

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**  
**RG-50.030\*0691**

## PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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.

## CHASTEN BOWEN

### April 26, 2013

Question: Today is Friday, 26 April, 2013, and 16:15 hours in the afternoon. This interview is being conducted with Mr. **Bowen**, and it re – to celebrate the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s** 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Mr. **Bowen**, tell us your full name and when and where you were born.

Answer: **Chasten L. Bowen**. I was born in **Nevada, Missouri** on July the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1924.

Q: And did you grow up there?

A: I was there til I was about nine years old. I moved to **Garden City, Kansas**, cause my mother was a nurse in a hospital there. She took a job there in kind of, depression days. She was there a few years and I was about 13, I think, and she got a job in **California**. My father got a job at **Chrysler** assembly plant in **Los Angeles**, so they went to **California**. I followed, with my brother about two months later, and that’s where I’ve been all my life.

Q: How old were you when you moved out to **California**?

A: Let’s see, I’m trying to think, let’s see, that was about – I think I was about 14 - 15 years old.

Q: Okay, so you went to sc –

A: 14.

Q: – you went to school out in **California**.

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

A: I went to school in – in **California**. Went to high school, and then I went to the first two years of college there before I went in the service.

Q: What high school did you go to?

A: I went to **Enterprise** Junior High and I went to – high school was **Compton JC**, junior college.

Q: Di-Did you like school?

A: What?

Q: Did you like school?

A: Oh, yeah, I like to learn stuff.

Q: And were – were y – did you par-participate in any sports, or any activities?

A: Tennis.

Q: Tennis, yeah.

A: Yeah, I was on tennis team, I used to like to play tennis, and –

Q: Singles or doubles?

A: Both.

Q: Both. Did you make varsity?

A: Huh?

Q: Did you make varsity?

A: No, I don't know, they didn't have varsity in those days, I don't think.

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

Q: Right.

A: We had competitions, the other schools and stuff. I used to be on the teams and go there and just a – an interesting sport to me.

Q: You have a girlfriend?

A: Did then I had one?

Q: Yeah.

A: No.

Q: So when did you go – when did you go off to college?

A: I didn't go – I went two years of college then, before I went in service, and then I – I went after I got out of the service. I went to engineering – electrical engineering school.

Q: Okay. What year did you graduate high school?

A: You would ask me that question. 1941, I think.

Q: '41, okay. When the war broke out, when you realized that **America** was entering the war, do – were you drafted, did you volunteer? Explain to me how that happened.

A: I was coming back from the mountains, went and got in the mountains and I heard on the news that we'd been bombed in **Pearl Harbor**, and I already knew the war was going on in **Germany**, and lots of news, stuff about it. And a buddy of

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

mine I ran around with, my best friend, why he and I said well, it's time we tried to get in the service. I was crazy in those days, I was about 17 or something. So I tried to – tried to get in the Canadian roy – **RCAF**, the Canadian Air Force. And you had to move to **Canada** and live there for two years before they'd take you. So we didn't do that. So I just waited until a draft notice came, and went in the – went into basic training that I di – didn't know where I was going. I got on a bus and they drove me to **Fresno, California**, and that was a – a basic training.

Q: When did that – you wa – hang on just for a moment, when did that draft notice come? What year was that?

A: It must have been '42.

Q: Okay.

A: 1940 – I was working graveyard at – on aircraft engines [**indecipherable**] **B-17s**.

Q: Okay.

A: – at **Ardman**(ph) aircraft, and going to school in the daytime. Anyway, I – I don't remember the exact date or anything like that, it's a long time ago. But went to basic training at **Fresno**, and after basic training I went to **Sioux Falls, South Dakota** for radio school. Went from there to **Salt Lake City** for continued training, stuff like that, radio and communications and stuff like that. And then I was sent to **Dyersburg, Tennessee** for training in **B-17s** as a radio operator, and top gunner on

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

the **B-17**. And after training there I had – I wanted to be a fighter pilot, so I applied for fighter training, and nothing happened, so after – just about the time that we was ready to ship overseas with – through basic training there at **Dyersburg, Tennessee** in **B-17s**, and dummy missions, you know, and navigation stuff like that. And flew down over **Cuba**, and stuff, was just long range navigation training. Orders came through find us, report to **Fort Worth, Texas** for fighter school. I was already on a crew, so I was – now I'm gonna stay with the crew right there, and train with them for months, and so we went to **Germany**. I went to fra – I went to **England** and then re – **Germany** later. So, went to the 91<sup>st</sup> bomb group in **Bassingbourn, England**, and that was shortly after the **Memphis Belle** completed its 25 missions, the first plane to finish a – a group of missions, to go home, and then –

Q: Let's ba – let's back up, just for a moment.

A: Surely.

Q: Let's go back to training. What did you think of training? Did you enjoy it?

Were there –

A: Oh yeah.

Q: – difficult parts to it? What was the most challenging thing for you?

A: I thought it was interesting. Was – we had a lo-lot of this – lots of – lots of training, learn communications and stuff. It's something new for a young guy, you

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

know, and was interesting to see the – how long the radio – how far you could reach on the radios, where you could talk to Australians, and was up in altitude, cause we had a training antenna that we could let out in the – in the radio room, you know.

And I thought it was interesting, you know.

Q: And did you like to be a radio operator, or di – how much say did you have in – in the job that you ended up doing?

A: I wa – always – I liked engines and stuff, and I wanted to be a – if I was going to be a – in the sir – first, you know, to be an engine mechanic. So I thought I'd do that, but they gave you a-aptitude tests. And when I was in **Fresno** basic training, they give you these tests, all sorts of stuff, mechanical and electrical and everything else. And I was able to do real good in electrical and they needed electronic people then, so they chose me to go to radio school, **Sioux Falls, South Dakota**, so that's where I went.

Q: You didn't have any problem with that?

A: No, I didn't have any problem. I liked th – I – I'm – I liked to – I liked both, electronics, and I became and electrical engineer later, and – and I always still fool with en – engines, racing engine and stuff. It's a hobby, I'm just inquisitive.

Q: From the **United States** you go to **England** with the 91<sup>st</sup> bo-bomb group. What par – which air force was that? Was that Eighth Air Force?



**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

A: Eighth Air Force, first division, 91<sup>st</sup> bomb group.

Q: Rough – do you remember – recall when that was when you went over to **England**?

A: It was – it must have been in June or July '44, near as I can recall.

Q: How did you get over to **England**?

A: Flew over.

Q: You flew over?

A: Yeah.

Q: On wh-what sort of aircraft?

A: I believe we left our plane in – in **Bangor, Maine** and we got on a – I believe it was a military transport [**indecipherable**] **C-47** possibly, very possibly, I don't really recall. I know there was a bunch of people on it. There was about six nurses and a bunch of us guys on there – there. We landed in – in s – I think in – in **Wales** first, and then we took off from there and went – some people left, you know, we went down to **Bassingbourn**.

Q: And where – I'm sorry, where did you say you ended up in **England**? Where was your base, your first ba –

A: **Bassingbourn**. It's about 15 kilometers from ha – **Cambridge**.

Q: What'd you think of **England**?

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

A: Oh, it was interesting, you know. A young person always – things are interesting to a young person. And the nice countryside, the – the – the base was a – was a **RAF** base, had been before, and then they carved out a lot of trees, they cut trees down and we parked some of the planes in the a – the trees, for camouflage, I guess really. And some of the buildings, we had Quonset huts, we had brick buildings, we had different types of buildings, cause a lot of them were put in just to – you know, as new construction, because we moved in and taken over this whole milit – British base. So –

Q: Did you interact with the British at all?

A: Oh yeah. There was British people there. We'd go to the little pubs and stuff like that, and eat, you know, and no, it was good, and –

Q: How were you treated by them, by the English?

A: Oh, very well. The girls would come to the base and walk around, they'd talk with us and stuff like that, you know, and carry on conversations and then they – they'd go to town, the people – I only had one instance where I – I was on leave, go – go – I was going to go to **London**, I was on the train over there – their trains have a compartment on one side, and a aisle down the other side there, you na – a compartment with about six people in them. And I was going to **London** one time and there was a little kid in there. I reached in my pocket and took out a **Hershey**

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

chocolate bar, and gave this little kid. And the mother scolded me for tormenting this little kid, because that's the only candy bar he had and he probably will ever have, and I shouldn't have given it to him. And I thought I was doing him a favor.

Q: Sure.

A: Cause the little kids would – you'd go up and down the street and the little kids would see a American **G.I.**, cause we always had, you know, spearmint chewing gum, or stuff like that, and they'd say, got any gum, chum? And they'd come out and grab you by the legs or something like that, say that, you know, and almost knock you down. And so, we just – you know, took candy and stuff for the little kids, and give it to them, you know, thought that was good. But that's the only time I ever had a run in with one that was – she just jumped all over me for giving her little kid that candy bar.

Q: What did you think of **London**?

A: Was kind of interesting city. I was there one time when – just after a **V-1** hit down by **Hyde Park**, and dug a big crater down there. And they had had these guys that were like spit and argue club guys, or all these guys down there complaining about the war and everything else, and you know, just carrying on talking and yakking, I don't know what they believed in or anything, but it was kind of interesting to listen to him and – yakking and talking. And walk around **Hyde Park**

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

and different place in **London** and I – interesting time. I – I thought I was – lost my arm there one time. I went in – I got a hotel in – with one of the other guys I was with, and we – I was laying in this bed, and it had a bar on the side of it and I somehow li – laid my arm down at the side and that bar was right under my arm, and it cut off my circulation so my arm was – went to sleep, and I woke up in the morning and tried to move the arm, and it wasn't there, and I reached over trying to find for it, it was hanging outside the bed, you know, that was kind of interesting. Then mis – the people, I had no trouble with the people, I think was pleasant.

Q: Did you make any English friends or girlfriends?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No. No, didn't have time.

Q: How much training did you do in **England** be-before –

A: Well, quite a bit of training, because in – in the radio thing, the Americans had five letter code groups, they'd send groups of five letters, and then you had to decode – decipher that into real language, from the **SOI** standard operating procedures, and the British had four letter groups. So the navigator and myself went to another base in **England** and trained – cross trained with the British, receiving their codes and stuff like that, and their diver – procedures that they had. So we

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

went about th – I think it was a couple weeks of training, cross training with the British, then went back to base, cause – cause we were in a lot – with the British a lot, you know, naturally, we was in their country still.

Q: What sort of aircraft did you have, and where were you in that aircraft?

A: I was the radio operator by the center of the aircraft, just behind the bomb bays, and I had gun above the head. And it was a **B-17G**, we just got the **Gs** model in when I was there. And I always used to go down the lines and see a lot of planes that come back were pretty shot up, and we wondered how they flew, and part of their tails missing and everything else, and big holes in them, you know. And it was kind of interesting to see them, you know, cause I was inquisitive.

Q: Was it frightening?

A: I never really seemed to get too excited about that. I always thought – I always figured that if the plane went down, my idea was I'd – I'd go down with it, and it'd crash and I'd get out of the crash somehow. But my mind changed when I got shot down.

Q: First combat experience – first flew – no – not – what – your first flight that you went over the **Channel**, what – when was that, what was that like?

A: I don't remember the exact day that we had there. I think there was training flights that we went just to the coast, turn around, come back, three of them. And

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

then on the day of the – the bomb, when I fir – when I was shot down, why we got up quite early in the morning, about four o'clock or something like that, I don't remember the exact time. It was early. Had the briefing and then we took off and we used to climb at certain altitudes [**indecipherable**] because you have a lot of airplanes up there. So they have a colored flares, and you have a – each plane has a different colored flare and they fire it off up there at altitude and then you rendezvous onto that group. That's your definition, and you start from there on your mission. So, you climb to a pretty good altitude before you start to cross the **Channel**. And it was interesting to, before that, that the **V-1s** that they were firing on **England**, they were these kind of a putt, you hear them flapping, cause they had a – a pulse jet motor on them, and you'd hear those at night. And as long as they weren't coming right over your head. Why? Because they didn't steer them, they just had an angle, wherever they go, and then they would kick the rudder over and – the horizontal stabilizers rather, and they just dive straight down. The British developed a technique to keep those from coming into **England**. They had a fighter – real big fighters called nape – **Typhoon**, with a **Napier Sabre** big engine on it. Wasn't – I guess it was too heavy to be a real good fighter like the **Spitfire**. And they would send those out over the **Channel** when they hear – see these things coming in, cause they flew at a certain altitude, and the **Typhoons** would fly along

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

the side of them and flap the wing on them and tip the gyro in, and they just spiral into the ocean. So the British really did a good job on downing many, many hundreds of those darn **B-1s**.

Q: It had to take some pretty skilled flying to do that.

A: Yeah, well they just fly alongside. They were doing about maybe, I don't know, 300 miles an hour, 250 mile an hour, fly alongside and just flap the wing, you know, tip it a little bit. The – the – tip the gyro in the rocket and they just spiral into the ocean. It was a clever idea, you know, and didn't take – they didn't fire on them because if they shot them, and then they explode and you'd fly right through all that debris.

Q: Right.

A: So it was a clever idea. Didn't take much you know, and the air – **Typhoons** could catch them real easy. So I thought that was real clever, myself.

Q: When was the first time you, after your training, and after you did the coastal runs and what have you, that you crossed over the **Channel** and went on a combat mission?

A: Th-The – what day, you mean?

Q: No, not necessarily day, but what was that experience like? Do you remember tha – going over for the first time?

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

A: Oh yeah, I remember going over and seeing the – the coastline and – and seeing some other planes where ya – I think we took – some planes took wa – one hit – I remember over **Calais, France**, I think it was, one took a – took a direct hit in the bomb bay, it looked like, cause it just blew up, disappeared, you know. And then we went on to our target, it was a dru – it was an underground airbase, fighter base, and they had caves and stuff in these hills where they'd put the fires inside, and everything was camouflaged, so it was a hard thing to find, but they were trying to knock out as much of those fighters as they could because of the invasion forces, you know. So we made a – went out and found the initial point, which is an identifiable point that you – they can find to turn on, and they drove cer – certain altitudes, certain speed and in a certain direction, and to the target. We met the first time and that – the bombardier couldn't find the target, camouflaged. So you do a no-no, we – we made a 360 degree turn and went back to same initial point and started the same course, same altitude, same everything. By that time the barrage flak that you see all the time hadn't got us the first time, so they had their tracking flak on us in. They knew our altitude, our course, they knew where we were going. So the tail gunner says, about 300 yards off the tail, had a burst. Next one through the waist, and the left wing wen-went off, and we caught on fire and started into a spiral. And I always figured I'd ride the airplane down, get out of the crash or



**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

something. But you change your mind rather quickly when that happens, so I – guys just bailing out, you know, when they gave the order to bail out. And I started out of the radio room and heard the ball turret gunner was spinning around, so I figure the communications were shot out or something, so I grabbed a big tuner, you know, the transmitter in the radio room and started beating on top of it. And he pointed the guns down and the handles come up and I flipped it out and he pops out. He was a little guy, and he popped out of there so quick I couldn't believe it. Hand him his parachute, he sta – snapped it on and boy he was out the win – out the door. I was right behind him.

Q: What altitude were you at when you bailed, roughly?

A: What – what else did I take?

Q: What al-altitude were you at when you bailed?

A: Was about – I think about 27,000 - 27 five –

Q: So you were up.

A: Huh?

Q: You were up.

A: We were about – about 30,000 we started.

Q: Yeah.

A: But we were in a dive, sort of a spiral dive, you know.

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

Q: Yeah.

A: So.

Q: What was that experience like, bailing out?

A: I didn't have too much, I guess the excitement, and all that stuff, that you don't think about it, I was just trying to get out of that fiery airplane. And so we'd always been told to delay your jump, cause they may – may shoot you coming down in the parachute, you know, a fighter come by, or something like that. So I had delayed my parachute til I could kind of see the leaves on the trees. And I popped the chute and it seemed like I took a couple swings and I was on the ground. And then there was a – a little boy, a lady, and a – at the end of this field where I landed in, there was a little boy over there and a lady, and so I – he ran over towards me and I reached in my kneepads to get my escape kit out and there's a little – we have books in there, a little book that says English and French, you know, cause we **[indecipherable] France**, and maps and stuff. And he pointed the **[indecipherable]** in the book, and he says hide, in there. So they took off. So I stuck my parachute under some bushes there at the edge of the field, and ran through the forest and got to the other side and I didn't know going to the other side is that I was getting deeper in the forest, but I come to a clearing. Now that little boy don't want to go out in there, cause gonna see me. So I just heard these – all these Germans running,

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

you could hear them, and there's – their canister they carry with them is – their gas mask rattles like a tin can, you know, so I heard rattling, so I just dove under some bushes right there and pulled them down kind of over me and laid there, waited, and hear when the Germans come up, he's – I could reach out and grab his pant leg, he was so close, but he was looking way out ahead, he wasn't looking down at his feet. And I don't know, it seemed like I laid there for a day, it was probably an hour or something like that, and he kept looking out there, and I didn't breathe for a couple hours, I don't think. But anyhow, they finally went away and then I just walked through the forest and – and I got my maps and there – they had maps that they gave you were like a silk handkerchief, but their maps were detailed, they had the curves in the road, you could see paths in the forest, and they had – I don't know where I got them, but they were very good. So I saw a curve in the road and it's where I was at, and I located myself and then I started out to cross this one road, a divided highway. And then I heard a big racket coming, I was right in the middle of it, it was quite wide, their divided highway was, and there's grass and s – lot of trees growing in the middle of it. And around the corner I get – hear them coming. So I dove into the grass and hear a bunch of German tanks and everything else was coming by, and guys in, I don't know, looked like armored cars or something, I didn't – I wasn't able to really look, I was – buried myself in the grass, hoping they

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

didn't see me. And they went on by, didn't see me, so I thought [indecipherable] get out of here, so I headed back. And every time I seen one walking, I would just veer off at an angle. I wouldn't walk close to them, cause they'd see me, identify me. So I just kept quite a ways away, and veer off at an angle. I never made any sharp turns or quick turns or anything like that, and finally I came to this forest area, and I ran across an old deserted – I don't know was a pigpen or whatever it was, but it was pretty dilapidated. So I went in there cause it had been raining, and I got all wet and stuff like that. So I took off my coveralls, cause I had coveralls with suspenders and stuff, my flight suit. So hung up on the thing in the top of it there, and laid down on the straw, and went to bed. And then the next morning, early the next morning, I don't know, seven – six, seven o'clock, or what time it was, but I heard crack – like sticks breaking, and stuff like that, and I peek out. Here is a guy out there, I thought he was an old man, it looks pre – he was probably 40 years old, cause I was only 19. And so I didn't know what to do, I had my .45 automatic, pil – you know, shoulder holster and sa – I says, I don't know whether to shoot at the guy, or make a noise in the – I had to make a decision real quick here. So I thought no, I stuck the gun in the straw, and I stepped out to the door, pulled the – and peeked out to him. And he put his finger up to his mouth like be quiet. And he says [indecipherable]. I didn't know French, but I thought that meant friend or

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

something. So he says, shh. So he left. And so about 10 - 15 minutes later, here he come back. Started motioning me to come with him. So I reluctantly went with him.

Q: Did you take your weapon with you or leave it in the straw?

A: No, I left it in the straw.

Q: Okay.

A: I didn't want to be caught with it because I'd always been told, if you wi – get with the French underground – and I didn't know who it was, they didn't know me either, why, if you don't do exactly what they say, they'll shoot you. You know, because they don't know who you are either. Maybe an infiltrator. So I figure it's best just to not take the chance, I'll just leave the gun there. So I left it in the straw and went with him, and we walked through the forest quite a ways, maybe a mile it seemed like. And came to a house and went to the back hou – of the house, it was a fence – brick, like brick fence, but half of it was torn down so that when we stepped over that, went into the house. And the family – I took my concentrated

**[indecipherable]** my escape kit, and gave it to them. And they made me hot chocolate and brought it to me and breakfast in the morning. I stayed there about three days. One time the German came to look – I – I guess just watch – looking for people, and they hid me out in the pigpen out in the back. And then they brought me back in, I stayed there. And then they brought a – a couple of – a guy who had a

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

bicycle and another bicycle for me, and he took me out – he ga – he gave me fresh clothes to put on. I had a tam, and stuff like that.

Q: How long were you with that family before you got –

A: Three days.

Q: Three days, okay.

A: And –

Q: Did you know their names?

A: No, I don't remember their names. I wish I did, but I don't remember their names. They had a – a young lady there, their daughter I guess it was, that used to bring the warm cereal and kind of coffee and – kind of an ersatz type coffee, I don't know, it was of str – strange ta –

Q: Chicory?

A: Yeah, like that. And that was – I was treated real well there and they – like I had a nice bed, and stuff like that. And then, you know, I rode away with this guy, he took me to another house, and that was Madam **Marie Duvall**(ph). I remember her name. And there I met a – well, a pilot, **Jim Fore**(ph).

Q: Really?

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

A: Yeah, he was there. And so, I was really surprised to see him, you know, but I guess they were all in the underground group there, you know, and we all lit in a certain area there. Anyway, here I met him, and –

Q: I don't suppose you had occasion at that point to question his circling around and doing that bomb run again?

A: No. No, no, no, no. No, you – you know, they said they were – and th – and said, we gotta take out these – these fighter bases and stuff like that. Cause they told us in briefing, you know, gotta get it done. So, you – you do what you're assigned to do. So if you made the decision, make a 360, why, he knew more about it and what – what was going on than I did, he and the bombardier, so you know, I –

Q: Did he recognize you straight away when he saw you?

A: Oh, oh yeah, sure. We gave each other a hug, you know. And we stayed there a few days and the lady, Madame **Marie Duvall**(ph) had a – there's a basement, and they had a radio in the basement, and we could listen to **BBC**. So we got there, we – I stayed there, I don't know, three or four days maybe, I don't know wa – I – I don't remember exactly how many, but then a guy in a two wheel cart, a horse drawn two wheel cart came by, and we got in this cart with him, and we rode through a ho – little – down a road and then turn a corner, went to a little village, and there was German tanks there, and soldiers, everything else, and here we were sitting there in

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

German – in French tams and stuff, in civilian clothes, and shaking like a leaf here, probably. But we were just trying to act nonchalant, you know, riding with this guy, cause if they'd [**indecipherable**] he'd have been shot right away too, you know.

Q: Sure.

A: So, we tried to be as calm as possible, and anyway, he took us to this house, like a sa – let's see, we were at Madame **Marie Duvall's**(ph) house, and then we went from there to a – I-I don't know, a man and a lady had a house and they lived in there, and there the – we were supposed to be picked up by someone and taken south of **Paris** cause they'd supposedly made arrangements to come in with an **A-20** and pick us up south of **Paris**. They're going to light up a field out there, a hay field or something. And a plane was supposed to come in and pick us up. So they took us to another house, we stayed there a few days, and they – they had nothing but wine to drink. And I got so thirsty for some water, we went out to the – where they had a well outside there, and started pulling up the water from the well, and the French guy come out and said, no, no, no, he said – I guess he thought it was poison or something or not with – fit to drink, you know. But man, I – if you'd been drinking just their white wine for a f-few days why your – get – get so thirsty for real water, you know? I did, anyway. And so anyways, a guy came by, and you probably heard the name **Jacques** before. He was a – I wa – I found out – we found



**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

out later he was a traitor, he was a Belgian F-French guy, and he was getting paid so much a head for all the people he turned in to the ga – the Germans. And so we got in this car, this **Citroën** – oh, in the meantime, and – this house we were at, they brought another kid there, he was a – from a **Wellington** bomber, a British kid from a **Wellington** bomber. So it was **Jim Fore**(ph), myself and this guy from the **Wellington** bomber. And so they – we got in the back of this **Citroën**, and the – the guy had a hat too big for him, kind of bug eyed little guy, and – and he had a redheaded woman with him, and a kid maybe 10 - 12 years old in the front seat with him. We drove into **Versailles**, dropped the girl – lady off and the little boy off in **Versailles**, and we wer – thought it was kind of strange, we went through some roadblocks just right on through, you slowed down and right on through. We thought boy, that's sort of strange. They told us it wa – he was a doctor, he could get through, you know, real easy cause he had the, I guess **I.D.** or something. But we were kind of shaken. Anyway, we went – then he left them there, we went into **Paris**. We ended up getting driven right into Gestapo headquarters. So, kind of surprised. So they – we went – they had the machine guns all around, and then we separated so – we walked up these stairs, second floor and down the hall, and the other Germans there, they're standing against the hall like they were afraid of us. They'd stand way back [**indecipherable**] walking down the hall. And they

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

separated **Jim** and I and I don't know where the prin – the British kid go – went either, but I know **Jim** and I were on the same floor up there, but he was in another room. And I went into this room, there was a lady and a German guy there, and he spoke English, and she was taking – writing all this stuff down. And so they started, you know, searching us and stuff like that. And I had my wristwatch and – and – up around my arm, up here. But they took my dog tags, I had them in my shoes and they took everything, just took everything off of us, you know, and – and put it in a si – in a – a ba – a bag there, in a big envelope. And I said, can I write my name on it or something like that? And he says no need, bury you in two days. But they didn't put my name on it. And th-the watch I had was not my military watch, it was issue watch, but – cause I had given that to the navigator cause that day he said his watch didn't work, and so I had mine and I had a gold watch that my mother had given me for graduating from school, so I wore it. But I had slipped it up here around my elbow. Anyway, took everything. So, from then on, I – I don't know, they just took us back and finally after that they took us to French prison. You ever heard of that? South of **Paris**? Which –

Q: Did they interrogate you there at Gestapo headquarters?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And what was that process like?

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

A: No, no – it was – it was not – not too bad. They ask us questions, they would be kind of firm about it, and he had a revolver laying right beside him on his desk. I guess that was kind of to be a threat to us or something like that. But I don't know, I didn't pay much attention to it, all I gave him was name, rank and serial number. And it wasn't til I got over to Fr-French prison, I think it was, that we were – the other interrogation took place that this German officer – I went into the officer and he shoved this paper out in front of me to sign. And I just shoved it back and I said no, I shook my head no. He said no, no, no and started to holler and come out from behind the desk, started kicking at me, and a couple of guards outside the door there grabbed me and put – I was put in a – a little box, it was about maybe two or three feet square, metal box, for about 24 hours. And then, the next day, why they took me out in the courtyard of – and lined me up in front of the firing squad. They had about five guys there, four or five guys with rifles and za – the German officers, couple of them there, and they were hollering at me and asking me questions and stuff. And I thought I was already dead, so I just, again, I gave them my main – name, rank and serial number, and I just stood there and looked at them. Cause I thought I was already dead, you know, I just crossed the bridge there for some reason and I just – I – I – I don't know why it come over me, I was just totally calm, I thought sh – I'm dead, go ahead and shoot me, you know, didn't make any

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

difference. And they just stormed around there for a while, stomping their feet and hollering. They had a guy with a British accent, was asking questions. And they wanted to know squadron, and all that good stuff. They had all that data, I found out later. But, anyway, they finally gave up and put me back in a cell, and I went in a cell for 38 days in solitary, and –

Q: Thir – how many days?

A: Thirty-eight.

Q: What was on the paper he wanted you to sign?

A: I don't know, I couldn't read it, it was in German. So I – I was always told, you know, they'll give you papers, try to sign something, everything else. They'll even have a Red Cross on it, to think sir – from the Red Cross or something. We were told that by intelligence people, you know, that they had this – all these things going, so I just – but me, I wasn't going to sign anything. You could have signed your death warrant, you don't know what you're signing, you know, or confessions or something like that. So I just didn't sign it, and dil – I gotta say, he got a little upset over that, but – and put me in solitary and then they would come in – th-the old prison, I don't know if you know about French prison, they have the ol-old type doors. The doors are about three inches thick, I think, wooden doors, you know, and they had this little trap door up the top, over door that they could open and slide a

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

bowl of soup in to you. And tha – and that, they had a little peephole, and they had a – one light on the side of this, in the room there, that they could turn on a switch on the outside and light the light, and in the corner you had a little carved out place there in cement, that had a little water spigot, and that was the toilet also there. And had straw on – on the fl – you know, a little place for you to sleep. Anyway, I – they'd – they'd come by and flip that light on and that little – you could hear them peeking – that little thing and peeking at you, you know, every once in a while. So I decided that I didn't like it. I don't know why I did it, but I took my little soup bowl I had, they put in there, and I propped it up on this little shelf in there so it covered their peek hole. Shouldn't have done that. Anyway, come along, pe – turned on the light, I guess, and couldn't see in. And boy, I heard the awful-est racket you ever heard out there. There's guys running, and you could hear their canisters clanging, their gas masks things and everything. Pretty soon they opened the door, about two or three of them are there, and they come in and started knocking me all around the room, and – trying to teach me a lesson, you know. And then they left. And I was – and I spent my time picking fleas, because they had lice, or fleas in there, and the fleas would get in the seams of your clothes, you know, and as a good pastime, cause they'd bite you all over, and I was taking – you could feel along, little hard things and you'd crunch them, you'd break their shells, you know. So that was our

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

pastime. And then we'd tap on the wall, cause there were other prisoners there. And there were some points you could tap and you could read the **Morse** code there. So you knew there were other American prisoners there or something, you know, cause they'd tap back, you know. So just spent your pastime that way. Once I was –

Q: What did you talk about?

A: Just a – trying to ask questions. They heard something like they were bombing at night, and you'd hear people screaming, women and men and you heard noises all night long, you hear sh – gunshots, you don't know what was going on. And I heard later they were probably torturing people out there, you know, the ai – they – cause they had a lot of the French underground people they'd caught also. And once I was taken out to a little courtyard, you had a wa – a kind of a balcony thing up there, where the guard kept walking back and forth. And then they had this little area there, and you walk around some, I guess that was your exercise room, you know. It was – it was penned in, but it was about probably 20 feet square, you could just walk around this little path around the square for exercise. And you could see carvings on the wall where people had been there from the 1800s or something like that. It's an old, old prison, but all the limestone walls, people scratched their names and stuff in it, you know, it was kind of intriguing to see all the people that had probably been there before. Cause it's an old, old prison, so – for **France**. And

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

anyway, finally, when you got, I guess as – Americans were about, I don't know, who knows, 12 - 15 miles away, maybe maybe – further, but there was shelling going on, you could hear it all night long, the cannons and stuff. And then it started getting pretty noisy. And so, all of a sudden the – they evacuated us, took us out, took us all and put us in those boxcars. And they putting 90 of us in one of those boxcars, and we had to stand up. And they put a barrel in the center, cut off half a barrel and that was a toilet and everything, you know, sloshing around there. And so they – we didn't know where we were going, you know, we thought we were going to be taken out of there to a **POW** camp, or something, you know, but we ended up going so far and then we came to a tunnel. And apparently the Americans or someone [**indecipherable**] someone had bombed the tunnel shut. And so we were in there for quite a few hours, and it got smoky and really bad. And so – then they took us all – all these boxcars and made us take the German, I don't know, backpacks and boxes and things that we carry clothing. And we walk – followed them down a road and then across a bridge to the other side of this river, up the other side, and then we went through a little village and the – the French people were out there throwing us apples and some food and stuff like that. And the Germans were trying to keep them from it, but they'd still throw the stuff, you know, and we'd catch something. And then we got to a train on the other side where

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

the tunnel had – was – was – you know, where the tunnel had been closed, we – they had backed a train up at the other side. We boarded that train and went onto – we didn't know where we're going, but I guess we got to **Frankfurt**, I think, **Germany**. But before we got there, was going up a hill or something, it's kind of slow, and the tru – the boxcar right behind us, the – th-the guys had pried a board out of the bottom of the – I found out later, pried – and the guys were dropping out between the railroad tracks. And then, when the train was going up a hill, slowing down, why they'd drop between the tracks and roll out between the wheels to get out from under there, because they had these scrapers that would go between it. So a few of the guys got out. I heard later on – I don't know this to be a fact, but I heard later on that one guy from **Texas**, he really escaped. He's the only guy I ever heard of ac-actually got away. So – but kind of a dangerous thing to do, but you know, was trying to get out of there, and then the – the one time they – they – a French kid in our box car was hanging on one of the vents. On the opposite – **cattywampus** corners of the boxcar they had a vent about maybe eight or 10 inches high and about two feet long for a vent. They had barbed wire strung across it. And there was this French kid, he's about 18 years old, I guess, or so – fif – 14 - 15, I don't know how old he was. And he had his hand up on this barbed wire, holding onto it, cause we were standing up in there. And the German guards on the outside



**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

shot him right through the hand. And that's kind of crazy, you know, he's already in there. And anyway, then they stopped the car, they took him out. And – oh, before that, by the way, when these guys dropped out between the railroad tracks, they stopped the train, and they took about, I don't know, it must have been 10 or 15 guys out there beside the boxcar, lined them up like they were going to shoot them – cause we could look out through the cracks and see them, and they looked like they were going to shoot them, and then this German officer was hollering at them and stuff like that. And then we were told that there – every time – if anyone tried to escape they were going to kill 15 guys for every one that tried to escape. So they were trying to quiet us down, I guess. I wasn't going anywhere. And they took this young kid out, I was surprised. And I was looking out a crack in that boxcar. The German officer told him to – kind of motioned him down there. The tracks were raised, kind of sloped on the side, down to – there's a f – some fields down there, have been plowed and stuff. And there's a little irrigation ditch along the edge of it. I looked down and I thought well, this German officer motioned this kid down there, I thought that he was going to have him go down, wash his hand off, cause it was bleeding and stuff like that. But as soon as he turned around, this German officer shot him right through the back. And the kid laid down and kind of kicked like, and one of the other guards there just raked him with a machine gun. And –

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

and then they took a couple of guys out of the boxcar and gave them shovels and made them go down there by the – right down close to that little ditch down there, and they – they weren't there very long. They dug a hole, and I don't think the thing was two feet deep. Threw this little kid in there and covered him up. And I thought, the mother will never know where that kid is. Cause who knows today –

Q: Sure.

A: – what happened to him, you know? Cause I thought boy, how cruel can you be? He's already in a prison, you know, in the ca – there, and why'd they shoot him in the hand in the first place? It's just do – I think it showed – to try to warn us, don't try anything. That's what I assumed, you know? And anyway, we went on and we were kind of shocked, I was anyway. I think all of us were that – we pulled up in – on this railroad place in front of this fence, got out. All these stripy clothes prisoners in there, and dogs and they herd us into this camp, and it was **Buchenwald** concentration camp.

Q: When you arrived, where did you think you had arrived?

A: I didn't know at first, I didn't even know about the camp, and I thought we were going to a **POW** camp. This was my assumption, you know, cause we'd always told they'd take you to **Dulag Luft** or something, and interrogate you and then take you to prisoner of war camp. But we were kind of shocked when we arrived there, cause

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

we saw, you know, that sign out there on the gate says, wor-wor-work will make you free, in German, and saw the – all the dogs, and these German guards and there's skinny prisoners in there, you know, and – and all the striped clothes. And since we got in there some of the prisoners come up and pretty soon they started telling – and in English, a few of them spoke English, and – or it was relayed through some of the guys that – we had one guy in our group that spoke – **Ben Sharf**(ph) was a ger – spoke German real well. And so he said, we're in **Buchenwald** concentration camp. And then they took us in and stripped all of our clothes off of us and put us in a shower-like thing, you know, and we come out, we didn't know what was going on. And then they shaved every hair off of our body and then swabbed us with something like creosote that set us on fire, you know, and you ben – you was dancing around, jumping and si – cause it was burning, ju-just like it's peeling the skin off, you know. And then they brought us down a little further and they started handing us some clothing. I was given a woman's silk blouse, and a pair of like silk slacks, or women's slacks or something, real thin things, no shoes, no socks, no nothing. They took everything we had away, our other clothes, before we went in the shower. We went in the shower, we thought we were going to the gas chamber or something, you know, cause we'd heard stories about that stuff. But anyway, we were shocked, sort of, that – and they just finally

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

herd us down to an area and left us there, we were outside on a rock pile. And I don't know, we were there I don't know how many days. But at night it was getting cold, so we'd all hover around, and cuddle up together, you know, to try to stay warm, and –

Q: You were out of doors during the nights?

A: Yeah, out-outside, and a – kind of a rock pile area there. And then we – one day we saw – we heard this noise, we look up in the air and hear a – about 30,000 feet or so up there was a whole bunch of bombers coming over, you know, you could see the contrails behind them. And they were – looked like they were coming right at us. We said, holy mackerel, you know, I hope they're not going to drop those things on us. And all of a sudden they popped a flair, like a lead bombardier always pops a flair and they s – the group tightens their formation, and they make a nice pattern. So we thought, holy mackerel, here they come. And all of a sudden you heard this ru – it's – if you ever heard bombs coming down, they fi – sound like a freight train coming down the track, and there's a little whistle going on to them, and they're just shredder and rattling like a freight train coming in, you know. And all of a sudden – and they started landing below, and we thought, boy, they're going to get us here. But not one bomb lit inside the – the fence. They blew part of the – the fence down, but they were bombing the underground factory that – where all the

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

wor – the slave labor was used. And that was a **V-2, V-2**, gyros and factories for ammunition and stuff like that there. So we were relieved and – you know, they didn't drop it on us. But they – apparently they went down the **SS** barracks, took out about 2,000 **SS** guys and – and gutted the whole place with – they first went in with explosives and then they dropped incendiaries after that. Then they dropped leaflets. I saw one of the leaflets, but they started shooting at people that picked up the leaflets, so there were – but there were still a few prisoners got ahold of leaflets. I saw one of them later. It showed a picture of a **B-17** and a silhouette of a **B-29**, showed how much bigger the **B-29** was and that we warned the Germans that they were going to start using these planes on them if they don't surrender, and stuff like that, you know, and – and it showed how Americans treat German prisoners of war, and stuff, it showed them in mess halls and stuff like that. And they – and then had a thing and they were trying to invite the pr – us prisoners to join them and fight against the Russians. And they give us extra benefits or something. You know, this kind of crazy thing.

Q: Were you made to work?

A: They tried to – they come up and ask us what our profession was, what we could do and stuff like that, and all of said we were students. We already had agreed to this before, we were going to say they were all students. And so we – we held by

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

that, and they – it made them pretty mad that we didn't tell them we had any professions other than just students and fliers. So we – none of us worked, we all refused to work. So – I don't know if that was a good idea or not, but we weren't – didn't seem be punished any more for it, you know. And they finally – we were living outside, like I say, on the rocks out there. And one day – and there were a lot of these little Gypsy kids, you've heard about them probably. I don't know how many, there were hundreds of them around there. And you had to watch, because if you had any food left at all, you have some, once in a while, about once a week, you get about three little – real small, little baked potatoes, half rotten, but they'd been boiled, you know. It was better than nothing. And if one of – if you had piece of those left, they'd steal it, those poor little Gypsy kids that were running around, they were hungry, you know, and they steal anything that wasn't tied down. And they were in a barracks there, and one day, it seemed like to me, they all disappeared. And they come down and got us and gave us that barracks. And I used to think, oh my, what'd they do, did they kill them all? They [indecipherable] their camp, what happened to them? I still to this day don't know really what all happened to those poor little kids. But they were little – you know, from **Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia**, all the eastern countries that they picked them up, their parents were probably killed, and they brought them in there. But that was – that's been kind of a

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

disturbing thing all my life, the – what happened to those poor little kids, you know. But we wer – we got the barracks and – and we were fortunate to get those, you know, and then we were there I don't know how long and we got a bowl of grass soup every day, you know, and three – we got about three little potatoes once a week or so, and – and then they brought in some – a barrel one time of la – like little sardines, they were just in saltwater, they were raw things, you know, dead, but – and were in saltwater, real heavy brine saltwater. And of course we ate those things like crazy. And w-we associated with all the other prisoners. There was a – right near – across from our barracks was a Polish barracks, and one day there was a big scuffle over there, you saw a whole bunch of them piling on some guy, and you wonder what happened. Well, later on I fou – h-heard that this one Polish guy had been at another camp, and apparently he had been a snitch or something like that. And I don't know if it was a fake, or what, but they said he knocked a bowl of soup out of one of the guy's hands. So a bunch of them jumped on him and put a blanket over his head and slugged him to death. It was just, you know, dog eat dog type attitude. And then they had these guys, you maybe heard of **kapos**, they were called **kapos**. These were German prisoners, but they had given them special rations to be – and they were all big guys, and they'd give them a big board or a club, like a baseball bat, and they were to keep us other prisoners in line, to obey orders you

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

know. Line up, do this, to go here. So everybody tried to stay away from those **kapos**. And so – but I used to talk to some of the Polish guys over there spoke English, and you – I don't know if you've ever heard of the esso – **SOE** guys, they were British and – and some of them were Scottish, most of them British. But they were secret type guys, operations guys that were dropped behind the German lines to do sabotage and stuff. And they were about – oh, there must have been 30 or so of them in there, 35 or 40. And one day they took – took – I heard – I don't know how many, but th – 17 of them went into **Weimar**, and I guess were tried, they brought them back and killed them. And later on they killed all the other guys. But I used to talk to some of those guys, and I found out two of them were from **Scotland**, they were twins, and one had had a scar up in his shoulder, and they put a scar on the other one's shoulder just like it. And they had – one would be up in **Bremen**, up in northern **Germany**, another would be down in **Munich** and something would happen, a big explosion or something would happen, they'd catch this guy and – cause he was there, and he had the evidence, because you know, he'd be – be real obvious around someplace, and he said no, I was, you know, here. I wasn't there. And here that they – they finally coupled the fact together that this – they were twins, and the Germans finally caught them both. And later on they were both killed. They killed all those **SOE** guys, the British guys. And the Russian guys



**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

– I used to talk to some of the Russians, they'd speak a little bit of English, and one of them used to tell me all the time that **America** would never survive because we produced so many airplanes and stuff like that, and we would financially and everything, fold after the war, that we couldn't stand all that production, and stuff like that. A few little conversations like that we had with the Russians, you know, that did speak some English. And they – I don't know if you've ever seen the **[indecipherable]** but I didn't know til after the war that they had a building up there, the Russians, a lot of them disappeared. They would take them up there and there was a like a – a medical examination. They'd stand them on some scales, and they had a hole right behind the scales, there in the wall, and a gun back there, and they'd turn around like that, and shoot them right through the back of the head. And they eliminated a whole bunch of Russians that way by – by make – make them think they were giving them a medical, they were standing on the scale, then bam, they're gone. And the crematorium there was – I've been there a few times after the war, after I been out of there, and they still have the hooks on the wall where they used to hang the prisoners, and they would cut them, their legs and bodies, and bleed – let the blood drain out of them into the drain, because then they would burn them in the crematorium upstairs, and they had these little trollies that they'd lay them on and wheel them up there, and then wheel them into these chambers up

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

there, had about, I don't know, eight or 10 of these cremation chambers up there, wheel them in there and cremate them. Cause they had bodies stacked by the crematorium all day long. The – used to see so much inhumanity to man, that you couldn't understand. You're already a prisoner, and you'd be sta – we'd stand up there – we counted – they called it **appel**. My number was 78,336, but – and we weren't tattooed, and we used to ask the **kapos**, the fa – the **kapos** told us that we were not tattooed because we were trading material. I guess – we – we assumed that that was going to be trading for German prisoners, you know, that we're – we captured or something. We didn't – and know – don't really know to this day what it was all about, why we weren't tattooed. But there were about – later on I found there were about, probably about 50,000 prisoners there, you know **[indecipherable]** 78,000, but they were dying off so fast, and I later fi – learned after the war that – from the archives at **Buchenwald** that the diet was designed to starve you to death in about three months. Keep cycling prisoners through there, cause they needed ru – labor, slave labor to work in the pri – in the factories and stuff, you know? So that was one way of just getting rid of them, starve them to death, rather than shoot them, or some go to – took energy and took people. I've heard all sorts of rumors, I don't know why, but I don't know. I've heard that the – they used to lie in the – you've seen where the pictures of the Jewish people lined

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

up by gas – by these pits and they'd shoot them and drop in the pits and they'd cover them up. But the people that had to mow them down, those people had mental problems because they didn't – you know, they were killing other humans. So that's why the gas chambers came into being, so much. That was to – cause it wasn't such a personal thing. So – but it's [**indecipherable**] because when we stand up for **appel** to be counted, these **SS** guys would stand up there, they count your heads, and they had to have the count right in camp before they would excuse you, go back to the barracks, or where you're gonna go. Sometimes it'd take three hours, and it – guys – some of the guys were – I weighed 82 pounds when I got out of there, some of the guys were skinnier than I was, couldn't stand up. And you'd try to help them stand up, and the **SS** guys would wade in there and knock his brains out with a rifle butt, and make the prisoners put him on a gunny sack, four of them carry him over and stack him by the bodies by the crematorium now. So it's just – and there was these two wheel carts running around all day, picking up bodies and hauling them to the crematorium. So it was just not a very good environment. And you just wonder – I used to wonder about how can people be so cruel, and just – you're already prisoners, you know, why make it even worse? But we had a guy whose name the ger – the German **SS** guy up there was named **Hauptman**. And he would stand up there when we were out there, and ge – weather got kind of cool, and he

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

had a little bucket, and he had a little cup in it, and he'd say – he'd pull back his uniform, show he had woolen underwear underneath. And he'd say, cold, cold? And then he'd throw – take a s-scoop up a bucket of this water – a scoop of this water and throw it out over us, you know, like spray us, you know, with a little bit of water. He'd say cold? He just kind of tormented, you know. I don't know what he did it for, but it – how – I don't know how people get some enjoyment out of that. Anyway, that was my feeling. And one day the Americans came over and bombed the – when we were outside, I was telling you before, living outside on the rocks were – after that bombing, why, we were asked, will you come down and guide us? They said, if you were soldiers, you have the discipline to help us with the wounded. And they had a guy in there, I don't know h – the – he spoke a British accent, like he was – be-been trained in **England** or something, and he would talk to us, you know, he was the guy that they used for communication to us. And then the – they had another guy in there named – he was a Dutchman from du – **Holland**, he spoke good English and he spoke German also. So they'd communicate through him, and he gave us lots of information. But anyway, they come down and got us, they says, you will help us with the wounded people in the bombing. Took us up there, and I didn't help anybody, cause I had no shoes, I was running through this fire and nails and stuff out there, and wood and stuff, and I was

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

going as slow as I could. And I saw a wooden – wooden shoe laying over there, and so I kneeled down and put that wooden shoe on my left foot, and the German guards over there picked up some board and started beating me across the back, and you know, knocked the wind out of me. It seemed like I climbed – I crawled about a mile, probably about 20 feet, but it seemed like a mile, and just got – almost knocked me out, cause I couldn't hardly breathe, you know, knocked the wind out of me. And I didn't help anybody. I just act like I was help – trying to help some, put out the fire, something like that. I just went around, but I didn't do a darn thing, but no one bothered me after that. Finally, I went back to my building I was in, but I sure didn't help anybody. Some of the guys, I guess, had to help somebody, you know, I didn't. But anyway, when the Luftwaffe guy came through to look – he's – I guess he was going to say, look at the bomb damage, he told the – the other **SS** guys that. And he came in. Well, we had a guy, **Ben Sharf**(ph) from **New Prague, Minnesota**, he was our waist gunner. He spoke German from his ancestor was German. And so we said, **Ben**, you gotta go up, talk to the guy. Tell him we should be in a **POW** camp. So **Jim Fore**(ph) and I went up with him, close to him, and he s – we told him salute the guy, so he's – **Ben** saluted him, and this German off – Luftwaffe officer, he kind of gives a real, slow salute. He didn't know what to do, I think, cause real slow he kind of went like this, real slow, put his hand down. And

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

they talked a few minutes, and then the **SS** tried to break it up, and he pulled his rank on them and told them to stand back, and so he talked about five minutes to **Ben**, and he told **Ben** that they didn't work very good with the Gestapo and the **SS**, but he'd do what he could, but we should be in a **POW** camp, he agreed. And we thought, well, that's encouraging news, but – and he left. And it was, I don't know, a month later, when I hear about a contingent of about 150 Luftwaffe people came into camp, round us up, took us and put into only about 30 - 40 in a boxcar and took us to **Stalag Luft III** over – over – over on the Polish border. So, man, and we got food, we got shoes, we got clothes. It was – it was like being in the **Waldorf Astoria**, you know. But it was really – really grateful th-that he came about. Now, I just found out recently that there's a book called, "**A Higher Call.**" And I had heard about a **B-17** that had been shot down, riddled pretty badly, and it was down, oh 3,000 feet or so, and they'd been throwing the radios out and the – the parachutes and everything to lighten plane, they'd get back to **England**. Well, this – this German fighter flew right down beside him, wingtip to wingtip, and tried to motion, and – they – they couldn't communicate, but th-the pilot was **Brown**, Lieutenant **Brown** flying that **B-17**, trying to get back to **England**, and this German fighter pilot was trying to make a motion for him to go to **England** – I mean, go to fr – to **Sweden**, closer, across the **Channel**. And this book is called, "**A Higher Call.**"

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

Now, this German fighter pilot was a Catholic guy, and he had even some other fighter pilots with him, had gone to **Goering** and tried to resign and knock off some of the stuff they was doing, but they almost got shot over it. And this book is called, “**A Higher Call**,” and it’s just recently come out. It’s in English. I got a copy of it just this – this last month. It’s quite intriguing to read, but this guy is the same guy that came into our camp, that got us out of there, and he got us out of there three days before the record – the record showing **Buchenwald** whatever, that we – we were supposed to be eliminated three days – and he got us out three days before we were supposed to all been killed. The orders had come down from **Berlin**. And this was just recently because this guy, **Mike Dorsey**, his father – his grandfather was in **Buchenwald** with us, his name was **Easy(ph) Freeman(ph)**. And his grandfather started talking about it in recent years, I guess, and so **Mike Dorsey** was a movie producer, he decided to look into it, and he went back to **Germany** for almost a year research, and then went to all the archives in **Buchenwald** and everything. And he made this movie called, “**The Lost Airman of Buchenwald**,” cause we had been lost because they didn’t know where we were. We weren’t in a **POW** camp until after the war they found where we were. So, that’s the reason that movie is named that, but I’m glad that he – his grandfather finally started talking about it, and he made this movie, and – and he – he even got – I was surprised, but when he

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

went back to **Buchenwald**, looked at all the records, he brought me back my arrest record, my Gestapo arrest picture, and the record of it. Shows **USA**, and then has it crossed out, and I think it says [**indecipherable**] or something up there on it.

Q: When you were at **Buchenwald**, how did – did you ind – did you stay with – physically stay with most other allied airman?

A: Oh yes, always.

Q: And how did you conduct yourselves when you were in camp? Did you maintain military discipline, did you maintain rank and order?

A: Yes, we – we all decided the highest ranking officer would be in charge. And that happened to be a New Zealander, the only New Zealander there, but he was a – a squadron leader, and so we all agreed our – our highest ranking officer of Americans agreed, we all agreed we would do whatever he said, and we'd act as a military unit. And a lot of times even we go to the latrine, that open latrine down there, we'd form up and march like we were soldiers. The **SS** guys just – we threw them in fits almost when we do that, because we were acting military, you know, like a unified unit. They didn't like that. So, yeah, we tried to act as military as possible. We'd sing songs you know, and stuff like that, and just to – I don't know, I guess to keep our spirits up. May have tormented them too, but I think it was primarily for our own si – you know, our own spirits. And we all – I don't know,



**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

and we also when we were there, we all agreed that if we ever got out of there, we would – we formed a club called the **KLB** pre-lager **Buchenwald**. And we would all meet every year somewhere, and all of us would attend these meetings. We did for many years. We met in **England**, we met in the **United States**, we met all over the places. But all of us guys would get together and it was – it was just a camaraderie that you develop, you know, by being in these situations. So –

Q: When you were at **Buchenwald**, did you actually personally witness any allied servicemen murdered or killed by the –

A: No, no. I only saw guys get s – knocked around a little bit. A couple of guys got pneumonia and died, you know. That was **L.C. Beck**(ph). He was from **[indecipherable] Park, California**. And **Jim Fore**(ph) and I, after we got back in service, went to see his parents and tell them, cause they never had any ar – he – he ri – had written some notes when he was with the French underground, and it's called, I think "**Fighter Pilot**." And he wrote this little book. And his parents we – all this information was given to his parents, and they p-printed this little book. Anyway, we went to see his parents and tell them how his last days were in **Buchenwald**, and he died of pneumonia. So, other than that I saw no actual – I didn't see everything, but I – I just saw no one get ki-killed by the Germans. So –

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

Q: Do you have any idea why they sent you to **Buchenwald**, as opposed to a **POW** camp?

A: Yes, I think because we had been caught in civilian clothes, with the French underground, and we – even though they knew who we were, cause they even showed us some pictures of our squad, and showed our – they had the names of our squad and they had a lot of information on us. And we had dog tags, you know. They knew who we were, but the excuse was, we were caught with – we were saboteurs and terrorists cause we were caught in civilian clothes with the French underground, so we were sent to **Buchenwald**. That's the way I assume it happened. I have no other – no other reason, you know, that I can think of.

Q: You got on the train at **Buchenwald**, and head towards **Stalag Luft III**. I assume you did not know where you were going.

A: No.

Q: What happens when you got there?

A: Kind of shock. We were herded out of the train, you know. Herded in there like I told you, and pretty soon we were herded in there, and took our clothes off, put us in the shower and shaved our heads and bodies and swabbed us and gave us some prison clothes, and that was it. We were just in total shock, really, you know, we didn't know what was going on. The other prisoners, some of the prisoners, and

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

through, like I say, **Ben Sharf**(ph), and – and **Dutch**, we found out that the other prisoners say the only way you'll ever leave this place is up the pipe, and that was the crematorium chimney there, you know. So we were constantly told that, you know, the only way out is up the pipe. So we'd all kind of resigned ourselves to that, more or less, you know, and hoping we'd get out and hoping the allies would, you know, get us before the – we got up the pipe.

Q: Right.

A: So it was just – I don't know. I don't know how we even kept our spirits up, but we – we were doing ra – pretty good. We'd talk a lot and we'd laugh – sit in – this forming of the **KLB** club was part of – we'd have discussions where we were going to meet, how we were going to do it, how the organization was going to be and everything. So it was – we – it was all planned in **Buchenwald**. And we had a little badge, we drew up a sig – insignia that we all had, and so it was a – it was just – I think it was to keep us busy, but also the camaraderie, you know, that we'd have if we ever got out of there. So – and I-I don't know how, some of the guys who got on the march, like I said, some of the guys that we – when we marched from **Stalag Luft III**, we got there on that march, some of the guys just gave up. We saw one guy, and he went running, cli – tried to climb the electric fence, you know, some guys gave up. I have a – a strange attitude of life. I always believed in a higher

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

power like the lord **Jesus Christ** as a savior, and I, as a kid I went to mi – I've got records showing I went to Sunday school, never missing a – a Sunday for four years, five years, you know. And – and when I was put up in front of the firing squad, all I – my cares all went away, I just flat lined, and I, from that day forward, I don't get excited, I don't get upset, I don't get mad, I don't worry. And when I used to work in the engineering stuff, why we'd be on government proposals. We had three guys in my department die of heart attacks in one year, and they issued stress cards that you hold and they turn color if you start getting stressed, and the director'd hold a meeting, and pretty soon you seen him take his little card out of his pocket, lay it down on the table, and I knew he was getting stressed. And after the meeting, guys used to come up to me, cause they'd be hollering, deadlines and why don't you do this, why don't you do that. And they'd come up to me and say, let's see your card. Show them mine, it was normal. They'd say, what the hell is wrong with you, don't you have any nerves? I said yeah. I says, if this is a problem, fix it. If you can't fix it, what's the problem?

Q: Right.

A: Kind of strange attitude, but I just – I just got that, like I say, after that firing squad, I just can't bring myself to worry. I don't – I'd – hate is a terrible thing too. I see people hate, and I see what hate does, like the Germans hated the Jewish people,

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

and the other people, and I – I just – I – I don't even hate the Germans, I feel sorry for them. Cause even the **SS** guys, you know, I don't agree with it, I don't like it and everything, but I can't – I just can't bring myself to hate. I-I'm a strange duck, I guess, but I – I can't.

**Q:** How long were you in **Stalag Luft III**?

**A:** Let's see, I think we were only there maybe three months or so.

**Q:** Did you gain any weight back, were you sick, were you –

**A:** Oh I – yeah, I gained some weight back, I – I don't know how much I weighed, but I gained some, and I had my – I had a wound in my lower leg when I bailed out, I don't know if it was from shrapnel, hooked on some **[indecipherable]** torn metal or what, but I had a pretty good gash just about to the bone, right about halfway up my lower leg, and when I hit the ground, why I turned my ankle, I guess it was kind of sore or something, hurt **[indecipherable]**. And when I was in **Buchenwald** it turned into gangrene, like. It was all numb and just – couldn't have any feeling, it felt like just you – you know how your leg – how something goes to sleep when you're **[indecipherable]** that's the way it felt. I could hardly feel I was walking on it, you know, it was just kind of bad. So when I got to **Stalag Luft III**, why, they – they tried to put sulfur drugs and stuff on it and nothing would touch it, so then they put me in the prison hospital. And the German doctor there wanted to amputate my

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

leg right above the knee. And I – Captain **Daniels**, he was – we had Major jone – **Davy Jones**, and Captain **Daniels**, who were on the **Doolittle** raids in **Tokyo** unit. And they ended up in **Europe** and being shot down, and they were in our – south compound of the da – **Stalag Luft III**. Anyway, Captain **Daniels** there in the hospital and I said, no, no, no, I – you know, listen, I don't want my leg cut off. And so they talked to the German guy, Captain **Daniels**, and they decided, well, the only solution was to try to save would be to – they made kind of a tray, a curved tray they laid down on my leg, and they wrapped my leg with gauze about – looked like about two inches thick, and they hung it up at about a 20 - 30 degree angle, and they put a – a – a metal bucket up there, hung it up there with a nail hole in it, dripping saltwater on it. And they dripped it on my toe, and it just run down the thing. I don't know if it was a month or something, it dripped – just dripped every day, it was just – it was miserable, just laying there, but you know – anyway it was a long time, I don't know how long it was, but that thing got – the whole thing got just like a big rock cast, cause all that salt and then it'd evaporate, you know. And they come in one day and they said, well, we're gonna cut it off, see what we got. So they cut that – all that gauze and stuff off of there, and it was just a – if you've ever seen a parched earth, it's just cracks and stuff and brown, and rotten looking thing. And then they squeezed it with this gauze and stuff, and the pus is squirt out around my

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

ankle, and it volcanoes up around my knee and stuff like that, and they'd squeeze it and milk it a little bit. And it stunk like crazy. So he looked at it, and they sh – they kind of shook their heads, and they said, well, it's doing something, so they wrapped it up again, put the saltwater up there again and kept dripping it on there, and I don't know, seemed like a month, I don't know how long it was, really. And it got all hard again, they took it off, and it was starting to grow skin back. So they kept wrap – wrapping in gauze, and stuff like that, and they we – and they finally sent me back to the – my barracks back at the saw – compound, and I was there and I was – it was hard to walk on, but it was – I was limping around, and it was getting a little better all the time. And they would – I – I forget how often the – but they would rewrap it. I don't remember, my mind is gone, I guess, on how often, but every once in a while they'd – every couple of days, why they'd rewrap the leg, and I'd walk on it. It hurt, but I walked on it, and then I was in – I was – guess I was in the theater one night there when all of a sudden they come in and said, we're – we're gonna leave the camp. Cause we'd seen all the low flying airplanes and stuff going, you know, to-towards the Russian front over there, and we'd heard a lot of rumors about it in camps, what's going on. And so Colonel **Clark**, he was a colonel major – he was General **Clark** at **Colorado Springs** there, the air – air academy there later on, but he was a colonel in our camp there at south compound. Major

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

**Davy Jones** and Captain **Daniels** and Colonel **Clark**. Anyway, Colonel **Clark** asked me, he says, that we're gonna go on this march [**indecipherable**] we're gonna leave. There's about three foot of snow on the ground, and Colonel **Cl** – Colonel **Clark** asked me, he says, you want to stay here, and be liber – or be – we – get liberated by the Russians? Or do you want to go with the masses, it's your choice. So I says, I'll go with the masses of people, and maybe the cold and the walking, the circulation will help. He says, you think you can make it? I says, well, I'm gonna try. So I went on the march, I was limping and it hurt, but every day seemed to be a little bit better, cause I think the circulation and the cold – it wasn't gonna re-infect, I don't think, with the cold, you know. And I think the circulation was helped by just walking on it, just constantly walking, cause we walked a long time. And finally got better. I was still limping when I got home, but –

Q: How many days did you march?

A: It seemed like a month, but I – I don't remember how many days we – and I know the first time we marched, what – 60 – I think we marched about 65 miles or something, I had heard, I don't know how miles it was, but it was – seemed like a couple days. We stopped at, I think a brick factory, or something like that. Once – I stopped at a barn once with hay, and that were – was pretty nice. And two or three times on that trip we stopped at places that we got warm, and they gave us some



**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

soup. And I don't really remember how many days it was. I'm sure other people know what – how many days that was on the trip, but –

Q: Did you understand why you were being marched?

A: [**indecipherable**] evacuate from the Russian front, cause the Russians were coming, they were close by apparently, and they wanted to get us away from the Russians.

Q: Why?

A: Well, you don't want the Russians to get ahold of us, they wanted to just keep us as prisoners, cause we were material that they could trade, or hold hostage, or something like that, you know. We just assumed that we were hostages to be held, and the more of us that they could keep, the – the better. And getting us away from the fronts, you know, and we ended up down at **Moosburg**, which was pretty crowded, had lots of prisoners there, you know. And then we heard rumors about the allies not too far away, and they – they had radio there too, you know, their secret radios, they had crystal sets. And I heard – we were told that – that if they tried to evacuate us from **Moosburg** to be – light a building on fire or something, cause they'd have planes circling. And we noticed that at about 35,000 feet or something, way up in the sky, we'd hear these airplanes, and once in a great while you could see one of them, but they're – just barely see them. And they were –

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

circled day and night, and they said, light a building on fire, something, if anything – they started to kill anybody or anything like that, and they would make an immediate attack on the camp. And we were shocked one day was – I was down by the gate cause there was a lot of commotion and stuff and the Germans were coming by, and there are tanks rolling by and everything else, and I think Captain he – and Captain **Daniels** was down there close to me too, and the German guards all of a sudden were running to a – one the buildings, their – their little guard shack there. And – and then we saw what was happening, the **SS** guy there, there was tank people out there, were telling the – motioning them to come out and help fight, I guess, cause we were right down there by the gate watching them, and all of a sudden one of these Germans put a **Panzer** fist, a German anti-tank gun right into those – his own guys, those Luftwaffe guys at the – at the gate in the building there, just blew it wide open. Holy mackerel, you know, what's going on, cause all hell was breaking loose, you know. You hear gunfire and cannon fire and everything else, and the Americans were shelling pretty high with large cannons, because you could look up to **Moosburg** and see the tar sliding off the roofs of the houses and stuff. So, was pretty noisy for a while, and all of a sudden the American tanks started coming by and we saw the goings on, and – and it wasn't five minutes behind the front lines, here come **Patton**, riding in a **Jeep**. It's ju – standing up in

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

his **Jeep**, and he motioned they – he motioned a tank or something, break down the fence, he come driving right inside the camp and stood up in his **Jeep**, and told everybody, you know, to be quiet or something. He gave a little talk and told us not to go into town, and stuff like that. And I was shocked to see him there, I was – you know, just dumbfounded. Here he had his pearl handled revolvers on, that you know, like, what was it – what's her name, some, you know, singer had given him, you know. And I-I was shocked, cause he wasn't five minutes for find the – behind the front lines. So we just stayed in camp and then they let us out, and I went up to where the Americans had put a pontoon bridge across the river up there, right in town, in the south side of town. And I went up there one time, and the – the – I was amazed that the engineers were out there putting a bridge back across the river; it had been cut loose. They were trying to get tanks across the river, and the Germans were up higher, shelling that down there to the river, and they cut the bri – their pontoon bridge loose one time, and it floated kind of down the river, and they had these little boats out there, outboard [**indecipherable**] towing that thing back up and con – reconnected. And shells were, you know, dropping in the water down in – above them there. I was shocked, I – now I realized, you know, I'd be running and hiding, rather than being there, but you could see it, the splash of the water and stuff, from where we were. And I remember seeing that – that German flag come

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

off that steeple up there in **Moosburg**, and the American flag go up. What a – what a feeling. You can't explain it. It's just –

Q: How long did it take before they evacuated you?

A: It was a few days, because I know they brought in the – the – the – you know, there's tanks, there are armored cars and stuff, and I got r – and they brought in a soup kitchen from their military guys at the front lines, and they had some – some soup, bean soup with corned beef in it. And I got a couple of bowls of that, and I ate it. Should never have done it, because I got so sick, I – I – I-I was wishing someone would shoot me in the head, cause I never been so sick in my life. I laid there in bed, in that bunk for I don't know how long. But I don't know how long – how many days I was there, but I – I-I – I've never been so sick in my life. That – but that corn – I call it corn willie soup, it was so good.

Q: Was this a question of too rich for your system?

A: Oh yeah, cause we had been, you know – bad re – not very much rations and stuff like that, and yeah, it was just too rich. And immediately when the – and finally the medics came in and cut us off all that stuff, you know. And I was so sick I didn't go to – a lot of the guys were – when we went to **Spremburg** and they flew us out of **Spremburg**, that was a – an air force – German air force base not far away, why I – I didn't go to spr – spre – to l – Camp **Lucky Strike**, I was taken to

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

**Liège, Belgium**, to a medical hospital up there. I was there a few weeks before I got to go to th – Camp **Lucky Strike**, cause gosh I was – I was sick. I had the – I still was limping on my leg, and I – I was so sick to my stomach I felt like I was gonna die.

Q: From Camp **Lucky Strike**, did you go back to **England** direct –

A: No, no, I went directly to **LaHavre**, and then to the **States**.

Q: How'd you go to the **States**, via boat?

A: Boat ba – about 12 days.

Q: Where'd you make landfall?

A: In **New York**.

Q: What was that like? Did you see it coming in?

A: Oh yeah, the Statue of Liberty and everything. Fantastic. Yeah, quite – quite an emotional feeling, and met there by the Red Cross, and the Red Cross let us – gave us high – I think I got a little bit of money they gave, and then I – they let us send telegrams to our families, and then later we – we were given – you know, put on trains to head home, gave a little bit of money. Great feeling

Q: Where did you go from **New York** –

A: **San Francisco**.

Q: – did you go straight to s – to san fran –

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

A: **San Francisco.**

Q: And who was the first family member you saw?

A: It was – I – I hitched – I hitchhiked, couldn't get – didn't know how to get home, so I started hitchhiking, and guy who was going to **Monterey Park** in a little coupe out there, it was a **Plymouth** coupe or something picked me up, and finally picked up another guy, it was two of us rode with him. And he drove to **Huntington** par – to **Monterey Park, California**. It was down very close to home, a few miles away. And when I got there I – luckily I remembered my parents' phone number. So I called the house, and my brother happened to be there. My brother had been in the military, but he had had a heart murmur, and so he got out, and he happened to be there. So I talked to him, and he drove up th – to **Monterey Park** and picked me and this other guy up. So – and he took me home, you know.

Q: Did you go straight home to your parents?

A: Yeah, I went straight home to my parents' house.

Q: What was it like seeing them?

A: Can't explain it. Just being home, you know, it's a great thing. And seeing the family, and then the – I stayed in the – I wasn't – I wasn't discharged yet, but I was able to stay home, and I worked with **GCA – Ground Approach Systems**, cause **Gilfillan** was building radars and stuff for ground approaches, training, and I was

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

still in the military, so I went to **Mines Field** which is **LA International Airport**, but the military side of it, and I – we'd go there every day and worked to put radios in planes and tune them up and stuff like that, cause the pilots were practicing landing with that new radar **Gilfillan** built. So I worked there for, I don't know, a couple of months. At first I was assigned – I ga – got to go home, and then I was at – at – got to what was it, **Santa Monica**, at a hotel out there, and then – but I wasn't required to stay there, I had a home tel – hotel room, but they said I could live at home if I wanted to, so I just lived at home with my parents. And I'd drive out to ma-march – **Mines Field** every day at **LA International Airport**, and so I don't know how long I worked there until I got out of the service, and sent to **San Bernardino**, and I was discharged from there. But in the meantime I'd read in the paper and the magazines about television and some stuff, and Dr. se – de – **Lee De Forest**, who invented the vacuum tube and **Sanabria**, his cohort had formed an engineering, electrical engineering and **TV** school in – on – in **Hollywood**. And so I got ahold of them and wanted to know if I could go to school there and get a degree in electrical engineering and learn **TV** and stuff like that, and so I signed up for it. So I went to s – I was in school three days after I got discharged out of **San Bernardino**. So I went right to school, and got out of there – went there f – about three years and got out, and the first thing I did was – cause **TV** was just coming on the market, I went

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

in the **TV** business. I went to work for a guy that was – bought a **TV**, and then went in it myself. And **RCA** was advertising they were gonna make a – a projection tube, five inch projection tube. And they'd had a little 10 inch table model **TV**. And **Bausch** and **Lomb** was talking about a lens for this **RCA** thing. So I was inquisitive, I called them up and asked **RCA** if I could get is – one of those tubes, and called **Bausch** and **Lomb**, see if I could get a lens, and I did it, and I took a 10 inch **RCA TV** and converted it to – made a little projection set. I put a 12 by 16 foot projection set in the **Shrine Auditorium** in 1947 for the **Rose Bowl** game and the **Rose Parade**. I sold 200 and – I sold 2400 s – I think – no, s – fe – was it – about a thousand seats anyway, at two dollars and 40 cents apiece for the whole **Rose Bowl** game and the **Rose Parade**. I – I – I was sweating that, because I had two of these little **TV** projector things made up, and with a **RCA** chassis because if one failed, I thought I'd re – I'd get shot if something happened. But I went to **Bodie(ph)** plastic screens, I could contact a guy in **Hollywood** that – cause I knew they made – you know, they had their experimental **TVs** and ther – not **TVs**, but projections up there. They already project them from the rear. So I got ahold of this **Bodie(ph)** plastic screen guy out in – in **Venice**, made the screens, and asked him if he can make me a screen. So I had a 12 by 16 foot, they made a wooden frame and put this plastic on it, and they s – they'd put the projector back there and ha-have a hot spot, and



**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

they'd spray with a – like a spray gun with plastic, and it would make it thicker in the center, so it made it even, the light even. Wouldn't have a hot spot in the center. So I parj – project it from the rear, and had a good time. I didn't have any complaints at all, and all these people over there got to see the **Rose Bowl** game. I made money and –

Q: How long did it take after the war before di – di – before you spoke about your experiences at **Buchenwald**?

A: I si – told my parents a little bit about it. And then there's a family down about four or five houses from my parents that was German ancestry and I – but the neighbors would ask me about stuff like that, I'd tell them a little bit about it. And that family, the German family says oh, that's all a lie. There's no – no concentration camps in **Germany** and stuff like that. They didn't believe any of it. And other people'd say – you say something about it, a-are you sure that's true, you know. Did that really happen? And they just question it, so we just – most – all of us, you talk to them, we sort of stopped talking about it. And I was – but I to – I just tell people – a lot of people about it, and a lot of people kind of yeah, yeah, yeah, something like that. But I never talked about it much, but about f – I don't know, 10 or 15 years ago, I don't know how long it was, but I used to go to the **VA** hospital in **Long Beach**. And I went there one day, I – cause every month I'd – I'd go in once a

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

month and they'd check my blood pressure and give me a – a – if I need vitamins, or whatever I needed, you know? And I went in there one day and I heard – they paged me to report to a certain office, and I did. I went in there and the guy sat down and he says, I'm the psychiatrist here at the hospital, and he said, I want to talk to you. So I sat – sat down. He says, you're saying you're – right up here you were in **Buchenwald** concentration camp, and he says, you're a liar. Just plain out, you're a liar. You – you were in a **POW** camp. I says, doctor, I know the difference. You don't. I just got up and walked out. But, you know, you get things like that, and so you kind of – you kind of – why talk about it? And the only time we really talk about it was when our group got together, you know, we'd talk about our stories, you know, and stuff like that. And it hasn't been just til – til recent years, and then – I don't even know how it happened, but the **Santa Ana "Register"** heard about I guess this deal through s-someone, I don't know how they heard about it even. And they called me up one time, wanted to come and talk to me. So they sent a reporter out to talk to me and then they put a whole thing in the **Santa Ana "Register"** about me and **Buchenwald** concentration camp and so forth. And pe – I started getting calls, and then got a call from the **Kiwanis** Club down in **Newport Beach**, and they wanted me to come and talk to them about the experience. Got a call from the Jewish war veterans. And you started getting all these calls that people want to

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

know about it, you know, it's – it's happened in recent years, you know. And it's just – it's strange. And then these movies would come out, you know, like **Mike Dorsey's** film, and stuff like that. And it's just, I don't know, the last couple of years or so it's just kind of come alive again.

Q: Did you receive any compensation from the German government?

A: I – I got s – I don't know if it's from the German government, the **IMF**, the International Monetary Fund, and I got, I don't know, seems to me like it was three or 4,000 dollars, something like that, quite a number of years ago. But I ran across some of that paperwork recently, I was going through a bunch of stuff, and I don't remember exactly how much it was, but it was something like that, three or 4,000 dollars, I was surprised. But it came from the **IMF**. I was surprised that – how they did that whole thing. I thought, why did it come the International Monetary Fund? And I don't know if it was directly from **Germany**, or if it was negotiations. I – I knew nothing about how that all come about.

Q: Were you decorated?

A: No. I got a Purple Heart, and I think a air medal, few things like that, but no, nothing else.

Q: This interview is going to be – become part of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's** permanent collection. It's going to be used by historians and

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

scholars of the Holocaust for many, many years to come. Is there anything you'd like to say in closing?

A: The only thing I'd like to say is, I've been very interested in the school system for a long time, cause I have had a couple of kids go through it. My wife and I were both involved heavily in the – going to school board meetings and stuff, and I was astonished at all – how little history and real information is being given and the – the – I don't think the teaching professions care much about this type of thing. And I've always felt, and I've heard many years that those who forget history are deemed to relive it. And it scares me that the young people today know very little about that stuff. And it's – it's maybe it's – a lot of it's kind of nasty, but I-I just think that – that the school systems and the colleges even are – I've talked to a lot of college professors and stuff. Like, my older son used to come home and tell me what the college professors are saying. And it just disturbed me that they are not more knowledgeable. They should be, I think. And I just – that's part – it just bothers me that they're not educating the kids to really – what really went on in history, cause they don't even teach, I don't think, good old-time history, how this country was founded, you know. Our freedoms that we have. If you go to – if you've traveled much, and a lot of people haven't – I have, quite a bit in other countries, and see how they operate and what's going on, and this is still the

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

greatest country there is, and the freedoms we have. But they seem to be gradually taken away from us, and the – things now are happening today that disturb me greatly, because it's just that little encroachment upon these little liberties and little things, they're just going away, and th – though that's not right, you know, this, that and the other thing. But this country didn't grow, it didn't grow financially – it's been the most successful country in the world. And why people can't see that – to me it's obvious. And why do people from all over the world want to come to the **United States**? And that bothers me a great deal, that we don't – I don't know, it just – I'm just disturbed by the way our country seems to be going, and that fact that young people don't really know anything about history. That part bothers me. My grandkids, I'm glad to say that I – I was able last year in April to – when I went to **Buchenwald**, and – by invitation of the Germans; my wife and I; my younger son and my grandkids; we took them, we went there, they were – spent a week at **Buchenwald** area, hearing all the speeches and seeing the graves and seeing all the history that took place there. And they were – my dau – granddaughter is fif – just turned 15, she's old enough to understand, she asked a lot of questions, so she was inquisitive. I just think more kids need to know about what really went on. I know that some of it is nasty and bad, but that's life. And protecting them and saying everything's just hunky dory and sm-smiley roses all the time is not the way real

**Interview with Chasten Bowen**  
**April 26, 2013**

life is. So that part bothers me, I just – I-I just have strong feelings about our school system and things like that, I – I’m bothered enough [indecipherable]. But it does, it bothers me a great deal that even grown-up people don’t know. And [indecipherable] today, a lot of people still deny the Holocaust happened. How can they deny it with so much evidence and – and everything? And yet people, th-they seem to have their head in the sand, to me. And maybe I’m just an old – ignorant old man, but I-I feel that people need to o-open their eyes and look around, cause we sure don’t want to relive it. Anyway, that’s my feelings, I just – you’re stuck with them.

Q: We thank you Mr. **Bowen**. Very much appreciate it.

A: Oh, my pleasure. I just am glad that it – I’m glad that you’re doing this, to let the future know what really happened.

Q: Thank you. It’s 17:45 hours.

**Conclusion of Interview**