Oh, you're so little, nobody will know." So he gave me key to the wardrobe, he kept, "Put your – put your items in a ke–" I put – put my trench coat and my Schmeisser and a bunch of boxes of my magazines of ammunition in his wardrobe, lock it up, serve the Mass. And then he said, "Okay, now you can go." So before he walked out, I would go into sacristy, unlock, jump out of a window and disappear. He was a good old man.

Q: Do you remember his name?

A: Yeah, Ksiadz[50] Miazga.

05:08:22

Q: This was your parish priest?

A: My parish priest, Ksiadz Miazga. He was older. He was patriotic. And I would tell him that I really can't serve Mass, nor can I go to communion – what I did. "I can't sleep nights, my conscience bothers me, cause some of the people that we exterminated were not really willingly going there." Said, "Everybody who is Ein– in Einsatzgruppe went willingly. And if you did kill some soldiers on the train, some officers, this is a war." Anyways, I still occasionally spend sleepless night. So, it lasted – it was good when it lasted. And then in spring, early spring of 1944, I was caught in a lapanka. Lapanka is a round-up, like they caught slaves in Africa, like they go hunting and have a – surround meters and hunters. In Poland, the lapanka was an institution. The group of German Schutzpolizei[51] would stop a train or a bus, mostly train, get everybody out, fish out all

[50] Priest (Polish)
[51] Conventional police (German)

the young people, put them in trucks, take them to process, processing, transit, camp building. And in our district, was the Skaryszewska, it was an – name after the – after the street in Warsaw, "Skaryszewska" – processed you and sent you to compulsory labor in Germany. It was called the "free labor." So I left what I was carrying – I was carrying a suitcase of dynamite and some wiring, so I left it on the train. It was – I was a little boy, caught on a train traveling between Warsaw and – and whatever.

05:11:03

And of course I was sent to western part – I'm sorry, eastern part of Germany, Silesia. Then there was almost like a – like a slave market. They took us to that Kreuzburg town, small town like a county town, Kreuzburg. We were kept – put in a – in a building next to a square – there we be walked out to the square and then farmers and people from different little factories, shops and so on, would come. "I'll take this one, I'll take that one, I'll take that one." "Okay. Here's your ai–," they filled out an arbeitbuch,[52] a little work book for you – your name and your employers name and you went and you were servant to that person. If you got to be on a farm, it wasn't too bad, because you had enough to eat. A group of us – the group of us, about 25 boys and 23 girls, between like 13 and 19 or so, were put in a village called Schorka and we worked in a forest, natching out the trees, pine trees and collecting the resin. Resin was used by German industry for making synthetic rubber. So we worked there about eight hours a day, worked in a group with a supervisor. And sometime the Stadtpolizei[53] worked with us, they try and they did not. So, some of us would be escaping now and then, of course, they would be apprehended and brought back and so on and so forth. And I worked there for, oh, probably three or four weeks. So a small group of us took off and went away. So, "I would – won't work for the damn Germans here. Let us go home." And the home was a general government the center of Poland, which was so called "Free Poland," it was under – it was a protectorate, Hans Frank was the gover-governor and it was run by the Germans, for the Germans, by the Germans and the Poles who were there had to give everything that they produced, they raised on the farm and so on, to the German war effort. But you were kind of semi-free. Anyway, those of us who were in the underground were free because we could go anyplace we want to.

05:13:47

Q: So you just walked away from Schorka – from the resin work camp?

A: Yes, yes. I w – just walked away. Partway home, close to town called Lubliniec and closer to little town called Blachownia, we split – we got chased by some Volksdeutsche[54] people with shotguns. And I ran into couple young boys and they were

[52] Work log (German)
[53] City police (German)
[54] Ethnic German (German)

the chlopcy z lasu,[55] the boys from the forest, who were in the same part of Polish underground that I was. So we talked, we introduced ourselves. And he says, "How come –," asked, "where are you from?" "Oh, I am from Warsaw district." "How come you're here?" "Well, I got caught, spend time in Germany, now I'm escaping." "Okay, come with us, we have a job to do. Are you – do you know anything about wet works?" "Oh, a little." "Well, you know, there is a Gestapo man who is such a son of a bitch, he mistreats people, he beats people, he shot some people, he killed some people during interrogation. And we want to do something willa– with him, but we are not – we got the sentence, death sentence for him from the – our underground authorities, the NSZ." The National – NSZ, which was the National Armed Forces. Narodowe Sily Zbrojne,[56] in Polish. That was the – kind of a rightish wing of the Polish underground. The Armia Krajowa[57] – the Home Army was kind of a middle – the A.L., A.L. – Armia Ludowa[58] were the Communists and we were the – toward the right somewhat. "Well, we are NSZ – we are NSZ and we have problems, we don't know how to proceed, so we –," I stayed with them for a few days and got some arms from them and instructed them and they were still afraid, so we did – we went and we did the job, according to the rules.

05:16:18

We met him in a park, with a wife and two children, one was in a carriage, one was walking. So we ask him to excuse himself and we excuse the lady and we walk him a short distance, we read him the sentence. And of course after we left, he – he was dead. And I should have known better, I should have gotten the hell out of there, but I stayed for a few more days and there was somebody who reported. And they came and I was so well trained and I became sloppy. I was too lucky for too long. I survived too long. I became sloppy and careless and my goose was cooked. I stayed with a family in a Blachownia – Blachstadt(ph) in German. And it was kind of a storage room in a backyard, I stayed there. And they came at about one a.m. We had a shootout. Two of those two who first came in, one was dead and one was badly wounded. And they shot across and they killed another one of their own. And I jumped out of a window, I thought I would – I was free to get out. And then I got hit from behind. I don't know what happened after that. When I was up to – I had a few broken ribs. I was badly kicked and mutilated, practically trampled into the soil in that little garden there. And then – that my – my gar – goose got cooked. They transported me to Lubliniec, which was a district town and a investigator came from my neighborhood, east of Warsaw.

05:18:24

Q: German?

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[55] Boys from the woods (Polish)
[56] National Armed Forces (Polish)
[57] Home Army (Polish)
[58] People's Army (Polish)

A: German, yeah. Gestapo officer came from Warsaw. He was Ph.D. from Heidelberg University. He was highly educated person. And he joined the Nazi party, of course. He didn't know any better. And he became special investigator for the Gestapo. He introduced himself and when he came in, the people who led him in, they said, "Where you from?" So he told them. And said, "You know, wir hat die schlange, wir hat die schlange.[59]" "We have the snake." Because where I came from, they call me the schlange[60] – the schlange, yeah the Germans. Because I lived forever and lasted foreve-forever, so they called me the snake. "Wir hat die schlange." We talked for five days and for five nights. He would not let me sleep. He would go and take a nap now and then, somebody else talked to me. After five 24 hour talks, he said, "You know, I think we became friends and I th– and I thought you were going to tell me everything that you know. Really, I'm your friend. I don't want to hurt you, I want to do anything. But you didn't tell me a damn thing. So we'll try something else." And I was just out of my – completely out of myself. I was sleepy, I was hungry, I was thirsty. So the first thing he did – he would – they would give me a little water now and then, but I don't think I ate anything for those five days and five nights. So then the first thing he did, he brought a big dish of ice water and gave me a big spoon. He said, "Sit and eat. If you don't finish it off, I'm going to shoot you right here." The most horrible thing in you life can be eating ice water with a spoon. What – it was probably a gallon and a half, maybe two gallons. If you try sometime, this is almost like a Chinese torture, maybe even worse. I ate the whole darn thing. And I was just getting out of my mind. So he would not let me go to the bathroom, so I just sat in a chair and made a big puddle on the floor, several times.

05:21:17

And then he called two men – two big, strong men and they gave me hell for about two hours. I was in and out several times. I didn't know what was happening to me. Then they would pour a pile of water on me, I would come back to it and they gave me – and beat me again. So then he asked questions and I apparently didn't tell him very much, so he said, "Okay, take him in a swing." So they took my clothes off, they tied my hands on and – my hands like this, put a broomstick here, put it on the top of the stools and I was swinging back and forth. And one of them was swinging hose, rubber hose, hitting my behind. "And talk and tell me this and tell me that. Well, you know about si– something about this?" So I was prepared, I told him blue streak. I told him – oh, I told him tall stories. All the people, all the names, who were dead. So then he left me – left me alone and he went and checked and he came back. He said, "You didn't tell me a thing." So they gave me beating again and beating again and beating again. And then he said, "Well, that's enough, we are ready." So I had a – and normally, I mean, they just took out – they shoot you. They shoot everybody in the neighborhood and this case, they wanted to be so legalistic, they wanted to be so exact, that I had a case in court. I had a defense attorney,

[59] We has [sic] the snake (German)
[60] Snake (German)

Mr. Heinrich Schmidt. Yeah, Heinrich Schmidt. And he was telling – he was talk to the court – it was the Volksgericht.[61] People who did not have any training in law, appointed by the German authorities to deal punishment sentences. So, my attorney was asking for three death sentences. And the – I don't remember – or did – I don't know if I ever knew the name of the judge. He said, "Two, enough. Zwei ganz genug. Zwei ganz genug.[62]" So he gave me two death sentences. And then he stamped "N and N" on my document. "N and N" is, is "Nacht und Nebel.[63]" "Night and fog."

05:24:05

A person who got a sentence – who even did not get a sentence, but had an N and N on his documents, he was sent to concentration camp, he was finished off – taken to the gas chamber or given an injection – phenol injection. Or went to the bunker to starve to death, or got mutilated or got hung in a – in a camp square. His documents were destroyed. His ashes were – his family was not notified to send seven marks for the ashes. You disappeared just like in a night and fog. So I was the Nacht und Nebel baby. I stayed in prison, in Lubliniec for two, three weeks. I healed. I could sleep on my back. When I got there, I could sleep only on my stomach. There were 17 of us in a two person cell. We slept like sardines in a can on the floor. And the one who was the latest, had to sleep next to kübel.[64] And kübel was a garbage pail that everybody emptied themselves. So I slept next to the kübel for about a week. And of course I advanced, later on. But after about two or three nights, they looked at me, at my back and they said, "Well, maybe you should move little here. Maybe we can put you in that corner, there," 'cause I, "you don't look so great."

Q: What do you think gave you strength to endure that?

A: I don't know. I was ornery. I was so damn patriotic. And I was very strongly religious. And I was very ornery.

Q: Good combination.

A: Yes. It was a good combination.

05:26:25

Q: Did you pray during those days?

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[61] People's court (German); treason court instituted for the prosecution of enemies of the Third Reich.
[62] Two total, enough. (German)
[63] Night and Fog (German)
[64] Pail (German)

A: Yes, I did. I prayed a lot. And I – actually I never prayed for anything. I prayed – I still have a ta– hard time praying for anything. Like for instance, presently I pray in thanksgiving that I'm still alive, can take nourishment, I can run a mile, I can skate, I can do some skiing. And I'm 75 and counting. So I never prayed for something, not even for release, not even for a longer life. I knew I wouldn't live to be 20. I was sure I would never live to be, to, to, to be ninet– 19 and a half or 20. I was – by that time I was almost 19. I never – I knew I was not going to live. But I prayed and I was so thankful that I was still alive. Anyway, after the sentence, I stayed there in a prison for a short time, then I went on a transport to Gross-Rosen concentration camp, which is in western Poland presently. At that time it was in eastern East Germany, close to Opole, German Oppeln. I was there in transit, in the block number 12, which was a subterranean block. It was a time – it was just a time when Polish Prince Radziwill[65] was sent to Gross-Rosen. The Germans wanted him to from Polish government under German auspices and he refused. So they sent him to concentration camp. He was a brother-in-law of Mrs. Kennedy. Kennedy's – Mrs. Kennedy's sister married one of the – his – that Polish Prince Radziwill, who was in Great Britain then. Anyway, Prince Radziwill came with a servant. And after they were told that sup – they took him – the ser– took the servant away. They gave a black number, black triangle and sent him to the stone quarry. And the person who received black triangle was – went to sa– to stone quarry, was not to survive. So his Kapo told him, "Prince, I'm going to kill you, over the next week or two, so if you want to jump, go ahead." So he jumped.

Q: Were you there?

A: No.

05:29:12

End of Tape #5

[65] Krysztof Mikolaj Radziwill

Tape #6

06:00:16

Q: This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski. It is April 8, 1998. We're outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. It's conducted – this interview is conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape number six. First of all, I just want to say that this is May 1994, about and you were just telling the story of the prince. How, how – you didn't witness that, but–

A: No, I didn't have to witness, but I spoke to one people who had a black number and was in the quarry. He came and by that time I developed a friendship with a Blockältester,[66] who was a Polish young boy, who was killing people right and left, to survive. Killing prisoners right and left, to survive. When I first came, we got into that barrack, we were put three people to the bunk and a bunk was about two and a half foot wide. Three people to a bunk and bunks were three piles high. So I went in the corner between the bunk and I stood against the wall, because my back, my seat, my – was kind of awful. And the Blockältester was a young Warsaw boy who became a killer to survive. He came and he said, "What do you think you are doing, you stupid so and so?" I said, "Well, I am resting." "Get in the bunk." I said, "Blockältester, I cannot get in a bunk." "Why not?" So, I turned around and lifted my clothes. "Uh-huh. Come on." So normally, when you said, 'come on', you were going to get 25 with a ax handle or – or a – or a rubber truncheon. So he led me to his little room and he said, "Take your clothes and lay down." So – "This is my bunk, lay down." So I lay down and he brought a – a towel, he brought a pail of water. He washed my back. He had some kind of an ointment that he put on me. And he said, "You cannot turn, can you?" I said, "No, I cannot turn." "Okay, you can sleep on my stomach. I can go and get my – see my girlfriend." So he went. Before morning he came back and said, "Now you can go back there and be one of the prisoners. And don't let me catch you again standing there. Go to bed. Cause if you don't, I'll kill you."

06:03:03

Q: Did he mean it?

A: Yes, he did. There were some people who were in position, occasionally they would give you – do you a favor. But don't ever ask them for a second favor, because that was the end of you. I met many people like that later – later on in Mauthausen. Anyway, I stayed there for a short duration and just about the same time, a bishop from my archdiocese – I can't ever remember his name, from Siedlce, came. He lasted only four days. They put him into Strafkommando.[67] People who were carrying big loads of stone with a wheelbarrow. So he was pushing a wheelbarrow, he was an old man – I mean he was old,

[66] Block elder (German)
[67] Punishment commando (German)

he was in his 40's or 50's. And he – the Kapo[68] beat him constantly. He survived either four or five days. They beat him to death.

06:04:13

Q: Were you working at that time?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Were they having you work at that time?

A: No, we stayed in the barrack. We were a kind of a zugang[69] people – new prisoners in transit. So about – I can't even remember how many it was – eight or nine days, we put – were put on a transport and went, and went, and went all the way to Mauthausen. Came to Mauthausen, got shaved, got disinfected, went to the showers, were given a pair of clodhoppers, wooden shoes and a prison uniform and went to a barrack. Barracks zwei und zwanzig[70] – the first quarantine. There was a main camp and a first quarantine. First quarantine they had barracks 21, 22, 23. After that there was a wall, there was 24 and 25, but those were the bunker barracks, where people went, never to get out. Anyway, barrack 22 was the barrack of the people with "N and N." So we went to a little chamber where they gave shots, phenol, derivative of gasoline. It is the most horrible death you can ever have. You die for about 45 minutes. That courses through your veins, gets into your heart several times, and you just die in a horrible torment. Just the worse thing ever. I saw dead people who died that way. They looked like the gargoyles on Notre-Dame Cathedral. Or they went on a transport, or went to Gusen Zwei,[71] never to come out. Or they went to gas chamber, or they went on special transport behind the front line. If something happened behind the front line, in a town or village, they would hang 10, 15, 20 local hostages and let them hang there for – sometime for weeks. If they did not have local people, they would bring people from concentration camp and execute them there. But for some strange reason, after a very short time, I was whisked out, my number was read, I was put by the gate with 500 people. We marched again to the train depot, which was about like three, four kilometers, through the little town of Mauthausen. Put on a train and went to Vienna. And put in a concentration camp which was a sub-camp of Mauthausen, 11th Bezirk[72] kolo Wiednia.[73] And we're put to work in an armament factory. It was an Ostermann-Sauer Werke, which built tractors and cars. It was a Swiss-Austrian-American company, built cars and trucks. At that time, they built Tiger tanks.

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[68] Forman (colloquial German); term used for inmates appointed by the SS to head a labor Kommando of prisoners.
[69] Arrival (German); term used for newly arrived concentration camp prisoners.
[70] Twenty-two (German)
[71] Gusen II
[72] District (German)
[73] In the vicinity of Vienna (Polish)

And I became a great machine operator. I mean, I learned in a hurry. I had a good master. He was a German engineer, a civilian. He put me on machine, he showed me how to do things. I was turning openings and grinding the huge blocks for the big, big heavy motor for the – was a horrible work, it was 12 hours a day. The food was bad. Most of what we were supposed to get, the people who handled it stole and ate and gorged themselves on. It wasn't too bad, actually. When I think back, it wasn't too bad. I got beaten a few times by the SS men, but it wasn't too bad.

06:08:42

Q: Why? What would you do that bothered them?

A: Well, I think it's – you – you looked wrong way, he came and slugged you. And one time – oh, my gosh, I never forget that. There was a little SS man, my size – big, fat thing. He was just kind of a, a roly-poly thing and he walked with a rifle. The rifle was three times as big as he is. And we walked the factory in a fives – you know, row – I mean fives – in kind of marching. And I look and I said, "Look at that little son of a bitch. He is my size and he is so damn fat. If he falls over, he is going to roll forever." And he understood Polish. And he got after me. And the boys hid me and we were just in the gate, so I ran quickly into the factory and got to my machine. And he was walking back and forth and watching and walking, looking for me. And every time he walked, I would duck behind the machine. I had a young Russian boy working with me, I would duck behind the machine. And he never found me. He would have probably finished me.

Q: Your mouth, your mouth did get away with you, didn't it? Get away from you sometimes.

A: I couldn't escape that. Many times my mouth ran away from me.

Q: So how long did you stay at this armament factory?

A: It was a chore for the authorities. I stayed there from – oh my gosh, from October, November, until the second part of January, I think. I think so – does it say so?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yes. Because – because every…

[Technical conversation]

A: Yes, the situation was such, they had a – I was a, I was a bloody headache for them. Because every four weeks, two big, burly SS people would bundle me up, take me on the train, we would go to Mauthausen, 120 kilometers in the train and I would be taken out to

the Politische Abteilung[74], Gestapo office outside of camp. I would be asked some questions and I would get the treatment that I couldn't sit for next two weeks, and back to work. Every four weeks, every four weeks.

Q: They continued these interrogations and beatings?

A: Interrogate my case. The reason why they didn't finish me off was because, "You're case –Du kleine Schlange,[75] your, your case is not yet finished. Your case is not yet finished, so we have to ask you a few more questions."

Q: But what were they asking you?

A: "Well, what happened then? Did you blow the train? How many people in your group? Give me their names. Who was your commander? What are the other groups around? What did you go this place? When you go that place? How come – how come at one time, you were by Smolensk? How come at one time you were by Minsk – the Soviet Minsk? Can you explain? Can you tell?"

06:12:44

Q: And what would you do?

A: Well, I made the tall stories, I talk blue streak. I tried not to repeat myself, I tried not to change what I told before. As I said, I do – I did have a good memory. I could memorize pages and pages of – I could memorize the 45 minutes of a propaganda talk. I didn't miss a word the second time. Anyway, and they would let me go. "Well, that's enough for now. We'll see you in four weeks." So the authorities in Vienna apparently got sick and tired of it, so for a time, they put me on a bomb squad. There were fifee– 50 people and after Americans started bombing Vienna – they came first in All Saint's Day, in 1944 and bombed the bejesus out of Vienna. They say there about 1200 American super fortress came. You couldn't see sun, you couldn't see anything for three days – fires. And they kept burning – Bezirk, district, 21, 22 and 23. All those three days. And finally they hit – there was a Tiergarten,[76] there was a park there and under the park there were enormous tanks – buried tanks of aviation gasoline. And they finally – the third night they hit, and the thing was boiling horribly. Because my factory lost all the roof too and we worked, you know, January – worked practically outside. We danced, we jumped. We tried to put cardboard in our jackets. If you got caught with a cardboard, you were beaten severely, sometimes shot. So finally they got tired of it, they took me back to Mauthausen.

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[74] Political division (German)
[75] You little snake (German)
[76] Zoological garden (German)

Q: I want to ask you a question about the interrogations, though. They – they went on for a long time and they were brutal. Was there ever a point that you said, "You know, I can't do this any more?"

A: Forget it. You do it. You do it. I tell him, "I don't remember any more." "Oh, you remember a lot. We will try something else." So then something else, when I came back to Mauthausen, the first two days – I was on block 22 again. Block where people got – who were not supposed to leave. And two days later I was called in and there said, "Well, we'll try something else." So they made me take my shoes off and I – leaned me on a chair and beat my heels. And this is the most horrible feeling. When they hit your heel, it feels like your brain wants to jump out. And – it was part of it – one of the stupid, untrained henchmen hit my foot and broke a m – broke my – my – some bones in my feet. Now I am a walking barometer. If – if the rain is coming tomorrow, I know there is going to be rain, because my foot bothers me. My heels were just like balloons. So I talked to some prisoners there, they said, "We just yell a lot." So, as from then on, whenever they took me there, before they hit me, I would scream bloody murder. I would yell, I would swear up and down. I would talk in Russian, I would talk in Polish. So they brought Russian and Polish interpreter, thinking that I was going to spill something. I would just talk blue streak. And I knew little Samoyed language, I would talk some Samoyed, cause then they would – later I'm sitting down, "What did you say then? What did you say? What did you say then?" I said, "I was just complaining." "What was the language you are talking to?" I said, "I was talking in a language, probably Latin." Because I – I had several years of Latin.

06:16:50

Q: But when you got back, did anybody take care of you? You must have been really hurt when you would get back to the barracks.

A: Oh, you were just dumped a barrack and you took care of yourself. I get some friends in the barrack who occasionally would bring me some – like an ointment from the Krankenhaus.[77] Actually the block secretary was a Polish man who took pity upon me frequently and he would bring me something. But I had a bunk all to myself, not two or three people, but to myself. At least after – for a week or so after I was – I went through a treatment. So I was in that barrack and was in a barrack and then of course and, and actually that interrogation and my "N and N" came – I mean it came to pass in late January, I think.

Q: Was this '45?

A: I went – yes.

[77] Hospital (German)

Q: Nineteen forty-five?

06:17:50

A: Forty – '45, '45. My number was list – it was called and a few other numbers were called and were called, we're taken to the Grosse Tor,[78] the great gate. And I said, "Oh-oh. I guess my cooked – my goose has been cooked." So we were taken, 12 of us – we were taken to Effektenkammer[79]. Effektenkammer was that big warehouse with the best, beautiful thing, that came with people who went directly to gas, were stored. Beautiful suit, beautiful boots, silk underwear and so on. So we got dressed like a – dressed well. I got silken underwear, I had beautiful socks. I had beautiful Hungarian boots. Woolen suit, tie – silk tie, fur hat, fur coat. They would put us by the gate and the prisoners were come in and said, "Man, look at the bunch of Jewish barons. What did – where do those come from?" And one of my friends came by and I said, "Hey." He said, "Don't hey me, you so and so civilian." I said, "Didn't you recognize me?" And he says, "No, what are you doing in that stuff?" I said, "God knows. I was dressed up." He said, "Uh-oh." Anyway, when we're – when we were in Effektenkammer, I had a friend – a friend who works there because I work part time before then, in a Kanadakommando[80] sorting those goods. So he gave me a bundle of jewelry. He said, "If you go on a trip, maybe you can buy your way out." And he gave me a Polish marine knife. So I tucked it in. We're standing there and pretty soon, SS squad came and we hiked to that depot, about three kilometers to the train and they put us in a prison compartments – went on a trip. And on the train, there was one SS man who was coming back and forth – coming back and forth, looking. And he came to a window, I, "Herr, Herr Ober– Ober– Herr Oberst, can you tell me where we are going?" And he looked, he said, "What is u – what is worth to you?" I said, "Two carats?" "Ganz gut. Hand it over." So I gave him a ring with a big diamond. "Well," he said, "La himmel, la himmel.[81]" "To paradise." He said, "There's a little town east of Oppeln – of Opole. Something happened behind the front line, they don't have local hostages, so you people are it. So you – normally, you know, they took you there, they took you finery off, they put – put on you paper suits. They filled your mouth with a – with gypsum, so you couldn't yell, took you out and hanged you in a marketplace. So that was it. Said, "Oh gosh, now I got to watch. I have that knife, I have all the jewelry." Nothing do it – doing. Went to Vienna, they backed up prison van to the train and two people with truncheons and two people with machine guns – into, into it, they drove into – us to the Elizabethpromenade – huge prison, put us in a cell. Next morning, likewise. Put us in a train. We went through Budejovice, we went as far as Brno in Czechoslovakia. They put us in old Franciscan monastery that was made into prison. The walls, they were 12 foot thick walls. That was a fortress. But I see, in quite a big cell,

[78] Great gate (German)
[79] Personal effects chamber (German); warehouse for confiscated belongings of prisoners.
[80] Canada commando (German); term used to refer to commando of prisoners assigned to work in the camp's warehouse of looted goods.
[81] Heaven (German)

there were 12 of us and there were another 15 of others. Anyway, there were girls next door. So we made a hole in that – well, it wasn't just the big, it was like a plaster wall, so we made a hole and I laid whole night talking to girls. Bunch of Czech, pretty Czech girls. They send me a paper, they send me a piece of candy and we talk blue streak all night. And the next night and the next night and those people who are with me, those prisoners who are with me said, "My gosh" – those were Bibelforscher[82] people, those were Baptist people. And he said, "We are supposed to be freed when we get to – to Opole, we're supposed to be freed." I said, "Well, count your blessings, if you get freed, you'll get freed." Anyway, the fourth day, we're put on a train, say goodbye to the pretty girls across the street – across the wall – put us in a train. And we keep watching and I see the same views. We were going through Vienna and going west again. We got back to Mauthausen. The place – later on discovered the place where I was supposed to be disposed of – was overran by the Reds. The Soviet army was there already. And Germans being so indit– I mean outrigh– Langsam aber Sicher,[83] slow and great and just exactly that way, no other way – took us back to the concentration camp.

06:23:41

We came back with a group – big group of prisoners from prisons in Vienna and elsewhere, probably two or three, 400 of us. There were tables ready, the registering tables. All the blockschrei—blockschreibers[84] were there, including my block secretary standing – sitting there at tables, you know they write your data, take your document if you have any and give you a number, give you a bracelet with your number and tell you where to go. So he was sitting there, he, "Stefan, come on, come on, come on here." So I went and I said, "Bujwid." And he said, "Well, welcome again. Great you made it – great you made it." I said, "What do you mean great you made it? I was supposed to be freed." He said, "Yeah, you were going to himmel." And there was a priest, Father Iwanski. Before I left, he listened to my confession, he gave me absolution and he said, "You are be freed, with the next three or four days, you'll be free. And pray for us." So I ca – later on I talked to Father Iwanski, I said, "You son of a gun, what do you think it was? Didn't you know I was going to by hung?" "Well, you know, I wanted to cheer you up. But I gave you absolution, so you will go straight to paradise." So I, "I probably will go to the deepest hell, what I – for all what I did so far." Anyway, Mr. Bujwid, "Here's your number, here's your bracelet, go to the showers and go to the barrack. You got – you got barrack 22, you're going to my block." And I looked and I said, "I don't want this damn number, this a zugang numbers, this is a new prisoner number. I want my number. I am a prominente.[85]" By that time I was a prominent prisoner. If you survive six months, you become prominent prisoner. And out of those 600 that I came with, in six months there were 13 of us left, only. So by – by the time – when you became prominente, you have

[82] Biblical scholar (German); term used to refer to Jehovah's Witnesses.
[83] Slow but sure (German)
[84] Block clerk (German)
[85] Prominent (German); term used in concentration camps for privileged prisoners.

special consideration. You can even go to SS kitchen after the SS finish and get a dish of their own soup, with beans and pork in it.

06:25:58

Q: There was kind of a hierarchy in the camp?

A: You beca– you became, you became person who counts. You became a prominent – a prominent prisoner, because you made it. And most of those who became functionaries in a camp, you know, if they didn't go by killing people, they did it by surviving. So he said, "Shut up. You want be killed? Go to the showers and go to your barrack." So I put my arm in there, tucked my ears in, went in. My finery was stripped. My shoe – my beautiful boots even were taken. I was left with a belt and a pair of holzschuhe[86] and my little bundle, which I stuck in a – in a holzschuh. Get out of the shower and was thrown prison strip – prisoner garb. Went back to the barrack boiling mad and Mr. Bujwid came and he said, "What's the matter with you, don't you know any better? You could get me killed and yourself killed." Said, "Yes, but I'm not a prominente any more. Look at that damn number." My – I – I will never forget my numbers. If you wake me up presently, in the middle of the night, I will stand at attention and shout my number. "Hundert-vier, zwei hundert zwei zwanzig.[87]" "104,222." And the second one was like 40,000 up, it was, "Hundert zwei und zwanzig, zwei hundert drei and sechzig.[88]" "122,263." So he said, "You know what you had in your documents? You had 'N and N.' And you know what else I saw? You had 'F and S.'" "F and S" was "Frühlingwind.[89]" It was spring wind. It was dub – to make double sure that nobody ever knows that you existed. You disperse like in a spring wind. So he said, "Now, you are free." Well, I wasn't free, but my being taken out to the Politische Abteilung ended. My seat healed. I didn't get any more a beating from then on.

Q: So this –

A: I was completely different, new person.

Q: You sort of assumed a new identity.

A: I assumed new identity.

Q: Which was no identity?

A: No, it wa– it was number.

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[86] Clogs (German)
[87] Hundred four, two hundred twenty-two (German)
[88] Hundred twenty-two, two hundred sixty-two (German)
[89] Spring wind (German)

Q: Number.

A: It was number, but was a different number. My “Nacht und Nebel” was gone forever. Because you know, toward the end, they were fishing out people with “Nacht und Nebel” and marching them to the gas chamber or behind the crematorium to the little room. Mostly to the little room to get your injection.

Q: In this—

[Technical conversation]

06:29:05

End of Tape #6

Tape #7

07:00: 07

Q: Well, you're doing just fine.

A: Well, I said forget it, I'm not sick or anything. I'm a tough old son of a gun.

Q: They didn't tattoo you?

A: No. They did not tattoo in Mauthausen, no.

Q: Okay.

A: Only Auschwitz.

Q: Just Auschwitz.

A: Yeah, only Auschwitz.

Q: Okay. This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski. It is April 8, 1998. We're outside Minneapolis, Minnesota. This interview is being conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape number seven. I wanted to ask you about the man you were just describing, who sort of had a position at the camp and who was giving you advice on your situation. Was he Polish?

A: He was Polish. His name was Bujwid. He was from a territory called Zmudz, which is bi– Lithuania in – in northern Russia. It was a holy Polish Zmudz. The coat of arms was Saint Michael. And they were Poles from 11th century. He was a prisoner. By surviving the first six months, also by knowing German very well, he became a block secretary. Each block had a Blockältester, block leader, which was in most cases German criminal and a block secretary who knew German very well, could write and read very well. So he was it. And it was an important function, even though he didn't cherish it because he had to lead – he had to call a lot of people to execution or to bunker or to injection or to gas chamber or to a – to go on a transport. That was his function – that's how he survived. If he wasn't there, somebody else would have done it. He had to keep the numbers of all people who had to assist the Rapportführer.[90] Every morning you – you lined up outside, the Rapportführer – SS man came and he counted you. Secretary wrote it down and gave it to him, he walked out. And a tally was made for the whole camp that had to count just right, nobody missing. If anybody was missing, they counted 10 times, until they found everybody. So this secretary was a – was the secretary of the barrack.

[90] Report leader (German); term used for roll-call officers in concentration camps system.

Q: And – and what did you think of him or people like that, who essentially were, I guess taking jobs, in a way, in the concentration camp?

A: Well, in most cases, we were appreciative, because if they were Polish, they could be of great help to us. Also, yo– they were not killers. Some Kapos were killers. Kapo – Kapos were group – people who led groups of people to work and to exercise and to kill at will. But people who – who had functions like block leader, if he didn't kill, he was all right and block secretary, most of them did not kill, they were all right. And there was a secretary over first quarantine, there was a – was a chief secretary of the whole – Führerschreiber,[91] secretary of the whole camp. They had positions. The camp inside, ran itself. Let me have a drink of water.

07:03:42

[Technical conversation]

A: Well, I'm back from a trip.

Q: You were asking about the, the guy who's – The guy, okay.

A: The guy, yes.

Q: Okay. I think – I think actually, I think you answered that, so–

A: Yes. So I was – I was back on his – in his barrack–

Q: Oh right, okay.

A: And that was a time that evacuations started coming from the east. When the eastern front approached, they would evacuate camps and push the prisoners in, killing most along the way. Those who could not walk would be killed and those who could walk. So Mauthausen became greatly overcrowded. So, like my barrack, instead of having 120 people, had 700. Half of the people slept inside, sitting one again – against each other, for half a night and then they would get out of a window and the people who are standing outdoors, would get in at 12 o'clock and sit on the floor to be warm and to sleep until morning.

07:05:02

Q: You did this too?

[91] Chief clerk (German)

A: Oh, of course, yes. And it was a time when I – when I met Victor Frankl. You heard of Victor Frankl? He was a Jew from Vienna. He just died about a year ago, he was in his upper 90's. He was a great man, he was a psychoanalyst. If you ever see a little book called my – *Man's Search for Meaning*, it was translated into English, many of his books were translated, he was a psychoanalyst. And he – when he came to Mauthausen, I don't know if – if he came from Auschwitz or elsewhere, he was just on his last leg. He lost his spoon, he lost his dish and with those two, you were dead. But he had a big bundle of papers. And we met, he somehow plopped next to me and – and he said, "Nu, who are you?" "Oh, I am Polish." "Oh, I am Jew from Vienna. And what do you do in your life?" I said, "I did nothing, I was a student and I was doing some little work after that – before the Germans caught me. What did you do?" "Well, I was a doctor and I'm a doctor of psychology." And I said, "Where's your spoon?" "Oh, I lost it." "Where's your dish?" "Oh, I lost it." I said, "Man, you dead, because you won't get your soup, you won't get anything to eat with." And if you try to catch some – some servers would give it into your hat, but most of them wouldn't. They would just take you aside and kill you. Anyway, found him soup spoon and found him dish and we became friends. And he was great. For next few days we just talked and every time we felt bad, it was just – end was coming, you know, people are being taken to gas chamber and places. He's a – he said, "Oh, sit down here, let's talk." So we talk blue streak and we got cheered up. He developed a – a special kind of psychotherapy call – called logotherapy. And he's went talking on – on – talking tours through United States many times. One time he came in 1970's, late 70's and we couldn't get together, but I phoned him at Coffman Union at the University here and he called me back at work and then he talk – we – he phoned at night and we talked for about three hours, from about 12 until 3:30. Said, "Well, I got to go, my train is – my plane is leaving shortly." So we said, "Auf wiedersehen" and then – anyway, he survived, but when – I never thought he would make it, but he did. He stayed in Mauthausen to the very – time of liberation. But, my case, again, I was fished out after a few – in a few days after the great crowds came and I was transported to Gusen Zwei, which was a walking distance. Gusen Eins[92] was about two mi– two kilometers, Gusen Zwei was about five kilometers, so we walked. There were about 5,000 of us walked that day. We were gather at the nightfall. We were – our clothes was taken, only belt and shoes were left on us. Our clothes was taken to be disinfected. We went to showers, which were cold at that time. We were put outside and we stayed until about four a.m. I was still quite nimble and quite healthy. I got in the middle of a group. My head kind of froze, but at morning we found about 500 people who were dead, out of 5,000. This is only 10 percent.

07:09:16

Q: But… tell us what that was like to – to spend the night and have people dropping around you, dying.

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[92] Gusen I

A: Yes, well, you become numb. You become cold, you beco– you hurt. Then all of a sudden you become numb, you don't hurt any more. You're not even cold any more. You become kind of a frozen stick. And Gusen Zwei was the worst camp you ever heard of. Normally, it had 50,000 prisoners and by the end of a week would be 45,000. Every week 5,000 prisoners came, sometime 10,000. And it never went above 50. Never went about 40. In a week would be 40. About – attrition ration was about 20 percent a week. Was a horrible work, we worked digging tunnels under mountain. The tunnels were buil– dug especially to put armament industries in them. They already built tanks. They built Messerschmitt – Messerschmitt planes. And I think they built also rocket planes that they used – I mean, the Vau-Eins,[93] Vau-Eins, Vau-Zwei,[94] to bomb England. But I'm not sure of that. But I knew they built Messerschmitts. But I was on a crew that was digging the tunnel, digging with a – straight ahead of you, in a kind of a softish stone, with a air drill. And a person as strong as he is, or he is, could stand about four days. After four days you broke down. Well, I stood it for about seven days and I was given a shovel to shovel because I couldn't lift it any more. And I had a Yugoslavian friend – Janko – Janko, I can't remember his last name. He lasted 27 days drilling. The drill weighed probably 35 - 40, maybe 50 pounds, straight into the wall, drilling. Then he dropped dead. Just dropped the drill and dropped. By the time we turn him over, he was dead. Yeah, he was a – Yugoslavians and especially Albanian. Albanian people are the tough son of a guns. Albanian man can swear for 15 minutes and never repeat himself. And if you translate some of the swearing, your hair will stand on end. They're tougher than Polacks, they're tougher than Russians. Even tougher than Yugoslavians.

07:12:10

Q: What were they giving you to eat at this point? Were you getting–

A: We had cup – we got cup of tea, it was birch leaves, or whatever it was, in the morning, nothing else. Sometime there was some milk. It was like a – like a cereal, boiled. Like maybe a handful of cereal to 10 gallons of water. It was slightly sweetish, I think they had some – beet marmalade mixed in it, and a cup of tea. At noon, you got a half a gallon of soup that had practically nothing in it and a small slice of bread. At night you got a pound of bread for either seven or eight or 10 people and a – another cup of tea. It was supposed to be 800 calories, but by the time it did get to you, it was no more than about four or 500. One does – if one did not organize, one did not last long.

Q: What – what do you mean by that?

A: I was lucky. I had a Russian friend who was a thief. He can steal anything out of anyplace. When the allotment of cigarettes came to a block to be given to the functionaries and it was parceled out, he would always steal of – steal a carton of

[93] V-1 (German)
[94] V-2 (German)

cigarettes and nobody ever could catch him. He was a Rostovskiy urka.[95] He was a specialist from Rostov. He said, "When I was 10 years old, Ya khodil po karmenam,[96] I walked in – he walked into people's pockets." He was a pickpocket. He could steal anything off anybody. So he shared his cigarettes with me. Cigarette were the high, hard currency. For one-fourth of a cigarette, you got portion of bread. For one-eighth of a cigarette, you got a dish of soup. So when I had an access to something, I shared with him. To make it short, I had a SS man who didn't like me, who beat me frequently. He was a beautiful, young, tall, blonde beast and he had a German Shepherd, young German Shepherd with him. So one time, I got the sh– German Shepherd in a dark tunnel and of course I dispose of him, I skinned him. I had him baked in a ba– in the smithy, because I that time was – I was a – a Läufer,[97] I was a runner. I was running with the drills to the smithy and back, you know, carrying them back and forth to be sharpened and to be brought back. So I gave the smith one-fourth of a dog, he baked it for me. Then I shared another quarter with the people who worked with me and a half of the dog, I brought to the camp and that three or four of us lived high on the dog for about a week and a half. Oh, that was an enormous shot in the arm. Course my Russian friend liked the dog so much, he said, "Stepka, get another one. Get another one." I said, "Sorry, I cannot catch and old German Shepherd, this was a young, stupid German Shepherd."

07:15:41

Q: I see. So, to survive, you couldn't just accept what they gave you, you had to find that extra–

A: You had to organize, you had to trade. When I was in Mauthausen, if I worked – when I worked on a Kanadakommando, sorting the goods, I was able to scrounge a lot of jewelry, came to the barrack or – got a bundle of American dollars. I could get a beautiful bottle of booze for 500 dollars. Or I could get a big, five pound sausage for 500 dollars. And my friends and – and – and – and colleagues, we live high on the hog.

07:16:22

Q: Now, at this time, in this camp that you were at, where you were doing the tunnel drilling, were people being taken away and executed or gassed at this camp?

A: We had a gas chamber, but I – no, there was a gas chamber in Gusen One, but not Gusen Zwei. But the mortality ratio was so enormous that – that nothing else was necessary. Of course the Kapos killed their portion of people every day. We went to camp, I mean went to work – on the way home we carried five, six, 10 - 15 - 20 people out of a hundred. Carried them because they were killed at the job. Some dropped dead but most of them

[95] Crook from Rostov (Russian)
[96] I walked in pockets (Russian)
[97] Runner (German)

were killed by the Kapo. Kapo would get a cigarette for every person he killed. If he were a heavy smoker, he killed a lot of people. Also, there was a Krankenhaus, there was a hospital and if you went to Krankenhaus, never came back, of course – but some people did. So from time to time, they would have a – a Krankenhaus had to be disinfected. So they would take the people from a Krankenhaus and make them walk across the railroad tracks to another barrack that was empty, kind of a temporary Krankenhaus and keep them there, and there would be a line of Kapos lined up on each side of the group walking. Anybody who would walk, they ran a gauntlet. They had ax handles on – or two by fours, and anybody who did not run, was killed. So I remember once in the first of February, 1945, they killed that night, 400 sick people out of 700, about 300 only made it, could run. The rest were killed. I had a friend at that time, he was a Polish mountaineer. He was a tough son of a – he was just wiry, he was strong. He was everything. Anyway, he got sick or he – maybe he malinger. So he was sent to the hospital. He went to hospital, couple nights later comes a Kapo from a hospital and say – calls my number, so I answer him, and said, "You have a friend in the hospital." "Yes, I have a friend in the hospital." "His – his name is Janko the Góral,[98] "John – little Johnny, the mountaineer." "Yes." "Well," he said, "that window, so he wants you to come and see him at that window." So at night I sneaked in – that was not allowed. To get out of a barrack, going get killed. So I went and I knocked the window, he opened it up and, "Oh, Stefan, come tomorrow and bring me a big jug of water. I'm so thirsty, there's not enough water here. Here." So he gave me a little bundle. I came back, there were about seven portions of bread. It was a fortune. Eating an extra portion a day, keep you alive and up your spirit for at least a week, maybe 14 days. So I brought him some water next day and I said, "Janko, where did you get all that bread?" "Well, you know, those damn Muselmans[99]." Muselmans was a name for people who were on their last foot. You know, they just lay there, they can't eat, they hold their bread. So when the Fliegeralarm[100] comes, you know, night, when the lights are out and planes are flying – lights are all – all the lights are off, he just went from bed to bed and swiped the bread and lived high on the hog.

07:20:34

And I said, "Janko, but this is un-Christian." "They are going to die anyway. I'm not going to – I – I'm not killing them, but they can't eat. They have bunches of bread sitting there, they just can't eat." So we both – and all my friends in the barrack, lived high on the hog. And Janko came back, got out of a ba– of a hospital, came back to the barrack and he was given three days of convalescence. He was staying in the barrack, did not have to go to work. And the Kapo, day Kapo in the barrack, ask him to do something and Janko said, "You so and so, get away from me. I'm convalescing, I'm sick." So the man

[98] Mountaineer, uplander (Polish)
[99] Muslim (German); camp term used to refer to prisoners who had lost the will to live and were near death.
[100] Aid-raid alarm (German)

took his tool and beat Janko to death. I came at night and one of our friends said, "Your friend is there." There was a – you know, there was a big, high stone wall between each barrack and next barrack. And we lined up, you know laid down, it was 10 - 20 - 50 people a day who were dying. So I went. Yes, Janko was still there, laying, his head bashed in. So I did have his address. I wrote to his family after the war and his sister answered and she said, "Well, my mother feels so bad because Janko was taken because he argued with her, so he volunteered and went to work in Germany and he got himself charge with sabotage and sent to concentration camp. And please tell me, did he have a nice casket? How was he buried, did he have a priest?" Janko, with probably 500 others, next day, was dumped into big wagon, that about 50 prisoners pushed and pulled. They just had big sides and their wheels were just like the Conestoga wagons in America there, but bigger. And they pushed and pulled to the first Gusen Eins, where the crematorium was. Gusen Zwei did not have a crematorium, so that the bodies, probably four or 500 a day, sometime maybe 1,000 a day were wheeled to Gusen Eins to be cremated.

07:23:07

Q: Were there times when you were afraid?

A: Not really. Became like – became – it became a normal life. It became a very normal life. You watched not to cross a line, you watched not to overstep your – your – your territory. You watched. I mean you had to have eyes back there and side here and forward, even down below. If you – if you saw a SS man coming, you didn't step off the sidewalk, why, he just could kill you. If you didn't step off the sidewalk and take your hat off and clap it again-against your leg and stood at attention, you could get killed. If he didn't like your looks, he could just take a gun and shoot you or else beat you that you would not survive. On and on and on, and if you did make it, it's just good luck, holy providence and a good combination of both of them.

Q: So it's February or March of 1945, are – are what – are you getting any information from the rest of the world? Do you have any sense –

A: None. None whatsoever. Well, there were rumors. You know rumors, like in American army rumors or any place where a lot of people, rumors. There were some people who listened to radios in a camp, but they shared their information very sparingly. We knew what was going on. The rumors told that Americans landed. The Russians are coming. Well, of course you know, all those prisoners coming from the east, consequently the front line is coming. The Germans are being killed by zillions. Well, great. We hope they will all ge– will get it. The – then we heard, when the Poles landed in Holland, you know the Polish parachuters, whole brigade and couple American brigades landed in Holland, we heard those rumors and it was the gospel truth of course, you could not – I mean, if you said, "No, it's not true," somebody could kill you, probably. Said, "You defeatist, what do you mean it's not true? Honest, it's gospel truth."

Q: Did you make good friends there, or –

A: Quite a few. But they didn't last very long. Either they got transferred or got killed. Most of them got killed. Only two people that I know survived Gusen Zwei. One was a priest, one was unfinished priest. Father Iwanski and Father Bruno. Father Iwanski survived. He survived Gusen, which was not easy to survive. He ended in Canada. I corresponded with him. He's dead for last 10 - 15 years. He was an old man that time. You know, he was in his 40's, he was old, old man. When he came to camp, said "Hey, how are – old are you?" "Oh, I'm 29 - 30 - 32." "Oh my God, you old. Week, two weeks, you are gone." You were supposed to be 17 - 18 - 19, you had a chance. If you were over 30, you were an old man. Father Iwanski was over 40. He was an old man. Father Bruno was an unfinished priest, he was – we call him unfinished priest. Nie skonczony ksiadz.[101] He was still in a seminary. He eventually became a priest and he went back to Poland. I understand he was executed by the Communists.

07:27:01

Q: Did the priests hold any kind of religious services, or –

A: Very secretly.

Q: – counsel you, or –

A: Very – they talked to us.

Q: They talked?

A: When I went on my little trip, Father Iwanski came to talk to me, he was still in Mauthausen and he talked to me and he blessed me and he listened to my confession. Later on I – I felt like killing him.

Q: Why?

A: Well, I said, "You should have warned me." "Warned you? What do – would it do? I have – I wanted you to feel good for next two or three days."

Q: But you would have liked to have known?

A: I would have liked to have known, yes. If I would have known, I – I might have made a greater effort – there wasn't much chance, but I – I might have tried. I probably would have killed mysel– got killed for it, but I would have known I didn't go meekly. And –

[101] Not finished priest (Polish)

[Technical conversation]

07:28:22

End of Tape #7

Tape #8

08:00:10

Q: Okay. This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski. It is April 8, 1998. We are outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. This interview is conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape number eight.

A: Oh my God, eight? He is wasting eight tapes.

Q: Not wasting. This is just – I guess it's just sort of an observation, that you were saying you would have liked to have known, that one time when you were being taken off, to possibly – well, the plan was to hang you. But so much of the war years, you had no idea what was going to happen next.

A: No, I didn't. As I said, I was resigned. I expected not to live to be 18 or 20 or 19 or 20, but I did. And I was very prayerfully, thankful for each day that I lived and tomorrow will take care of itself. Even at bedtimes, when I expected to be – to be taken to the little room to be injected – I knew it was coming, but still I said, "Well, I'm still alive today. Tomorrow will take care of itself." Especially, I mean I felt very bad one time. There was a little boy, his name was Henry. He said he was 14, but he looked like he was nine. He was a – he was a Polish worker, working in Germany, in a factory. Somebody put sand in a – in a motor. Motor got destroyed, he was blamed for it, sabotage. Sent to Mauthausen. He lived, for a time, in block 22. Then he was called. And he was – he was just like a tiny, little bird. He was so skinny, he was so miserable. He just looked like a – like a – like will of a wisp. And Mr. Bujwid wanted greatly – to help him. So when he – execution time came, Mr. Bujwid went to the – camp secretary went to Gestapo office and begged for him, one day. So they postpone it. And the next day – next day he came his face was bitten up and swollen. He came –

08:02:40

Q: Who's this?

A: Our secretary. He went next day again and again he had welts on his back and his face was beaten some more. So the fourth day, a list came – Läufer came running. Läufer was the runner, you know, as I – pretty young boys were runners, Läufers. They ran between the camps and delivered messages. So Läufer came with a list and – and said, "Mr. Bujwid," I mean, "Herr Bujwid.[102] Exekution eintreten, Exekution eintreten.[103] Roll up with execution." So Mr. Bujwid came to barrack and read the list and I was sure I was going to be on the list and the little boy was on the list. And he walked out into the front

[102] Mr. Bujwid
[103] Fall in for execution (German)

and they got lined up and the Blockältester, Max, the German criminal who was the block leader, led them out…. And it was so, so funny, Mr. Bujwid talked with that little Henry. Oh, they talk blue streak. "Because we both are from the holy Zmudz." Because the little boy was from the same territory that Mr. Bujwid was. They say, "We're holy people, we believe in God, we hate the damn Communists. We hate those Germans even more because they're ungodly creatures. And we are going to survive for ever and ever and ever." And the last day, before Henry went to be killed, he said, "Mr. Bujwid, thank you." Yeah, he, he knew what was coming.

08:05:06

Anyway, that was still in Mauthausen and that was I wa– then I wa– on our way in – Gusen Zwei and of course, it – I heard it later on, but it was a good story. A Swedish Red Cross person, whose name nobody ever found, came to speak to the commander, General Pohl,[104] P-o-h-l. And he came to talk to him and General Pohl was complaining, he said, "See here," was a telegram or was a letter. "I have an befehl[105] here," I have an order, "to lead all these people I have left here, about 42,000, into the tunnel. The ends of the tunnels are already mined to be dynamited and those people will suffocate there, within in probably one, two hours." He said, "If it was only telephone order, I probably could escape not doing it, but is a befehl, it's a telegram, I had to sign for it. What I am going to do?" He was not – he was not a very bad person, that man was. Matter of fact, he had a case in court later on and some of us testified for him. Anyway, when this man left his office, the document disappeared. The man – and the general was diverted somewhat – the man swiped it. He borrowed a bicycle from a German guard, then he borrowed a horse. And the American front line was just beyond Linz. It was probably 30 - 35 - 40 miles. He went across the whole front line on a horse, then – he in tie and suit. Why the German Ges– SS didn't kill him, I don't have an idea. Did he talked to somebody, I don't have an idea. Did he identify himself, I don't have an idea. He got across, he got as far as General Patton[106] headquarters. And nobody wanted to talk to him, so he bothered everybody there and eventually somebody did talk to him. So he mentioned that, he described it. So they said, "Okay, come on in, come on in." They let him talk to assistant to Patton. And then Patton came and asked a few questions. And Patton sent five American tanks. They broke across the front line, they went and went and went. They came to Gusen Zwei, they took few potshots at the guard towers. The SS people surrendered. They left tank, I think about five soldiers, to guard those 800 SS, who are herded into – into – into a big kind of a barn. And the rest of us, who were just barely moving, because we haven't gotten anything to eat about four days and my case, I was flat on my back. I couldn't even turn over. Then the four tanks went to Mauthausen, five more miles and sur– and get around, too few – took few potshots at the guard towers.

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[104] The interviewee later corrected this name to Max Pausch, Kommandant of Gusen II.
[105] Order (German)
[106] Gen. George Smith Patton

3,000 SS people surrendered and there was bedlam in Mauthausen. It was not much of a bedlam in Gusen Zwei because most of us were just about done for.

08:09:07

Q: Take us back a little bit – wa– what was going on the last few days that you had stopped getting food?

A: They told us there was no food. "We cannot give you anything because there isn't any." Well, it turned out, that the warehouses were full of bread and the bread was – after we found it after a few days after liberation, it was all moldy by then. There was probably two, three, four, five tons of bread. They just probably tried to starve us to death. And many did. Many did. We had an enormous ditch dug out between the Gusen Eins and Gusen Zwei by American bulldozers, army bulldozers. Just an enormous ditch. And they took all the Germans from the countryside, with horses and carts and wheelbarrows and all and they came and picked up all the people, washed up everybody and laid them evenly, not just dumped them, but laid them evenly in a – in that grave. There are about 18,000 people buried there. And those were the dead for last four or five days, when the crematorium did not work.

Q: 18,000?

A: About 17 - 18,000. An enormous, enormous – kind of almost like a – like a – like a riverbank built up high.

Q: Did the Germans know that the Americans were coming?

A: Well, they expected – they, they all knew the front was nearby, but they expect it to be still fighting there for quite sometime, but this – they just broke through. They said, "Oh my God, the armies are coming. "Amerikaner, Amerikaner – run!" And the SS of course, just surrendered and the Commander Ziereis[107] was a horrible man – of Mauthausen. He was – people testified and – against him and he was hanged, later on. But General Pohl of Mau– of Gusen Zwei, was exonerated.

Q: Think back to that day and – you said you were laying in bed, but did – what did it sound like when the Americans –

A: It was kind of a bedlam – it was a bedlam and it was a – Americans really came, you know – really came. It was about two days later that the front moved, Americans came. They just came in, walking around. Taking lot of pictures and they came to my – to my barrack and they looked up and – and one of them spoke German, "Kommen Sie da,

[107] Franz Ziereis

kommen Sie da.[108]" And I said, "I can't move. I can't even turn over." "Ja, wir helfen dich – wir helfen – wir helfen dich.[109]" We'll help you. Came with a stretcher and a couple people and they pull me off. They lay me in a stretcher and somebody came with a pail of water, they washed me off. I was – I was shitty and – and stinking, and all that and they covered me up with a German army overcoat. Took me to Gusen Eins and there was a little hospital made there and were given little milk – milk with – mixed with water and kind of a gruel, that you give to babies, for a few days. Eventually, we started eating food. And people who were in – who got hold of a solid food, like American were tossing cans of Spam – and Spam was the heavenly food. Oh my God. Spam was it. I still can close my eyes and I can taste that beautiful American Spam. So somebody would eat it, would not share it with somebody else and he would die, immediately, on the spot. Could not – could not take it.

08:13:15

Q: So you were pretty sick. What was the reaction of the Americans who saw you – who ca – who came by your bunk and saw you?

A: Well, there were so many of us, they were just flabbergasted. They kept us there and they took us some, on – in trucks, to hospital in Bamberg, which was couple hundred miles west, into West Germany. And I was in a Städtischer Hospital,[110] the state hospital for about four, five, six months there. I had – well, I was down to 72 pounds, had a – I had a bad case of tuberculosis. And my lungs were collecting liquid, especially my left lung. So I got shots. I got shots, it was the 10 cubic centimeters lime – lime shots. Know lime, like the – used for building? Calcium – calcium shots. Calcium shots. And when you get the shot, you get hot from your tip of your toe – fingers to tippy toes and to your head, you just get pleasantly hot. And that was supposed to sh– to dry up that liquid in your lungs. And after a few weeks, when a nurse was coming with a needle, my veins went south. She would jab and jab and jab and she could not find a vein. She said, "Just don't look when I come. I don't want you to see, because your veins disappear." My both arms were just like – like I was a heavy addict to God knows what. But it didn't dry it. It didn't dry, they had to make a puncture in the back and pump it out. And they couldn't put me under, because I would never wake up. So two big men, just like those two, big clunks held me and the doctor went back and he made – punctured my back and he pumped, oh probably gallon and a half of horrible liquid. And he said – the doctor said, "Well, if you're lucky, this is it. If you're not lucky, you have to pump it every six months for the rest of your days. Of course, if are still unlucky, you die of TB, well, you'll be dead." I was lucky. I didn't die of TB and I did not have to ever have it pumped again, except that I have two big stones on the bottom of my lungs, because the calcium goes all the organism and collects in your lungs and settles on the bottom. Occasionally when I have

[108] Come there [sic] (German)
[109] Yes, we help you, we help you. (German)
[110] Municipal hospital (German)

cold, when I cough, little grainy stuff, I do cough out. Doesn't bother me any. Except I go to x-ray. When I first came to x-ray, he says, the doctor – technician looked, call the doctor and doctor said, "What is that?" And I said, "What is what?" "What is that on bottom of your lungs?" I said, "Calcium." "Calcium? How come calcium?" Said, "Well, I was given about 310 cubic centimeters as injections of calcium to dry up my wet pleurisy, they called it, Pleuritism Exudative[111] in Latin – my wet pleurisy." "Oh, they did that?" "Yes, they did that." "Did it dry out?" "No."

08:17:00

Q: Did you feel – I mean, could you comprehend that the war is over? Did you feel safe again?

A: I felt safe.

Q: Did you feel like it was really over?

A: And I felt safe and I felt on the top of a cloud. It's unbelievable, but when you have nothing, you know, you are dirty, you are starving, you have completely nothing and you are in prison, the freedom is so sweet. When we went to work, there was a train going over the viaduct and you saw the German people standing in the windows and smiling, you know. Well dressed, well-fed, just smiling, you said, "Oh my God, how free those people are." They were not, I mean, they were under Nazis men, all that, but "how free these people are." And frequently when you are in a life, you are quite well off sometimes and oh, my God, you know how many people commit suicide because being unhappy temporarily. Nobody ever committed suicide there. He was Muselman, he went to gas tomorrow morning, he did not commit sui– suicide today. Well, there were incidents where people went against the wire and got themselves elec-electrocuted. But you never became despondent. You also – you n – you need that – you e – never caught a cold. I had never seen a person in Siberia – I have never seen a person in a concentration camp to catch a cold. Nobody ever caught the common cold, ever. They are just too tough to catch a cold. When you get to be a civilian, you become sissy, you catch any cold that comes along.

Q: Now, when you got out, were you able to contact your family at all?

A: No. For about six months I couldn't.

Q: Why not?

A: There was no connection.

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[111] Wet pleurisy (Medical terminology)

Q: Okay.

A: No correspondence, nothing, between West Germany and Poland, they were damn Soviets on the way. About six months later, I registered with the Swedish Red Cross and the Swedish Red Cross notified them and about a year later, we started writing back and forth, so they knew that I was still alive and – alive and kicking and not too bad. Of course I was still in a – in a sanatorium.

Q: In – the first place you went to the hospital was in –

A: In Bamberg.

Q: the U.S. –

A: Bamberg

Q: – occupied Germany?

A: I'm sorry. It was in U.S. occupied Austria.

Q: Austria, okay.

A: In Gusen Eins, there was a kind of a hospital or camp hospital. In a few days, only – later on, they took us to Bamberg, to a real hospital. It was a good, old German hospital and –

Q: And how did you feel about being treated by Germans?

A: Great. The Schwesters[112] – I mean all people who took care of you are nuns. The Schwesters are all nuns. All nurses in Germany at that time were nuns. There some nurse helper – nurse helpers who were ladies, women, civilian girls, but all German nurses were Schwesters. Oh yeah, then we had some great Schwesters. I still have a rosary that one gave me. Yeah, Sister Urszula gave me rosary, I still have it.

08:20:33

Q: So when was it determined that you would need to go for further rest?

A: Well, after being in the hospital, they said, "Well, you are not well to go into a camp, you have to go to sanatorium because your tuberculosis – it's not spreaded – spreading, it's arresting – it's arrested, but you have to have rest." So I went to Erholungsheim[113] – rest

[112] Nurses (German)
[113] Sanatorium (German)

home, which is a beautiful Schloß[114] on a top of a mount – on the top – top of a hill, next to forest, with a big garden. And it was a Schloß, it was a castle that belonged to a German Jewish family. They had a David – David star in their – in their coat of arms. When the Hitler's came, they all were arrested and packed to concentration camps and I understand never came back.

Q: So what was it like when you got there?

A: Well, we were assigned rooms – either one or two people to a room, you stayed a lot in bed. The food was quite good, provided by the German – by the Germans and – and Swiss Cross and American army, mostly. We'd get American PX packages, with a little canned food and a beautiful piece of chocolate. I was crazy about chocolate. When I got my package, there was probably about four ounces of chocolate, I inhaled it. One time the chocolate was moldy in those packages, so I traded with everybody who want to dispose of it. I traded everything I had – I had – oh my God, I don't know how many blocks of chocolate I had – I ate myself sick. For next six weeks, I couldn't look chocolate in the face. It was very moldy. The German doctor – actually it was a French lady doctor, she thought I was get blood – I mean food poisoning, she hovered over me constantly. It was a beautiful, little French girl. I almost, I almost married her. Yeah, she – we, we became very friendly and she took me to see her family, we drove all the way to Versailles, stay there, came back. Of course nothing came out of it, I was just a dilapidated little old prisoner and she was a beautiful young lady, just out of medical school. But was great when it lasted. Oh, she was fun to be with.

08:23:09

Q: Boy, it sounds like you were starting to begin to take joy in normal things like –

A: Well, of course –

Q: – chocolate and dating and –

A: Of course, I me – I mean every day was a new day and you are free. You are not going to get to be – get your – shot or go to a gas chamber. In Mauthausen, every 10 days, one block was gassed. You went to showers, you went in tiptoe – you went to showers every 10 days. You went tiptoeing, your whole block, you know, 400 - 600 people – and there was a deathly silence. You could not hear people breathe. And everybody was watching the shower heads. You got a little piece of soap. When the water came, it was a bedlam. Jumping, yelling, shouting, laughing, hugging one another, because sometime, instead of the water, those little red flaps came open, Zyklon B[115] poured in – those little blue

[114] Castle (German)
[115] Zyclon B (German); hydrogen cyanide.

granules poured in, by gallons. Then your goose was cooked. Seventeen minutes, you were done for.

Q: So you knew what happened in – in – I mean it was no secret at that point?

A: Oh no, that was no secret.

Q: Yeah.

A: When you went – and you never know which – you never knew which barrack was going to happen to. So you went – you apprehensive, when you got out, you say, "Whee, I'm going to live next 10 days. At least next 10 days."

Q: And you told me before that sometimes you were forced to actually clean up after that.

A: Yes. Yes, I was under special – special barrack, so when they needed extra help when extra – lot of people came, they took a crew of 10 - 20 - 50 people and we had to go transport the bodies to the cool chamber. The cool chamber, it was kind of a underground tunnel and a little push railroad. We loaded up the bodies on the top of this little flatcars and got into crematorium – in the cool chamber next to it. The cool chamber too – could take about 2,000 people – bodies. Because sometime they couldn't catch up, burning.

Q: I mean how do you – what do you say to yourself to make yourself do something like that?

A: Well, you went willingly, you got an extra bowl of soup. You abhorred it, but you went. You got big dish of SS soup. Peas or beans with pork in it. Oh my God, that was a heaven. As I said, your life became every day life – normal, every day life. And whatever happened was normal for that time and place.

08:26:15

Q: In the first few days of your liberation, think about what were the things that – that were normally normal, but you weren't used to any more. Did you have any experiences, you know that –

A: It was just – it was just like being a cloud nine. Laying in a clean bed and being clean and being – people come and feed you. An American would come and stand by my bed. And he said, "You cannot eat, can you?" "Well, I can, kind of." So he would take a spoon…. Yes, it was a great feeling.

[Technical conversation]

08:27:18

End of Tape #8

Tape #9

09:00:07

Q: It is April 8, 1998. We're outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. This interview is being conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape number nine. So you're in the sanatorium and you're beginning to get your strength back. What kind of thoughts are you having about your future?

A: Not much of it. By the time I became well, I knew that Poland became Communist and the part of the Polish underground I was in was fighting both the Germans and the Communists. As we said, "They are coming, who do you shoot first?" We said, "Pleasure before duty, shoot the Russians first." And I knew they were looking for me. I felt they were looking for me. I discover later on they were. Out of the original 17 – 20, five of us survived. I was arrested by the Germans and was sent away. The four boys survived. About a year later, they were asked to a big party by the local Russian army people, because they discovered what we did and especially what we did for them. They had a big party. They drank and ate for three days and three nights, they were given Stalin Cross. They were given Pobieda Medal,[116] Russian victory medal. They were given Polish Virtuti Militari, third class. They were given 17,000 rubles each. And fourth day, were packed on a – put on a train and sent to Siberia. Said, "People like you, we appreciate what you did for us, but we don't want you now here." And two of those four boys – were two that were of – with me from the very beginning. From the very – my first seven – 17 and there was Icek number one, Icek number two. Isaac number one, Isaac number two. They were both Jewish boys. And they led a charmed life. I knew I was probably God's chosen, maybe son of God – sometime I felt I was God, almost. Because everybody else killed right and left, mutilated, I am still alive. I got few – hit few times, but it was nothing. But I always look at those two and said, "My – you two are freaks. How come you still alive?" "Well, if you want to kill us, go ahead." They never came back. The other two came back from Soviet Russia, these two never came back.

09:03:10

Q: Now, I didn't know that two of the boys in your unit were Jewish.

A: Yes, they were Jewish, yes.

Q: Interesting.

[116] Victory Medal (Russian)

A: We had probably more who did not identify themselves. And I remember some of the names of people. But none of our names were names. We did not tell our own names. My c – my name was not Czyzewski, my name was Grot.[117]

Q: Can you spell that?

A: G-r-o-t.

Q: Okay.

A: Spear point.

Q: Cause I had read in some of the history books, that some of the Polish underground didn't want to fight with the Jewish underground.

A: Many didn't – some didn't – many didn't. The A.I. – A.L., Armia Ludowa, the Communists did accept Jews. Actually, the whole army accept many Jews. My part did not accept many Jews, but we had quite a few. We had quite a few and those two were the best.

Q: So, Icek and Icek did not come back?

A: Icek and Icek didn't come back. Icek Pierwszy, Icek Drugi never come back. I don't even know their last names. Never learned.

Q: But the two other ones did?

A: Those two other ones survived and came back.

Q: Did you ever meet up with them again?

A: No. They refused to write to me. I had a third hand information from them. One is still alive, I think. One is dead. Was – wa– they said, "Damn you, it was your fault."

Q: How so?

A: Well, they served with me. You cannot, you cannot guess people's feelings. They just felt that way, it was my fault. But – but I did not – we did not have people who had to be with me. Those people all volunteers. And we had them coming through the doors and windows. When we lost a person or two or three, we got 10 who wanted to be. Yeah, because they wanted to be active.

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[117] Spearhead (Polish)

Q: How did your family, when they found out – well, I guess they knew what you were doing – they found out you had survived.

A: They knew I wasn't around. We never talked much. I came for a visit and say, "Well, I can visit for a while, I have to be on the run." They knew I was being looked after – I mean searched for. The Schutzpolizei would come sometime and beat my – beat up my father and ask for me. And he said, "I don't know. You came looking for him one time, he, he ran away and he probably is dead. Never heard from him again. Matter of fact – as a matter fact, I think you – you took him to Germany. He worked – he wrote few letters from a place he worked in Germany, then he disappeared."

09:06:15

Q: Your father must have been proud of you.

A: I don't know. I don't know. He always ran me down. Then one time, he was sitting on a fence at nigh – in the evening, with the neighbors. He was bragging about me. And I knew that he was not really – didn't think I was wimp or nothing or next to nothing. But he always told me, "Oh, come on, you're so clumsy. Can't you do this, can't you do that? Get on the ball."

Q: Did you go back to Lesnogóra after the war?

A: Never been – never went back yet. I think I have about one more person I'm waiting to – to kick the bucket. Then I go and spit on his grave.

Q: Who is that?

A: Okay, somebody who is very unsavory, who is a traitor. Also, I have a good reason now to go to – to go back. I had a friend whose name was Stefan, his last name was Wojtyla and if you know the connotation, you know John Paul Two, his last name is Wojtyla.[118] Stefan Wojtyla was my neighbor, was my friend, went to school together. He did not want to join. When the Soviets came, he joined immediately.

Q: Are you saying you were friends with the Pope?

A: No, no, no.

Q: Okay.

A: I was friend with Stefan Wojtyla.

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[118] Karol Wojtyla

Q: Sorry. Okay, okay, okay.

A: Stefan Wojtyla has the same name as the Pope.

Q: Name, okay.

A: They are from different part of the country, they're no relation, most likely. Stefan Wojtyla joined the Communist party, he was sent for training to Soviet Russia, he came back in 1949 or 1950. He joined Polish army. He became a law officer. He became, last time – he used to write to me, say "Stefan, come back. Your were shedding blood, you were fighting. You will get your rewards here." So we wrote back and forth and I discovered that Stefan Wojtyla arrested at least dozen of my people and at least eight were put against the wall and shot without trial. In 1973, he became a persecutor general of the Polish armed forces and was the last time he wrote to me, because I wrote him that, "You dirty, damn Communist. Why did you have to do that?" So he wrote back, "I haven't done anything, I helped a lot of people, I helped a lot of people." And I wrote him, "Do you want a feather in your hat? You want me to come back and you put me against the wall?" So he wrote, "I would never do that to you, you were my friend always, you always will be my friend. But I am becoming the prosecutor general of the Polish armed forces and I cannot write you to – to you any more. But I promise you that – your folder, that is about three inches thick, is going to disappear when I get my position. Nobody's going to see it again." And my sisters, when they came – they came here, said, "Yes, he came for a visit, many times," and the times were hard in Poland, so sh– they said that he brought always some very exquisite food. He always brought a bottle of champagne and – with a lunch with him and he said, "I never will forget what you did for me." He said, "When I was a kid, and we were dirt poor, when Stefan and I were going to school in the morning, I would sneaked into your house early and your mother always would give me a good breakfast with Stefan. And then we walked our three kilometers to school." He said, "I'll never forget that. And you can write Stefan that I would never hurt him." Anyway, when I go back, I will spit –

09:10:30

Q: On his grave?

A: Well, probably not. I should be Christian and forgive him. But I can not forget. Just like that – there's a little German saying that says, "Orte und Zeiten der Schrecken die wir niemals vergessen werden.[119]" "The times and places of horror, we should never forget." Especially this day and age. You know, you talk to young people – I spoke to about 110 young people in a middle school about two weeks ago. And they had a course on Holocaust, they wanted to know what was going on. They don't know who Hitler was. They heard little of Stalin, they don't remember who Roosevelt was. They learn little

[119] The places and times of terror should never be forgotten. (German)

about the Holocaust. They were living – reading Elie Wiesel, the book – little book, *Night*. They were just about few pages gone and they wanted to ask many questions and I told them little story. So I frequently go and talk to group – various groups of people, willingly, and few of us that are still alive should not forget. And it seems like your people with the museum there and whatever information you impart to people must have some influence, because a lot of schools, even grade schools, have a special course every year on the Holocaust. And as far as I know, almost all the middle schools here, especially the religious schools, Catholic and Lutheran schools, do have it too.

Q: So you – you – you didn't want to go back, because it was Communist and so –

A: Well, I – I – I could not go.

Q: You couldn't go, right.

A: Because those people are – my sisters wrote me in 1955, I think and said, "Well, we would like to see you, but if you come, you may end in a piaskowo.[120]" Piaskowo is a cemetery – is a sandy hill. Said, "Because many people like you are being taken out." I had two little relatives, they were two girls my age. They were actually my nieces but I – they were my age. In 1947, they were arrested, they were mistreated, they were sent to jai– to prison for 10, 15, 20 years. They were exonerated in 1960, released and they even were allowed to live in Warsaw, which was a great privilege. They're both dead. They didn't survive very long.

09:13:54

Q: Your, your parents survived the war?

A: My father survived. My – my mother was dead by then. My mother was a war, war casualty. She had a baby and all doctors were arrested and sent to concentration camps. She had a very child – difficult childbirth and she died in childbirth at 41.

Q: Died?

A: Yes. But those two girls in question, they were couriers for our underground. They carried mostly explosives on the train. They'd have two huge suitcases of explosives, get on the train, they spoke little German. They're pretty young girls. Well, frequently they would get into a German car – a bunch of German soldiers, officers had a special car, so they're, "Mädchen, mädchen, kommen Sie hier.[121]" So they would came with the big suitcase that the German would pick up the suitcase, put it up on the upper. Because there were controls frequently, they would stop a train and search and contraband like food, the

[120] Sandy hill (Polish); colloquially "cemetary."
[121] Girls, girls, come here! (German)

so-called black market, which was a free market, people training would be stole – taken away from people. So if you are pretty girl and you carry that, Germans invited you, took your bundle there and nobody could come and search you. And they would come to Warsaw and said, "auf wiedersehen" and "danke schön" and went blissfully their own way with four big suitcases, carrying enough stuff to blow up four – four or five trains. But the Communists got them. They said, "But we helped you." "Well, helpers like you we don't need any more." Just like with my four boys. "Helpers like you we don't need any more."

09:15:59

And mainly, we were helpers in one aspect. In 1943, in summer, a Communist young man, slightly older than I, came and talk – talked. He said, "Stefan, we need to blow up something and I know that you can do it." I said, "You're a dirty Communist. I wouldn't bend my finger to do anything for you." "But you know, you really got to help us. You really got to help us." So I talked to my commander and my commander said, "Oh, you stupid so and so. Go help them? If you go and lose your behind, it will serve you well because you lost your head already." But he reconsidered. Few days later he came and said, "Yes, you can go and help them. I talked – we talked." So they provided me with two – well, they gave me two of my boys and myself and a load of explosives. And provided us with a German chauffeur. German chauffeur who was carrying a truckload of arm – war material to a certain spot. And we're going to that spot. It was kind of an army filled depot. There were a lot of explosives there and then tanks and aircraft bombs and God knows what else. So he left us out in the forest. He went and delivered the stuff and then came back and he was going to wait for us in the forest. And I was told, "You send one boy, if he doesn't make it, send a second one. Don't go yourself, because if you go, you get court martialed when you get back." So one of my boys went in, he went under the first wire and had a little shovel, dug out. Then he went to a second wire and a dog got him. And the guards, the SS guards came in and shot him. And well, he didn't suffer because they shot what he had with him and he just gro– got blown up to smithereens. So then I said, "Well, your turn." He said, "No, I'm not going." I said, "But you have to, you swore." "You can shoot me, I'm not going. I'm not going to help those son of a bitches against those son of a bitches." So I said, "Well, you don't have much choice, do we? I have to shoot you." "Well, go ahead and shoot me. You're my friend. I would rather be – be shot by a friend than – then relative." So I said, "Well," I said, "I'm going to try, but be sure when we come back, don't you ever tell." Said, "I'll save my life, I won't tell."

09:19:11

So I went – I went to the first place, I went to a second place, there was still stuff around. It was muddy also, but was quite muddy from the person who blew up. And a dog came and for quite sometime – I don't know if I had – it's like I had affinity with dogs. Actually when we walked – my group walked to the village and I was with them, not a single dog would bark. And a bunch of dogs would fo– I would go – walk behind and a bunch of dogs would follow me and squeal – wanted to be petted. So the dog came and

he squealed and I petted him and he raised his – his – his leg and sprayed me from head to toe. I was so mad at that dog. I said, "If that was elsewhere, I would show you what is what." And the guards came by and the dog followed them and I was right at their feet there. They never looked. So I scrambled in – I walked in. I had – I always ruled by 17, I had – my lucky 17. So I went for my 17 charges, put them here and there. Then I got out the same way, I watched the guards when they just passed. I got from – was a kind of a half truck standing nearby, got from behind it. Scrambled under one wire and a second wire and ran like hell. Got to my boy, grabbed him and we both ran like hell. We got to the forest. Probably was a good kilometer, was like three-fourths of a mile. He started the truck, we drove. We drove like hell for about 10 - 15 minutes and it blew up. The first explosion blew up all the windows in the truck, back and front. And then it blew and it blew and it blew and it blew. It was just like an atomic f –bomb fireworks. They were preparing pa – putsch on Moscow and the Russians – and the Russian under – Soviet underground wanted badly to demolish this. So that's why my boys, after the war were invited to the big party. "You did for us, you did for us, but now we don't need you any more. Also, people like you we don't need here. Out you go." And they asked about me and they said, "The Germans got him, probably killed him."

09:21:55

Q: It's interesting, I hear more bitterness in your voice about that than I have heard about other things.

A: Well, yes. I think we – I thought we did them, did them a favor. I was sorry to have done it, but was fun to blow up that thing. Oh my God, it was just like a – like a Easter Monday – like Easter Sunday. You should see those explosions, sky high, flying in every direction. Oh, it was a blow out. I was practically intoxicated watching it. But we were repaid and my friend Stefan Wojtyla mentioned it. He said, "They would never do anything to you." So later on I wrote to somebody, "Ask Stefan what happened to my four boys." Later on he said, talked to some, "It was an aberration." Anyway, he went to his rewards. I don't know, maybe he – maybe he became a good Christian and is happy in paradise, playing the lyre. But I kind of suspect that the good Lucifer is poking him with a fork now, là-bas.[122]

Q: You lived in the – tell us a little bit about the displaced person's camps. When you got better –

A: Yes, when I – when I recei– became better, I was in a – a Hohenfels, then I was in Lohr, which was not really – it was like a hospital, it was called sanatorium. Then I became better and I went – was sent to Aschaffenburg, Jäger Kaserne,[123] a displaced person camp. And I kind of convalesced there for a short while. Then I work in the kitchen for a

[122] There (French)
[123] Barrack (German)

time and I became an accountant in the kitchen. Well, the Jäger Kaserne was disbanded, we went to a da – different Kaserne, closer to Aschaffenburg, within a city, stay there for a time. Then I worked as a courier there, for a time, between those three camps. There was Ukrainian camp and two Polish camps. Then we were se – to – moved again to a camp, Wildflecken, which is close to Schweinfurt in Bavaria. It was enormous German army camp. I think it was the ski troops that were trained there. Enormous, there were probably 15 - 20,000 refugees there. By that time I was – for a time I was stenographer for the police force and then became a detective and worked there for the duration as a detective until I left in 1949 for America.

Q: What did you investigate?

A: Local crimes, there were some murders, there were some rapes, there were some so called sui– faked up suicides – murders that looked like suicides. There were malpractice, medical malpractice. I had one medical malpractice where a lady went to have a appendix taken and the doctor forgot to tie one blood vessel and she bled to death, into her abdomen. And some interesting cases. Shoot – shoot-outs with gangs occasion, but very seldom.

09:25:21

Q: Gangs?

A: Well, there were Polish gangs that went – black market operators mostly. Well, if for instance, we'd go to a farm and they would need a cow, they put boots on a cow legs and lead the cow to the camp and lead the cow to the fourth floor to the attic and slaughter it and have a lot of meat to sell. It was all kind of shenanigans going on. And from time to time I would make a document for somebody. See, people who escaped from across – from there – behind Iron Curtain, some want – some had a hard time documenting themselves. So when I felt that somebody was not guilty of anything and worthy, more or less, I would – I was specialist in sacram– sac– document forging. When I was still in Polish underground, I went through a crash course and worked for sometime in the so called "psychological warfare." Kind of got to – little vacation from my group. From a fighting group. So I could make documents. I can make you a document. I can make a stamp. I can forge your signature or your signature and your signature, if I – if I want to – if I practice long enough.

09:26:42

Q: There's a thread here, it's like you're very good at investigating and underground work and being, I think probably really analytical in assessing situations and being able to figure out how to handle them.

A: That's why I'm still alive, I think. Of course, holy providence had something to do with it, but most of the time I avoided getting killed. I got beaten – I, I got almost finished off one time, when I worked in a tunnel. I had a Kapo who was a Czech, he hated Poles and he hated me specially. "You shitty little Polack." He would beat me up and do things to me. So, one time I was working up – up there and he was passing by and I took the railroad tie and I put – put it down on him. Got him hit quite badly. Anyway, I was very sympathetic when I later on saw him. "Oh, Gabriel you get hurt? Oh, you poor thing, what happened to you?" He said, "Some son of a bitch tossed a railroad tie on me." Anyway poor Gabriel got so bad that he lost his Kapo job and he got the shits and if you got those, you got loose stomach in a camp, you are done. So, I even went and burned my portion of bread for two days and fed it to him. Cause if you got very loose stomach, which was a killing thing, three days you are done – if you had enough bread and charred it and ate it, it would stop it. So I fed the poor Gabriel with my own bread and every time I turn around, I felt like spitting in my face, helping that old son of a gun. I mean he was old, he was 31, but he was old in comparison, I mean he was. And I don't even know if he survived or not because I was transferred to a different barrack and he stayed in the same barrack. I don't know if he made it or not. That old Gabriel, Angel Gabriel, he was not. I still got a little scar, he one time chopped me with a – with a shovel, just swung the shovel and cut me right over my forehead.

Q: How did you have compassion for him?

09:29:19

End of Tape #9

Tape #10

10:00:06

[Technical conversation]

Q: This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski. It is April 8, 1998. We are outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. This interview is conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape 10. How – how did you have compassion for someone like the Czech Kapo?

A: I don't know. I felt sorry for that – for that old, shitty son of a gun. I kind of forgot what he had been before and didn't really dwell upon it. Things happen and you go. And ordinarily we did help one another. We did help one another. It was kind of a dog eat dog at times, when some people tried to get to the top and become a top dog, they had to kill and steal and do the horrible things. But there was cases people did help one another. I didn't – I don't know if I felt compassion or if I were just – saw him so miserable, I said, "Okay, you dog, eat that bread. Maybe – maybe your loose stomach will stop."

Q: Did he change his attitude towards you, afterwards?

A: He was still grumbling. He didn't call me names any more. Because I wa– by that time I was stronger. And he lost his job. He lost his job. He was not a lord almighty any more. He could kill all 25 people he had, in one day, if he wanted to. He would get 20 – a pack of cigarettes for it. He did beat many people, I don – never saw him kill anybody, but he could if he wanted to. So maybe he wasn't very bad. But angel Gabriel, he was not.

Q: How – how do you think that – that – those experiences in the war and then in the camps, how did they shape you as a person?

A: I don't think they made me any better. Maybe they made me a little more understanding. But they did not deflate my ego. And I still talk a blue streak. Well, they made me – surviving it made me very thankful, as I previously said. I never prayer – had – pray a prayer of petition. I always say a small prayer of thanksgiving. So it made me appreciate life and the presently, I mean, I wake up every morning and I feel so free. And I'm not hungry and I'm not cold. And I have a darn good job. I love books and I work with books. I buy a lot of books, I'll sell a few books. I'll read. I work five and a half days in the bookstore. Every second Monday, you go to public library, we get our 10 or 15 books, so we have something to read. Sylvia reads too, a lot.

10:03:31

Q: Your wife?

A: My wife, Sylvia reads a lot, too. And every Thursday Sylvia comes downtown on a bus and we have lunch and we talk blue streak. Because normally, after supper – when she has supper ready when I come from work. I come on a bus and I walk a mile. We eat supper, I wash the dishes and we sit with our noses in a book. So, to preserve domestic tranquillity, we get together once a wook – once a week and we have a lunch out. Just like one person said, I think it was a good saying, "My family – family ate out a lot, but they always went to the cheap places." That's it.

Q: You said that you wake up and you think, "I'm not cold, I'm not hungry."

A: And I'm free.

10:04:29

Q: "And I'm free." And that made me wonder, is that feeling of – of having everything taken away from you, of being hungry, or your freedom being taken away, is that a really real feeling sometimes? Can you remember it like it's right there?

A: I can – I can't remember it. Occasionally – well mainly, what – I remember it in the – in dreams. I used to have nightmares. Presently I have them very seldom. I probably will have one next couple nights. When I saw *Schindler's List* – after I saw *Schindler's List*, I had a couple real – just almost like – like it really happened there and I was there back – back there. But it is so far away. One time, St. Paul Cathedral was showing a film, Nacht[124] – *Night and Fog*. The film still exists. It was made by the Polish French company and you can still get the video of it. Anyway, I was asked to come and watch with them and to talk about it later on. Well, it was shortly after I came here and after that went – that went through, I could not talk, mainly because I saw the steps. Hundred and eighty-six steps from a stone quarry, leading to the camp in Mauthausen. And I walked those steps for 11 days, carrying a big stone. When you first came into Mauthausen, you went through the introduction, you were put in a Strafkommando, punishment company. You went down to the quarry and you went up, you went down. Oh, it was about six, seven times a day and you took the biggest stone you could carry, because if you didn't, when you got to about 100 steps up, the Kapo would look and said, "Hey you and you and you and you, step out there. You stupid so and so. Look at the rest of them, they are just breaking down, getting ruptures. And you took two those little stones?" So he give them a push and they would fly down. And that happened just about every day. Five, 10 - 15 -20 people would be killed a day, in the Strafkommando. And sometime, when he had a special order, they would make people run. It was Fliegerbrücke,[125] the flying bridge. There was a kind of a little platform and he would run people to the platform and they would fly down, like two or 300 feet. And then the quarry supervisor started complaining that they messed – "He is messing up my work, so make him stop. That so and so is

[124] Night (German)
[125] Flyer's bridge (German)

messing up my work. He had all those – those – all that mess, those smashed prisoners there. I have to clean it up every day."

10:07:37

So it kind of abated, but he was still killing people. If he didn't do that, when you – didn't like you or you got close up and the upper was kind of a steep road into the gate, front gate of the Grosse Tor – he would take your hat, we had those stripped berets – he would take it and make it fly beyond the post line. And you had to put your stone down, everybody waited and you went to retrieve it. And that was a no-no, because it was beyond the line, and people up on the tower there would open up and shoot you. Sometimes they would just wound you, most of the time they would kill you. And you had to go and retrieve your hat because if you walked to the gate, you had to take your hat and walk at attention, you know, your hat to your leg and walk stiffly and carry your big stone here, you know. Straighten up. SS at the gate, if you did not have a hat to take off, they would take you – take you aside and beat you – most of the time they would take you aside and shoot you. There would be pile of people, dead bodies on the side, people who did not have their hats with them. Those little exercises. I made it for 11 days and lived to tell. Anyway, it was kind of a little introduction to the system.

Q: And so when you saw those steps again –

A: When I saw those steps, I could not talk. Hundred and eighty-six steps – stone steps, quite steep. Just try to walk 180 – 80 steep – 86 steps carrying nothing, at a good clip. I don't think I could now. I walk up a bunch of steps when you go to state park and you hear, "Oh, let's stand down for awhile, Steven, let's take a rest."

Q: Does it surprise you, what you were able to endure?

A: Yes, it does. But in that time, it was nothing. I just thought I was tough son of a gun. I couldn– I could do anything. Especially after surviving two and a half, almost – well not exactly three – is about two and a half years in Polish underground with a – with a fighting group. That was a survival. Later on, camp at times, was almost like a – well, kind of a mild danger. You avoid this, you avoid that, you may live forever. You are hungry, maybe you can organize something, you can steal something. Maybe somebody will give you piece of bread. Maybe you'll catch a dog.

10:10:14

Q: And so, just tell us a little bit about how you left the displaced person's camp.

A: Yes, I – I stayed and worked most of the time, most of the people didn't. They didn't want to. People who stay in places who don't have to work, they don't want to work. We talk sometime about our welfare people, they're paid little and not to have to work.

People who don't work, won't work. There were probably – out of five, eight, 10,000, in Wildflecken, maybe 200 of us who worked. The rest of the people didn't. And I knew one person who was a black market operator, he was a rich – one rich young man. And each person were living in a camp had to donate half a day work to the camp, like chopping trees for the fuel, sweeping streets or doing something. Well, he didn't. So he was called to the camp director and the camp director said, "Mr. So and So, I have a report here you haven't worked last week." And said, "Mr. Director, that's a lie. I never worked." "You never worked? You are supposed to work." "I pay well, people who go and work for me. When my time comes, there is a person who goes and works for me hard, for half a day or a day, I pay him well. Mr. Director, that's a lie, I never worked." That was the mentality of – that people developed. Later on when they went to various countries, there were some were repatriated to Poland, but very few. When Communism took over, they did not want to, as I didn't want to. Many went to Canada, many went – many – some – everybody wanted to come to America. Some went to Belgium, some went to England. Many went to Australia and New Zealand. While those people had – at times had a hard time adjusting back and going back to work. So I stayed in Wildflecken until 1949 and the U.S. Catholic Conference found a sponsor here and I went through the consul and a doctor and document this and document that – all kind of little documents. As the Russians said, "S propiskom vsyë mozhna[126] zrobic.[127]" With a little card, you can do almost anything. Ru– in Russia, if you had to have a propiska[128] to move from place to place, to visit next village, you have to have a propiska issued by police because you cannot move freely. Well, now maybe you can, but that time you could not. So all this little documents and you had to go through a doctor and – well, I worked part time with American CIC. [129] They came one time when I was still in Aschaffenburg.

10:13:30

Q: CIC?

A: The American CIC people came and talked to me and said, "We are catching some of the German criminals and we kind of feel that you may some – have something against it, would you want to help us?" "Sure." "How much you want to paid?" "Paid? If I had money, I would pay you." CIC was the counter-intelligent corps, U.S. Army. There were two captains who worked there and I worked with them until full maturation. One or two days a week I would get release from the police force and work with them. We went across the green border into East Germany and occasionally apprehended somebody who was being searched for and brought him back.

Q: War criminals?

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[126] With a visa one can…anything (Russian)
[127] Do (Polish)
[128] Visa (Russian)
[129] Counter Intelligence Corps

A: Nazis – war criminals, yes.

Q: The Nazis, okay.

A: And then questioned them. Then when they had Polish Nazis questioned, I would help them question. Then when he had Polish Communists sneaking in, I would help them question those. So then they helped me a lot, too – to go through and get in. Yes, but was mostly the Catholic organization who found me sponsor here. I came to St. Paul, I lived with a old couple – old, ancient couple for quite some time, paid room and board. Then I moved out and leaded my little – one little single room overlooking the whole city. I had a beautiful view, it was up on a hill. Old house with little rooms and a landlady who charged us very little rent. It was a very carefree life.

Q: Is there something that I haven't asked you that you'd like to say?

A: Not really, I think we just did almost everything. Oh yes. Yes, I – I met Hans Christian, who was my interrogator.

10:15:36

Q: Your German interrogator?

A: Yes, my German interrogator. Ph.D. from Heidelberg University. He was arrested, he was in jail under different name and Captain Wulkanowski took me – took me to Brückenau, where the man was in jail and he said, "Stefan, maybe you would like to talk to this man, he speaks Polish." So they took me to his cell and I said, "Hans Christian, what are you doing here?" "Was machen Sie da hier?[130]" And he looked, he said, "Stefan?" "Yeah." "Du bist no' nit tot?[131]" I said, "Well, if I was dead, I'm resurrected." So I asked him what his name is and he had different name. I said, "His name is Hans Christian. He was in – a Gestapo interrogator. When he was questioning me, he took me out four times and shot next to me, four different people and told me I was going to be the next one if I don't tell him what he wants to know. And I know that those people are not tried to be executed." I testified against him. So he – Mister – Captain Wulkanowski said, "Well" – he chain him. He chain him to the bed. He said, "Stay a while. Beat the shit out of him." I said, "Okay, I'll stay with him for awhile." So we – I stayed and we talked. He said, "Aren't you going to beat me?" I said, "No, I'm not going to beat you. You will get your reward." He said, "Well, you know, really, I didn't want to beat you either, but I was doing my job." Said, "Well, now I would be doing my job." So then I knocked on the door and said, "Well, I'm sorry. I'm going to testify against you, I know who you are." And I did. And I understand that couple years later he wa– couple years

[130] What are you doing there here? (German)
[131] Aren't you dead yet? (Austrian German)

later he was hanged. But I wasn't asked to come to the execution. And Captain Wulkanowski, I walked out and said, "Take my pistol, go and shoot the son of a bitch." I said, "Shoot him? You people can hang him, I don't want to shoot him." Yeah, Hans Christian. Beautiful, tall, blonde man with blue eyes and beautiful bleach hair.

10:18:10

Q: Some people would have wanted to kill him.

A: I don't know. We promised ourselves, when we were in a camp, when we were in Gusen, when the freedom come, if we are alive, we will go burning, killing. Not raping because we are not strong enough, but we will do horrible things here. Nobody did anything. The only one atrocity that we committed – that people committed in a camp – was a Spanish from a Spanish civil war – his name was Santacara. He was Oberkapo[132] of the first shift. He had under him about 20,000 people. And he beat people and he killed people, he drowned people. If, if somebody he didn't like, he would just pick them up and – and tip him.

[Technical conversation]

He was very bad person, he would – didn't like somebody, he would lead a person to a washroom, pick him up and put him in the barrel head first and drown him. I mean he was just a bad person. Anyway, there were a bunch of Russians who hated him, because he especially hated Russians, I don't know why, because he was a Spanish Communist and the Russians were Russian Communists, but he hated them. So they nailed him – they stripped him, they nailed him to the barrack by hands and feet and they took a heavy machine gun and they shot him to pieces. And I watched – when I was in the hospital I watched out of my window – was – my bunk was next to the window, I watched it. And I asked, "Who that was?" "Oh, was Santacara." "Oh, Santacara. May God be merciful of his, of – over – over his mortal soul – immortal soul." So I know one – saw one atrocity committed by the former prisoners.

Q: Is there anything else? Besides these things? I have got one question I've got ask you. Okay.

A: All right.

10:20:30

Q: You said that you– [Break in tape] befriend him and how did – how–? Did he know who you were?

[132] Senior foreman (German); term used for inmates appointed by the SS to supervise Kapos.

A: Yeah, well we met – we met in a beer joint, I mean we were – a drinking place. And there were a couple street girls with me and I introduced him to them and he said, "Do you want to come tomorrow, have a drink with me? I'll bring some good schnapps." So I came the next day. Instead of watery beer, he had some good schnapps, we had a drink and we used to meet from time to time. And he even did me little favors. He liked those two girls, apparently. So later on discovered he was the supply officer, I kind of went clo– and I showed a bunch of money, said, "Would you like some money?" "Ja, Ja.[133] What do you want me to sell you?" I said, "A Schmeisser." "Ja." "Zwei Schmeissers?[134]" "Ja." "Fünf und zwanzig Schmeissers?[135]" "Twenty-five Schmeissers?" "Ja. Wieviel?[136]" So I said, "Well, about 200,000 marks." "Well, zwei hundert, tausend?[137] Hundert Schmeissers.[138]" "Ganz gut." So he – he sold it to me. He had it delivered to a place where I want it, driving the truck himself, we unloaded it. He went – happy with his money. A good German can sell you his mother or daughter. Well, I have a – after the war I had a lady who used to do my washing, a German lady, refugee lady who had a bunch of children and she escaped from the eastern part of Germany to western part of Germany, she has a daughter, was "Rita the Virgin." And I went out with her daughter a few times and she says, "Stefan, be sure that you don't go to sleep with my daughter." I said, "Frau Anders, [139] I would never go to sleep with a beautiful young girl." "Rita is a virgin." Well, we called her from then on, we called "Rita the Virgin." "I would let Rita sleep with a rich American who would give me a big bag of Polen kaffee[140] – unground coffee. Because ground coffee was always adulterated. If a rich American came and gave me a big bag of Polen kaffee, I would let him sleep with Rita." So, a good German can sell you anything you want to, if you pay enough. Also I was lucky. He could have reported me. He could have shot me on the stop – spot, too, because he was armed.

10:23:14

Q: He could have taken the money and then reported you.

A: He could have taken the money too. Well, he was an honest thief.

Q: Okay, now we're going to look at some pictures that –

[Showing photos]

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[133] Yes (German)
[134] Two schmeissers? (German)
[135] Twenty-five schmeissers? (German)
[136] Yes. How many? (German)
[137] Two hundred, thousand (German)
[138] Hundred Schmeissers (German)
[139] Mrs. Anders (German)
[140] Poland coffee (German)

A: Right, that was my little visit to my home village, from the forest. I'm the second one from the left, in britches and funny hat. I behave like a peacock of course. I thought I was on the top of the world. So that's awful little.

[Technical conversation]

Yeah, this was taken sometime in 1943, on Sunday afternoon. It was shortly after my encounter with blowing the building where the Einsatzgruppen stayed. And I came home to celebrate and that was my neighbor, his name is Tadeusz and I'm the one on the right. And I looked blonde and bleached, with big, blue eyes. Yeah, that is a – a shield of a 11th armored division. Those were the people who liberated Gusen Zwei, Gusen Eins and Mauthausen concentration camps. There comes a great detective in Wildflecken displaced person camps in Bavaria, Germany. I think I'm on the way from work. Don't I look like a peacock?

Q: This is about 1946 or '47?

A: Forty-seven, '48. That is so and so in Wildflecken. It was a main square in Wildflecken, in the back there's one of the buildings that people lived. And I think I was on the way to see a pretty girl.

10:25:55

This was taken shortly after I did get out of a hospital and went to sanatorium. My hair grow up and I gained a lot of weight. Ate a lot of soup and gained weight, probably half a pound a day. That is Hohenfels Erholungsheim. That means "Hohenfels TB Sanatorium." It was a castle on a top of a hill that was used as a recuperation center for German flyers during the war and after war it became a TB sanatorium for refugees from all countries of Europe. It is my Ausreise[141] – it means document. When I worked as a detective in Wildflecken displaced person camp. It was at times fun, at times was little harrowing. We met all kind of people, some criminals, some petty criminals. It was an interesting job. This is a transit camp in Hamburg-Altona. We stayed there for about a week or so before taking ship to America. That was a document issued to me by German authorities in Bamberg, when I was in the hospital there, denoting that I was an honest to goodness political prisoner of the German Nazis.

Q: Wow. That was probably an important piece of paper to have.

A: It was – it was, yes.

Q: Authenticating what you had experienced that.

[141] Exit visa (German)

A: This is a document issued by Polish prisoner organization, telling that I really was who I was. They had a very strict verification commission. You have to ask – answer many questions. They did not want – did not want anybody to sneak in. So that is the document they finally issued to me. No, I don't think I want to go to work any more. Where do you work at?

A: I work in a bookstore, down –

10:29:09

End of Tape #10

Tape #11

11:00:08

Q: This is an interview with Stefan Czyzewski, April 8, 1998, Minneapolis, Minnesota, conducted by Katie Davis and this is tape number 11.

A: All right. This is a poem, written by Polish poet, whose name is Michal Piasecki. He's a Polish Jew who escaped the Holocaust simply because he escaped to Soviet Russia. He spent the war times – war time in Magnitogorsk, in Ural Mountains, working for the Russians. He had a great sympathy with the Communism and I don't care too much for him, but he's a good poet, I love his poems. I'm translating some of his poems to be published in this country, here. And this is one of them. I would like to read it in Polish and English.

"Szabas
Juz biel sosnowy stol zaslania,
Zapada zmierzch. W kuchni ogien gasnie.
W lichtarze mama wstawi swiece,
Diamentem pierwsza gwiazda blysnie.
Ulica pusta. Zaraz zamkna okiennice.
Nosiwoda koromyslo polozy obok klody,
Do boznicy spieszy, wpierw grosze policzy.
W szabas Fiszel nie nosi wody.
Za oknem brzoza siega nieba,
Swiatelka swiec niesmialo chybocza.
Cisza. Topola tylko liscmi zaszelesci.
Matczyne dlonie plomyki zaurocza.
Ojciec w niezlym nastroju zasiadl do stolu.
Wiary w lepsze czasy calkiem nie stracil,
By zamiast na raty, na weksle –
Gotowka za szycie klient zaplacil.
Trzy dania byly, jak ongis w Jeruzalem:
Gefylte fisz w rybnym sosie, pulchna chala,
Rosol z fasola, z cieniutkim makaronem,
Kura – po zydowsku dzielona – cwiartek osiem miala.
W szabas Bog nakazal odposzywac
I nad Tora chwalic imie Jego.
Czynic mykwe czyli dobry uczynek –
Zawsze, nie tylko dnia siodmego.
Moj szabas zdeptano w czasach pogardy,
Kiedy te skaze znalezli w rodowodzie.
Kolorami jeszcze dalie igraly, gdy,
Przystani szukalem gdzies n Wschodzie.

Szabas nieraz w snach powraca,
Ta sama gwiazda zamigoce,
Te same dalie wciaz igraja.
Przesnilem takie piekne noce."

11:03:32

The English translation is:

"Sabbath
Our pine table is shrouded in white.
Dusk comes; kitchen fires die.
Candles in menorah mother will place,
First star like diamond will shine.
Street empty. I'll close the shutters now.
Water vendor his yoke will put by the well,
To synagogue he walks, counting his pennies.
Sabbath todi– today, Fiszel does not trade.
By the window, birch racing for the sky,
Candlelight timidly shines afar.
Stillness, only aspen leaves whisper softly.
By mother hands, the light shines bright,
By prie– by prayer blessed, so then suddenly alive.
This one and that one took flight to God,
Praying and begging for plenty to all,
Health of a husband and children's health.
Father in a mood, not ugly, sat behind the table.
Did not loose faith in good times to come,
So that instead of hope in the promissory notes,
For his tedious sewing, simple cash will flow.
Three dishes served of yore in Jerusalem,
Gefilte fish in fish sauce and a soft challah,
Chicken soup with beans with angel hair macaroni,
Hen – Jewish style – divided to make eight quarters of one.
Sabbath is for your rest, just like good Lord ordered
And with His Torah to proclaim his name.
To perform ablutions and all those good deeds –
Good deeds do always, not only on the Sabbath day.
My Sabbath was trampled in these times of horror,
When evil mark was spotted in ancestral scrutiny.
Dahlias in bloom, charmed and enchanted us,
Safe ha – safe harbor here I searched for in a Far Eastern way.
Sabbath at times comes in dreams.
The same stars are shining by,

The same dahlias still bloom.
And still of great old times, we daydream."
That's it.

11:06:22

Q: Thank you very much.

A: I think I would like to give you an address of Mr. Piasecki in Warsaw.

Q: Okay.

A: He wrote a book, *From Little Town to Poland to Magnitogorsk in Ba– and Back*. And he probably would be very proud to send you a copy for your archives and very likely he probably could send you some of his poems. This poems were brought back from – back from Poland by Professor Sher,[142] who is at the University of Minnesota. Matter of fact, he is presently teaching for three years in Auckland, New Zealand. It was – he's some kind of a specialist in economy. He met that man and they talked and that man presented him with a bunch of his poems. And Mr. Sher gave them to me to translate and he has intention to publish them, possibly in a Tikkun Magazine.[143] He's still working on it. I don't know how soon – how long will it take him. It seems to take him forever.

Q: I'd be glad to take his address.

A: Yes.

11:07:41

End of Tape #11
Conclusion of Interview

[142] Michael Sher
[143] Tikkun: A Bimonthly Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture and Society