

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Jacques Ribons
May 20, 2014 and June 10, 2014
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PREFACE

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JACQUES RIBONS

May 20, 2014

Question: Okay. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Jacques Ribons on May 20th, 2014 by phone audio. Mr. Ribons is in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Interviewer Ina Navazelskis is in Washington, D.C. Thank you, Mr. Ribons, for agreeing to speak with us today.

Answer: You're very welcome.

Q: I'm going to begin our interview at the very beginning. I'd like to find out a little bit about your childhood, the family you were born into, the world you were born into. So I'll start with my first question. Can you give me your date of birth and place of birth.

A: 8/15/1927. The place of birth is it's very difficult to pronounce. Sulmierzyce, Poland, a small town.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Outside of Bedzin.

Q: A small town

A: Yeah, outside of Bedzin.

Q: Okay. Outside of Bedzin. And what part of Poland was was this in? Was it the western? The eastern? How

A: It's I think it's the eastern, I would say. It is in Oberschlesien, which is Gorny Slask in Polish.

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Q: Oh, if it's Oberschlesien, then it would be the western part close to Germany; right?

A: Right. Exactly.

Q: Okay. So it's eastern Germany but western Poland.

A: Right.

Q: Okay. And what was your name at birth?

A: At birth, my name was Jacob.

Q: Jacob.

A: Ribstein.

Q: R i b s t e i n?

A: e i n, correct.

Q: Well, maybe it's a long story, but how did Jacob Ribstein become Jacques Ribons?

A: Well, my mother and my father had the same last name.

Q: Really?

A: And they are sort of related. I don't know which way.

Q: Uh huh. Okay.

A: And so every time that I talk to somebody, I have to give them my name and my mother's name. They were always the same.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And so questions have arisen, which I didn't know and didn't want to answer anyhow.

Q: Okay.

A: So I don't know. So I when I came out of the military and I became a citizen

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Q: You're talking about the U.S. military?

A: U.S. military.

Q: Uh huh.

A: I became a citizen afterwards. I just changed my name at the time.

Q: Oh, okay. So this is when you were already in the United States after the war?

A: Correct.

Q: Okay. So until then, you were Jacob Ribstein?

A: Right.

Q: Okay. So tell me tell me, did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: Yes. I have one brother that died recently here in the United States.

Q: What was his name?

A: My name is Bernard or Beret (phonetic) in Polish.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Ribstein also. And he also changed his name.

Q: To what?

A: And he to Ribons. And he passed away he got hit by a car in Los Angeles.

Q: Oh, how sad. How terrible. So so he survived the war but

A: Yes.

Q: With you.

A: Correct.

Q: Well, my sympathies for your loss.

A: Thank you.

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Q: And did you and did you say you had another sibling?

A: I had a sister.

Q: Okay.

A: Which was very young. She was seven years old. And she was taken with my mother and my grandmother.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And my little niece.

Q: Oh.

A: And I tried to tell her that, you know, she can save her life if she wants to leave them. And she said to me, "I cannot we can let them die alone."

Q: You're talking about who?

A: I'm talking about my mother.

Q: Your mother said, "I cannot" "I cannot let them die alone"?

A: Alone. That was my sister, my little niece, and my grandmother.

Q: Wow. What was your sister's name?

A: Excuse me.

Q: That's okay?

A: My eyes. My sister's name was Esther.

Q: Esther. She was the youngest?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. What was your mother's name?

A: Vera, or Weira in Polish, Ribstein.

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Q: Okay. Vera in English, Weira in Polish?

A: Yes.

Q: And her maiden name, also Ribstein?

A: Ribstein; correct.

Q: And your father's name?

A: Was Pawel, which is in English would be Paul, Ribstein.

Q: Okay. Tell me a little bit about your home life. How did you father support the family?

A: My father was away most of the time, and my mother is the one that took care of us for the most part.

Q: Then was he away on business or was he away for different reasons?

A: As far as I knew, it was business. I don't know.

Q: Okay. Okay. So do you remember the business that he was in?

A: Textile.

Q: Textile. Does that mean did he have his own factory or his own store or

A: I really don't know. I was a little bit young to ask questions. In fact, I just didn't get answers, you know, even if I asked, you know. So I don't know.

Q: And how did your mother also work to support the family?

A: She did the best she could.

Q: Okay. What kind of work did she do?

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A: Well, my father used to send her some money and then my father used to send her some things to sell. She went around the neighborhood and, you know, she sold things like I guess, like butter, refrigerated butter.

Q: I see.

A: He would send some other stuff. He'd send her some money occasionally.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And I just saw him on the holidays, so...

Q: Really? So he was away from the house that much?

A: Most of the time.

Q: So is it would it be fair to say that you didn't get to know your father very well?

A: Yes, I got to know him. He came for the holidays.

Q: Uh huh.

A: He came home. And it wasn't a good life.

Q: It was not or it was

A: No, it was not.

Q: It was not.

A: Looking back at it.

Q: What how do you come to that conclusion now when you say it was not a good life?

What made it not good?

A: Because my mother struggled to feed us. She struggled to send us to school. She struggled all alone. And, you know, I didn't have any shoes and I wore my mother's shoes.

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Q: Did you really?

A: You know, from time to time, yes.

Q: It must have been hard for you.

A: It was very difficult.

Q: I can also imagine other kids making fun of of a child wearing a grownup's shoes?

A: Not really. We were generally isolated. We lived in a neighborhood where most people were non Jews. And the Jewish people were located downtown the city or the town. And so it wasn't a very good life.

Q: What kind of a place did you did you live in the same place as a child in the 1930s or did you move around?

A: We moved, you know, a couple times.

Q: Okay.

A: And we lived in near Lodz where there was a textile. So we moved moved us and himself near Lodz, a small town down there.

Q: Yeah. And can you describe to me the the living quarters you remember the best? Was there any one place that you lived for a longer period of time?

A: Yes. The last place that we lived in the house, that was three rooms.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And a kitchen.

Q: And was it a self standing house or was there another apartment in it or

A: It was a short of like a duplex.

Q: I see.

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In the center of town or on the out

A: No. It was pretty much out of town of the mainstream of the population. The Jewish people primarily.

Q: Uh huh. And was this still in that town of what did you say its name was?

A: Sulmierzyce.

Q: Sulmierzyce?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was it still in the same town?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We were in the same town.

Q: Did you have electricity?

A: No. We had a kerosene lamp and a coal stove that my mother used to cook and heat and this kind of stuff.

Q: Did anybody else live with you or was it just you, your mother, and your brother and sister and father?

A: That's all.

Q: That's it. No grandparents? No aunts? No uncles?

A: No grandparents, no.

Q: Did they both come did they both have brothers and sisters, your parents?

A: Oh, yes. My mother came from a family of ten.

Q: Wow.

A: And my father had three, a total of three. He had two sisters and himself.

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Q: And what did their families do? What did what was their you would say your grandparents?

A: My grandfather one of them was a teacher.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And he was teaching Russian.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And the other one, I don't know. He died very young. I only knew my grandmother.

At least I was told that I was around when he was alive. But I do not remember him.

Q: When

A: My mother's father.

Q: You mother's father, you don't remember?

A: No. No. Don't remember.

Q: Okay. Were your grandparents well to do or were they kind of poor?

A: I I would say poor.

Q: Uh huh. And your parents? You say your mother struggled. So it wasn't a very good life. Does that mean

A: My father was I hate to say this, but he's been gone and I shouldn't say it, maybe.

He wasn't the best father around.

Q: Oh. So so you struggled? In other words, it had repercussions financially as well?

A: My mother had struggles. I you know, I was too young to know what it means even.

I always struggled to get food. She struggled to do this, she struggled to do that, send us to school, to get us clothing, you know.

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Q: Were you close to her?

A: Yes, very much so.

Q: Tell me a little bit about what kind of a person she was.

A: She was the most loving mother.

Q: Was she?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh.

A: My father, in fact, when well, as we go, I'll be able to tell you the story of what happened.

Q: Okay. Yeah, we'll get there. We'll get there.

A: Thank you.

Q: Your what kind of values did she have that that you feel she kind of also bequeathed to you?

A: She was a very religious person.

Q: She was. Yes?

A: Very religious.

Q: Uh huh?

A: You know, she tried to send us to Hebrew school. She tried to do things for us. And she did the best she could, and we did go to Hebrew school.

Q: You did?

A: Yeah. Yes, we did. I don't remember much of it, but we did go to Hebrew school.

Q: Okay. Was she somebody that you could talk to easily?

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A: Well, she wasn't like she was not an educated woman. My father was but my mother was not.

Q: Uh huh.

A: I think in those days most women were not too educated, at least in the Jewish community.

Q: Could she read and write, though?

A: Just in Yiddish.

Q: Just in Yiddish. Okay. That is another one of my questions is what language did you speak at home?

A: Yiddish.

Q: Yiddish. And you said you lived in a kind of non Jewish neighborhood?

A: Correct.

Q: Did you also speak Polish or German?

A: No. We we spoke Polish because we did go to Polish schools.

Q: Uh huh. Okay.

A: So, you know, we did speak Polish. At home, we spoke Yiddish.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And my mother didn't speak Polish too well.

Q: Uh huh.

A: So communication was in Yiddish.

Q: Did was she also born and grew up in the same area or had she come from someplace else?

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A: She came from someplace else. She came from a place called Zelow, which is near Lodz.

Q: Okay. Okay. And your father?

A: My father, in the same area.

Q: Okay. So she moved to where he where his roots were?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Before they got married, my mother and his mother lived in the same town.

Q: Was it an arranged marriage?

A: I don't know. I I honestly don't know.

Q: Was she

A: It could be have been, but I don't know.

Q: Were either of your parents storytellers? For example, they told you about their own childhood, their own lives, their own families?

A: Not really. I was when the war started, I was 12 years old. So I don't think they spoke too much of themselves.

Q: Uh huh. As you were growing up before the war?

A: As I was growing up, yes.

Q: Well, tell me a little bit about that life. What was the name that was the town itself a modern town or a very old fashioned town?

A: It was a big, big village.

Q: How many people?

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A: I have no idea, but it was it was big. The Jewish population was big.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And the Polish population was also big.

Q: How many synagogues did it have?

A: Oh, probably about three or four.

Q: And same amount of churches?

A: Churches, I don't know. It had one large church, which was mostly I think all of it was Catholic.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And that's all I remember as of this town.

Q: Was there any interaction between, you know, kids who were Jews and non Jews?

Did you play together? Did you keep distance from one another? What kind of relations did you have?

A: We had a very minor interaction.

Q: Okay.

A: Because they were hating Jews, you know. They were told that by the parents, by the grandparents.

Q: And you saw that? You experienced that every day?

A: I experienced it

Q: Uh huh.

A: a lot.

Q: Can you tell me what how?

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A: We had interaction. We were kids.

Q: Well, would they call you names? I'd like to have a little bit of a sense of how you experienced it.

A: Yes. They called us dirty Jews and so on and so forth, go to Palestine. We don't know how to explain that we were I had a teacher who was German.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Of German descent.

Q: Okay.

A: If he was born in Poland or not, I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: He used to tell the Jewish kids, "Wait till Hitler comes." This was before the war.

Q: Oh, that's charming.

A: Yes, it was.

Q: Do you did you know who Hitler was or did people talk about Hitler or was he

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We knew. We weren't aware too much on what he was like, what he was. But we heard his name and the hating of Jews. Because, also, they had they brought in the Germans brought in Jews from Czechoslovakia.

Q: Is this during the war or before?

A: When the war already started.

Q: When the war already started.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did any Jews from Germany come to [redacted] since you were close to the German border, did any Jews from Germany come to Poland before the war started?

A: Some.

Q: Running away from Germany?

A: Some.

Q: Some.

A: Not too many that I knew of.

Q: Uh huh. And did they fit into the community or did they look very different?

A: They didn't look very different, but they were kind of [redacted] they had their nose up in the air, so to speak, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: They were above everybody else.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. Such a human thing. What was the main economy in the town?

A: The main economy basically was coal mining.

Q: I see. I see. So did most people [redacted] I mean, did most people work in the mines or have, you know, family members work in the mines and then also the support functions to that?

A: Yes, as far as I know, the non Jewish. The Jewish did not work in the mines.

Q: Uh huh.

A: They wouldn't even hire them even if they wanted to. But, yes.

Q: So how did Jews support themselves?

A: Well, my mother my father used to send things to sell. She went out and sold them and kept us going. Made sure we dressed, we went to school. We had to have special clothing like Catholic kids wear. You know, we had to wear certain certain clothing

Q: What kind of clothing?

A: attached to the shirt or whatever. And that was the kind of life. And it wasn't the best, at least not in my family.

Q: When you went to school, at that time you were old enough was she able to afford a pair of shoes for you?

A: Hardly. Hardly. There was a couple times that I wore her shoes because I didn't have any any shoes to wear. And that was already just before the war started.

Q: You were already maybe, like, an 11 , 12 year old boy.

A: Yes.

Q: Did your younger brother and sister go to school? Maybe your sister not, but did

A: My brother did. He was a year younger than I am even though he said two. It was just one year.

Q: Were you hungry at any time? Did you have enough to eat when you were a kid?

A: No. There was always potatoes. There were always things that you could eat.

Q: Uh huh.

A: But it was enough food. When I say food, I mean, you know, basics.

Q: That's right. Did you also have any chores that you had to do as you were growing up?

A: Not much, you know. We didn't have a big house, so my mother cleaned and whatever she did. And we were out playing when we were kids.

Q: What did people say? I mean, in this in this small place or big village, as you say, but, you know, not one that had were there people who had cars?

A: Cars?

Q: Uh huh.

A: No. The only thing person that had a car that I remember was a doctor in town, and he had a Mercedes.

Q: Well, what a car.

A: Yes, indeed.

Q: And so that's a rarity. Things like that were did anybody own a radio?

A: Yes. Just people owned and we had one.

Q: You had one too?

A: We had one too. When the Germans came, they took it away and we turned it in.

Q: So you had they told you to turn it in rather than coming to the house?

A: Yes, to turn it in. Everybody had to turn in. You couldn't listen to the radio because if you picked up in fact, you could pick up London on most radios.

Q: I see.

A: And they didn't want us to hear the news from London.

Q: Had you ever before the Germans came, before the World War started, did you listen to the radio outside of you know, radio broadcasts that came from London or other places outside of Poland?

A: Yes. Yes. We like, one time we moved where my father and mother were born.

Q: Okay.

A: And it's closer to the Czech border.

Q: To the Czech border?

A: To the Czech border. That was the other I don't know how far away it was. It was quite a distance.

Q: Okay.

A: And we used to listen to Radio Prague.

Q: Uh huh. In Czech or in German?

A: In German and Czech mostly.

Q: So you could understand what they were saying?

A: In a roundabout way, yes, because the Czech language is a Slavic language. So you could understand some of it.

Q: And was this about the time that Czechoslovakia was annexed to Germany or before?

A: Before and after.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Yeah. But, you know, when the Germans came in, they took all the radios. You know, there was a death penalty, at least they said, if they caught you to have a radio.

Q: I guess what I'm trying to do is get a sense of how much information came into the town. How well informed were people about the larger historical, you know, things that were going on? The political developments that were going on? Were people afraid or did it all seem very distant?

A: No. My father went through World War I when he was a kid.

Q: Uh huh?

A: And so he was aware of the things of war. And I heard him speak to his friends about the war. And the consensus among them was it's not going to last very long. Because they were aware there were planes and, you know, kinds of things that they can use to really to do a job on another country. So they were aware of things. And I heard them speak and I was sort of aware what was going on myself.

Q: So there was talk of war, but there was also a confidence that you could beat somebody who invades your country?

A: No.

Q: There was no confidence?

A: There was never any confidence because within the government

Q: Okay.

A: the Polish government had some Germans in high office. And so they just they actually dismantled the air force before the war started.

Q: So you're saying there was some sort of sabotage from within?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And since it was you know, the last place I lived which was Sulmierzyce, they we had seen you know, it was very close to the German border.

Q: Okay.

A: And we were aware but not to the extent that they came in with, which the blasts and the armament and whatnot was going on. So the war was wasn't going to last very long. Nobody believed that it's going to last very long. Because the Poles didn't have enough of a force to fight them off.

Q: I see. So it was in that sense that you that there was talk that they were coming and they'll overrun us immediately? That sort of talk?

A: Oh, yes. There was no doubt about it. And they did come in, and within a couple days they were all occupied, the whole area.

Q: Tell me the first time that you do you remember where you were when you learned that the war had broken out?

A: I was at home. And it and a Polish Polish government called upon the people of age to come and join the military.

Q: So there was an as announcement over the radio?

A: There was an announcement. And so my father left

Q: Uh huh.

A: to join not join. He had to he was a in the military before. It's been a couple years. So, therefore, he was supposed to report to one of the military I would say where register and they get you into the service.

Q: One yeah.

A: So he left. We didn't know where he was when the Germans came in. And my father finally came home. I don't know how many how much time. I cannot remember the time element it took for him to come back. He was told the story that he was captured by the Germans and they held him. And they were going to kill him and a whole bunch of people that they were going to kill. So they had my father had a gold Omega pocket watch, which in those days was the style. And one of the German guards saw it. He

says, "If you give me this, I'll let you go." So he gave him the watch and he really let him go, and he came home.

Q: I see. So it was for his breath.

A: Right. Right. That was just the beginning.

Q: And when was the first time you saw any did you see German soldiers soon after that announcement came? When did you first have the war come to you?

A: Within two days.

Q: Okay. What happened?

A: The Germans moved in and they started killing people. They rounded up the teachers, the priests, the rabbis, you know, and they started killing them.

Q: So this sounds like it was not based on whether you were Jewish or not but based more if you were, like, a community leader. 'Cause a priest or a rabbi would be a community leader.

A: Right. The elite. The teachers, the doctors, the old the educated people.

Q: Okay. And they were the ones who were being arrested and killed?

A: Right, either killed or sent to Germany to work. I am not aware how many people they killed, but I know they did.

Q: Did you see anything did you see any violence on the streets?

A: From time to time. The occupation was broadcast and we didn't go out on the street until they entrenched themselves within the city, within the town.

Q: So you stayed at home. When you found out that the war was on, your mother and your brother and your sister you stayed inside the house?

A: Yes, absolutely.

Q: And when did you first venture out?

A: Right after. Right after a few days, we ventured out and 'cause we understood the language.

Q: Uh huh.

A: The German people the German soldiers did not know who was Jewish and who was not.

Q: They did not. Okay.

A: They did not.

Q: Were you similar you said you mother was very religious. But in your dress and in your manners and so on, you were indistinguishable from anybody else?

A: Right. Correct.

Q: I see. Okay. And what is the first thing that you noticed that was different?

A: The food. We didn't get much food. It was rationed. And the ruthlessness of the German occupiers. They'd just beat people up, beat kids up, beat grownups up and got them to work or picked them up in the street and took them to work.

Q: So in other words, I get the sense that there's really no fighting that actually happened; that there was no fight that was put up in your area. They just ran in.

A: Right.

Q: They just overran the place?

A: They just came in, and that was that was it. They did not there was no fight. There was not a soldier within miles. And

Q: When you say they came in then, does that mean no soldiers were there? No Wehrmacht was there or

A: Oh, yes. The Wehrmacht came in, the SS right after that. You know, I didn't know who was an SS man is, but I did know what an Wehrmacht is.

Q: Yeah. Uh huh. But no Polish soldiers?

A: No. They were gone.

Q: They were all gone. Yeah.

A: 'Cause I never saw when the war started.

Q: Yeah. So aside from aside from rationing and, you said, the ruthlessness of the German soldiers, how else did life change?

A: You had to stay in line for to get a loaf of bread. Everything was in short supply. There was no sugar, no nothing. You know, that whatever you had to do, you were rationed.

Q: Was that across the board for everybody or was this particular targeted to the Jews?

A: That, I don't know. I would imagine it was across the board.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know.

Q: Was there in those early days, was there any discrimination against the Jews that was harsher or more different than, let's say, the Polish population?

A: They didn't know they couldn't recognize one from the other unless they wear the religious hair.

Q: Right.

A: Otherwise they didn't know who the Jews were.

Q: Uh huh.

A: They just didn't know. And so, like, myself, I was able to go anywhere even where the soldiers were and, you know, it was okay. I was afraid, but I did go. You know, I did see them, you know. I didn't go near any Army installation or any you know, anything like that. I avoided that. But, however, you know, they didn't they didn't know who the Jews were or what they looked like unless they saw somebody who was religious that they wore the the garb, the hair, the face, you know, and so on.

Q: Well, when you would go, you know, I take it out of, like, a child's curiosity to see what was what are some of the things you saw?

A: A lot of military around there. There was a lot of they established the SS headquarters. They took over the police department.

Q: Uh huh.

A: So they had special German police. They didn't have any Polish. They just disbanded them. And right when I was about in fear because they were ruthless. If they got ahold of somebody who did something, they either killed them or beat the hell out of them.

Q: Did you see things like that? Did you see people being beaten?

A: Oh, yes, a lot. In fact, as we go, I have something I can tell you about myself, what transpired.

Q: Okay. We'll probably be there soon. Tell me, what happened with your mother and your father? How did they start how did they continue to put food on the table? I take it your father, when he came back, didn't leave again because, where would he go?

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A: My father was gone for quite a while. We didn't know where he was.

Q: Okay.

A: But when he came back, he is he was an educated person.

Q: Okay.

A: He spoke German.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Spoke clean Polish. He spoke a little bit between. He had knowledge of a lot of languages, you know; Russian, for instance. 'Cause his his father was a Russian teacher.

Q: Uh huh. That's quite impressive

A: Well

Q: to know that many languages.

A: Well, I was impressed with him, but I didn't like him, quite honestly.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. I got

A: So about when he came back, he had to start providing things. He was able to go among the Germans, talk to them, establish a Jewish city hall.

Q: Okay.

A: Which he was one of the people that worked for them. He was a mediator between the Germans and the Jewish community.

Q: That's very responsible.

A: Yes, it was responsible. And but, you know, I

Q: Was he a harsh man?

A: No, he wasn't. He wasn't. Only when I did something I shouldn't have done.

Q: Was he distant then? Decent but distant?

A: I would say I don't think he was instant. You know, I hugged him and, you know, he hugged me. You know, so but he was he was not a warm father, but he was not distant.

Q: I got that. Okay. So he became a mediator, you know, between the Germans and the Jewish community.

A: Right.

Q: And did I understand correctly that sometimes he would just perform some services for the Germans and then he was able to put food on the table because of that?

A: He was able to do things the food was rationed.

Q: Okay.

A: When we have a situation like we had, when you have rations, you have you have sometimes a preference if you know people.

Q: Right.

A: So this was the kind of thing that he did. But he also bailed out people that were arrested.

Q: Uh huh.

A: He paid them off. He did a lot of things that was for the Jewish community. The Jewish community apparently gave him things, you know, for the Germans that were what he needed to buy the person out for money or for other things. I don't know. For gold. I don't I would imagine. But he was a mediator between the Germans and the

Jewish community the Jewish city hall that they formed. And, of course, they had people that they talked to and that decided what to do, how to do it.

Q: So did he come home and talk about all of these things or did

A: Never.

Q: Never, huh?

A: Never talked about anything. I never knew, but they do did know that he was a mediator because he used to bring home a lot of a suitcase for the money. And what did he need money for? Only to buy out or to buy off a German, you know, for

Q: For somebody.

A: For

Q: For somebody's life.

A: Right.

Q: Uh huh. How long did you all live in this kind of situation? How long did this kind of limbo situation last?

A: It was probably about a year and a half, maybe two.

Q: So were you in a ghetto or were you just

A: This was before the ghetto the time they formed that ghetto.

Q: So in other words, for a year and a half or almost two years

A: No, not quite. Not two years. About a year, I would say.

Q: Okay. So it would be from September '39 to September '40, one could say?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah. Something like that.

Q: Something like that. Your you still lived in your own home. You were under this this occupation regime.

A: Right.

Q: It was bad but there was no sense yet that the Jews are going to be targeted for some special special treatment in the negative sense? It was it was bad for everybody?

A: We knew because there were a lot of killings taking place. There was a lot of stuff that was going on. Being as young as I was, I wasn't aware of a lot of things. You have to remember, when the war started, I was 12 years old.

Q: Yeah. Of course. Of course.

A: And I didn't I wasn't aware of no one person what was going on.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. It would be clues. It's from your child's memories that I'm trying to get this picture of what things were like.

A: Yeah. I understand.

Q: Yeah. So did life stay the same, pretty much, until the ghetto was formed or were there some incidents before it happened that

A: There were some things before it happened. They took a lot of people out.

Q: Tell me what those were.

A: Well, they rounded up people.

Q: Okay.

A: And they rounded up people and they just disappeared.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And later on, we found out there were labor camps, after the war.

Q: So how did they round them up? Did they block off streets or did they go by a list of names? How did this happen?

A: Well, they had names. The some of the Polish people were turned the Jews in, period.

Q: I see.

A: So and they rounded they rounded them up and they disappeared. And they were brought back for instance, a couple Jewish Polish soldiers, and they killed them because they did something that they didn't like. So they killed them so everybody can see or that most people can see so that they wouldn't do it.

Q: So these why like public executions?

A: Sort of, yes. Sort of. But then then after about a year or so I'm not sure as to the time, you know, that

Q: Sure.

A: at the place. They took a Polish two streets and took the Polish people out of there and put the Jewish in there. And then they had that is where the ghetto was formed.

Q: And the ghetto was in the small town you were born and grew up in?

A: In the small town, yes. Another part of town where I used to live or another a part of what is called, quote, downtown area.

Q: Okay. Okay. And so did you have to move into those two streets?

A: Yes. Yes. We had to move in. We had to have one room. We shared a place with another family.

Interview with Jacques Ribons

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Q: Was there indoor plumbing?

A: You know, I do not recall that.

Q: Okay.

A: The most people didn't have it. This was a newer house. I don't think so.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't think so. And they formed a ghetto.

Q: Before they formed the ghetto, were you going to school or was school suspended?

A: School was suspended for the Jewish kids.

Q: Okay. And what about the Polish kids?

A: The Polish kids had school, yes. They had schools for them.

Q: Okay. So during the day, you just hung out at home?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh huh.

A: I mean, what where can you go?

Q: Exactly.

A: No place to go.

Q: And your father was with you when you moved into the ghetto?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: He was with us. And moved into one room. There was five of us.

Q: Oh, my.

A: And we had a little kitchen, you know, a small little kitchen. But that was the extent of it.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And so the ghetto, when they took out people, like myself I was, like, again, 12, 13 years old at that time. And they put me to work.

Q: And what was what did you have to do?

A: My job was I was an electric welder.

Q: An electric welder?

A: Welder. They showed me how to do it and I was welding the wheelbarrows.

Q: You were welding wheelbarrows?

A: Right. So they they produced they have that iron now. They had the company there and they hired they got the Jewish kids.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Or the Jewish people, you know, that were working and producing them.

Q: Well, did you get any kind of pay for this? Any kind of

A: Oh, no.

Q: No. So this was this was forced labor?

A: It was forced labor, absolutely.

Q: And no food?

A: They didn't give us any food. The food was from the house, whatever you could get.

Q: And no and no ability to say no?

A: That's correct. Because if you refused, you weren't around very long.

Q: Yeah. What kind of job did your father do? Was he continuing being a mediator?

A: Yes. He was a mediator to the very end of the ghetto.

Q: And what did your mother do?

A: Not much. She tried to provide for us. She tried to keep us fed. Didn't do much.

There was no nothing that you can do. You were packed like herrings into a small area.

Q: Did you when you went to work in the morning, did you leave the ghetto area?

A: They left we left when we left the ghetto area, we were under guards.

Q: I see.

A: They had some Jewish what they call kapos or whatever and the Germans. They walked with us to the place of work.

Q: And the Jewish kapos are these people that you recognized and knew or were they strangers?

A: No; people that we knew. It wasn't that big of a town that we didn't know people, you know, but yeah, we knew them.

Q: And were they were they harsh? Were they

A: No. They just you know, kids are kids everywhere. They tried to get out of line.

Q: That's true.

A: They put them back, you know. We didn't realize the enormity of this whole thing.

Q: Yeah.

A: So but I I don't know how to explain this. We used to go to work every morning and come home in the evening, and that was going on for quite a while. And a little bit at the time, they took the Jews and shipped them out.

Q: That's when the ghetto gets liquidated?

A: Right, a little bit at a time.

Q: A little bit at a time. Okay.

A: Right.

Q: Okay. But and was that something everybody noticed, that another group was gone and another group is gone?

A: Oh, yeah. They what you call they rounded up all the Jews.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And they picked out whoever they wanted to pick out to send to the gas chambers or prison camps or such, you know.

Q: And, again, how was this done when it was a little bit at a time? Was it by a list or was it you were called to a square and then they would say every tenth person? How did those people who get rounded up

A: You were called to a square. Everybody had to appear. And they picked out I don't know how they went about picking out picking out people. I have no idea. And but they did. Families let's say, mother and father or mother and the kids, and I don't know how they went about doing it. And my father occasionally was able to get somebody back from what they picked out by buying them off.

Q: I see. Were there more people who were doing the same thing as your father was doing as a mediator?

A: Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge. At least I didn't know any.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. Well, you told me earlier that there was a story you had to tell me. It was when I was asking about did you see people being beaten up, did you see people you know, violence in the streets. And can you tell me what what happened?

A: There was violence. There was a German population that they moved in and they used to beat up the Jewish kids or the Jewish people.

Q: So it was civilians who would do this, not just Army?

A: Civilians and occasionally they had the SS going through there. And, you know, they picked up people. They you know, I cannot explain they used to beat them up, and sometimes they picked them up and killed them.

Q: Did you see corpses in the streets?

A: Not at the time that I was in the ghetto. I saw corpses from starvation. Occasionally, yes, I did see, but not many.

Q: Uh huh.

A: They didn't do it in public view, so to speak.

Q: Except for those two Polish Jewish soldiers.

A: Two Polish Jewish soldiers; brought them in because they called the German soldier and I don't know what happened. And they brought them in.

It was a Jewish restaurant before the ghetto. And they used to the Jewish people used to go there to this what they call a restaurant. And they brought in this Jewish Polish soldier that he was imprisoned. He was a POW. They brought him in to explain what happened, what he did. And that was the end of him. After that, we didn't hear of him anymore.

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Q: I see. I see.

A: So logically speaking, knowing what I know, he didn't make it.

Q: Okay. So but you didn't see this public execution?

A: No.

Q: Remember, you said that there were a couple who were executed publicly. So

A: I saw that.

Q: You saw it?

A: Yes. But I saw within the town. And they did something, and I don't know what they did. And they just shot them.

Q: Yeah. That's an awful lot of violence for a 13 year old to see.

A: Hm, yeah. It was a bad time.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. Did you yourself ever get beat up?

A: No, not really. You know, I got hit a couple times across my back. But that's about it, you know.

Q: Okay. Were there I remember in the interview that we did in Los Angeles, you know, where where we were only able to speak with you for a short amount of time

A: Correct.

Q: you did mention something about the son of the German police chief.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: What was that about?

A: Well, we only were allowed to walk on one side of the street.

Q: Okay.

A: The other side was for Aryans only. So here this kid you know, being a kid, again, I went to the other side of the street.

Q: The wrong side.

A: The wrong side, the one that I'm not supposed to. But I also wore a (inaudible) with "Jew" on it.

Q: Oh, you wore the yellow star?

A: Yellow star.

Q: Okay.

A: So this kid came and pushed me off and I pushed him back. And we started hitting each other. Then he started running. I cornered him, kind of beat him up a little bit.

And next thing I knew, the I found out later he belonged to the police officers police captain or something and they were looking for me.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

A: And I was hiding. Well, after a while they, stopped looking and everything turned out okay. But, you know, I guess if they would have caught me, I wouldn't laid on seen the light of the day.

Q: It could have very easily been that way.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: So was this before you had moved into the ghetto, before

A: Yes. That was before.

Q: Okay. And did you ever try and get food for the family or help in trying to trade things so that there would be food?

A: No. No. I depended on my father.

Q: Okay.

A: Again, he was sort of a mediator there, you know. He was able to provide enough provide for us.

Q: Okay. Then let's get to the part where you say that that, little by little, people, you know, are rounded up and disappear and, you know, they're taken away. When did this affect your family? How did things develop that okay.

A: For a while, they used to call the people into a into a place an open place. All the Jewish people came. They picked up some Jewish people and they just took them away. That was the end of them; never heard from them again. The they did us they did this quite a few times. And then they did I don't know how many people they had left. We were then in the ghetto. And they rounded up everybody. My father had a place that the neighbor was had a boyfriend who wasn't Jewish.

Q: Okay.

A: And myself he took myself and my mother, my sister and my brother and my grandmother that was his mother.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And we went to this Polish man, and we were there waiting to see what happened.

Q: How long were you there?

A: We were there only a couple of days.

Q: Okay.

A: Here where it was. They took the bulk of the people that couldn't hide or couldn't disappear and shipped out away and, you know we knew where they were going, but we have no alternative of any kind.

Q: So you knew where were they going?

A: To Auschwitz.

Q: And how did you know about Auschwitz?

A: At that time, we already knew that this is what was happening to the Jewish people.

Q: So this would have been what year? 1942 or '43?

A: 1942.

Q: '42.

A: Yep.

Q: Okay. So you already knew about Auschwitz's existence, and the Jews were being sent there.

A: The Jews were being sent there.

Q: Did you know that did you know about the gas and the

A: Gas chambers.

Q: Yeah.

A: Not not really.

Q: Okay.

A: Not really. We did know they disappeared, that they were gone, period. So we were hidden, and also there was a couple the girl's boyfriend one of the she had two brothers in that family and a son. And we went, waited out to see what was going to

happen. Well, they took they closed up the ghetto, period, and they shipped the Jews out. Well, then we were left father and mother, these other people, and a son. The daughters the one one of the daughters one daughter was already in prison. And our family, which was myself, my mother, my sister, my brother, and my grandmother, which was my father's mother.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And we waited a day or so. The ghetto was gone. They took everybody.

Q: This place where you were waiting and hiding it was outside the ghetto?

A: Outside the ghetto; a Polish guy that had a Jewish girlfriend.

Q: Okay. And so it wasn't far away from the ghetto, or it was far away?

A: No. It wasn't that far away.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: It wasn't that far away.

Q: It was still within the town?

A: Yes, absolutely.

Q: Okay.

A: So we went there and waited out to see what was going to happen since they got all the Jews out.

Q: Okay.

A: And then they announced that any Jew that was being caught, they're going to shoot. We heard that from this Polish guy that owned the apartment.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we didn't know what to do. My suggestion you know, I was then 13 years old. My suggestion was to turn ourselves in. We have no place to go.

Q: Yeah.

A: Some of us would survive. Most of us wouldn't.

Q: Where was your father's here? Was he there too?

A: My father was gone. He was he took his sister and they disappeared. So I don't know. I think they went to a different town. He was able to buy himself time to go to a different town. Are you there?

Q: I'm here, but I'm kind of shocked. So he kind of abandoned his family?

A: So to speak, yes. And because he knew the end result. He really did.

Q: I see.

A: He didn't talk. He knew what was going on. So the question was: What do we do?

Q: I see.

A: 13 years old. And there was a man with his son and his wife ask me. I says, you know, I'm 13 years old. I don't know.

Q: Yeah.

A: I said, you know, in my opinion, if we turn ourselves in we have absolutely no place to go. If we wait days, they catch us, they kill us. There's no there was no question about that.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: I says, if we turn ourselves in, some of us have a chance to survive.

Q: What a hard thing.

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A: Yes, a hard decision to make.

Q: Yeah.

A: So as it turned out, they they listened to me and we turned ourselves in to the Germans.

Q: So did you walk the streets to turn yourselves in to the Germans or they were invited

A: To the Germans, yes.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And we went we went back to the ghetto. They had one room there that they kept the people that came back or were caught.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And they just kept us in that room.

Q: Okay.

A: So in the middle of the night, they took out they came in and they caused really ruckus. They took this the couple, husband and wife, that were there with us.

Q: That's right.

A: And _____.

Q: Uh huh.

A: They took us out.

Q: I'm you know something? Is the phone farther away from you? Because now the sound is not as good.

A: No.

Q: Now it's better. Now it's better.

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A: Okay. _____.

Q: Now I can't hear you at all.

A: You cannot?

Q: Now I can hear you. It is at some points, it's muffled and at some points it's clearer.

A: Okay. So I'm going to keep it away from my ear.

Q: Okay.

A: The _____.

Q: Now excuse me. Now it's muffled again.

A: Okay.

Q: We were fine we were fine until just, like, when I started to say the sound is muffled. Did you switch or move the phone a little bit?

A: Can you hear me now?

Q: Now it's perfect.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay.

A: So they took us out outside at night.

Q: Okay.

A: And they killed the mother and father and the son.

Q: In front of you?

A: In front of me. And they were going to do that to me too. They didn't, for whatever reason they had. And they took us back into the room

Q: Yeah.

A: where we were all in. And the following morning and they had some other people that they killed. I don't know who they were. They killed something like 20 people, shot them.

Q: Oh, my gosh.

A: So in the morning, they got some men bigger than I am to take them for burial. They buried them somewhere in the hillside. I don't know exactly where. And myself and whoever else was there, which I don't remember, we went into the room back into the room. Well, a day later, they took us out and they send us to a place called Bedzin.

Q: Okay. To that larger place. The larger place

A: The ghetto was already eliminated.

Q: I see.

A: They caught people after that and they killed them. There was no question about them doing that.

Q: Yeah.

A: So they took us to Bedzin. They put us into a I think it was a place where they had nuns.

Q: Okay. An abbey?

A: An abbey or whatever. I don't quite recall what it was.

Q: Okay.

A: And I had

Q: A convent?

A: And they had women and kids and everybody was thrown off and it was a commotion.

Interview with Jacques Ribons

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Q: Okay.

A: I was a little bit older. They took me and they made me clean all that.

Q: Oh, my.

A: All that the puking and the what you call, you know, the

Q: All of it.

A: All of it.

Q: All of it.

A: And the bathroom; with my hands. And I was I was really puking my insides out, you know.

Q: Oh, my gosh.

A: Finally, they came and they put me back in there. And they send us to a place called Bedzin.

Q: Yeah.

A: And over there, they sent us to a place that they called Sosnowiec.

Q: Okay. Sosnowiec.

A: Which was up closer to the German border.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And they put us I think there was a prison there

Q: Uh huh.

A: they put us in. And they took people out for work. You know, they selected people to do these things, I guess. So I was there with my mother, my brother, and my sister. And I was able to get out away from my mother because I talked to my mother and I said, "I

don't want to leave you alone, Mom." So she says, "Look, I cannot go with you. I cannot let your sister, your grandmother, and your niece die by themselves."

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, it was a big decision to make. So I said to my brother, "Let's see what we can try maybe to save us ourselves." And we did.

Q: How did you do that?

A: They put us in a different room.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I don't know why, because my brother was really a tiny guy.

Q: Uh huh.

A: So, you know and myself, I always looked well fed.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And they took us with the rest of the men and women and they sent us to a camp. And my mother said to me, "I cannot let them die alone."

Q: So they put you in a different room and they took then your mother and your sister and your grandmother and niece they took them away to another camp?

A: To Auschwitz.

Q: They took them to Auschwitz.

A: They took them to Auschwitz. There was no other place.

Q: Okay.

A: Either.

Q: I see. And

A: And they sent me and my brother and a few other people that they had to a place called what had a man.

Q: How do you say that again?

A: Blechhammer.

Q: Blechhammen?

A: Blechhammer. It's B l a c h h a m e r.

Q: Blechhammer?

A: Blechhammer.

Q: Yeah.

A: Which was a Yiddish and arbeitslager.

Q: Which was a Yiddish what?

A: Yiddish shtanz (phonetic) arbeitslager.

Q: Arbeitslager. Forced labor?

A: Forced labor.

Q: So

A: And we were there about they took us out _____.

Q: Excuse me. Now the voice now the voice the sound is muffled again. I'm going to go back and repeat things so that I understand them.

A: Sorry.

Q: Okay.

A: Is that better?

Q: Now it's better.

A: Okay.

Q: So

A: They took us to Blechhammer and assigned us to a work what we would be doing work and digging and, you know, hauling cement and carrying and loading cement.

And my mother knowing was went to Auschwitz. And my I had a cousin there that showed up. And my cousin went to Auschwitz from there 'cause he looked like he is doesn't eat enough, you know. Moments.

Q: So you that conversation that you had with

A: _____.

Q: The conversation you had with your mother where it was you know, you kind of decided that you would try to save yourself and your brother.

A: Right. And my mother wanted us to go to do that.

Q: Well, that was that was I mean, that's an amazing what an amazing person that

A: She was.

Q: that she said

A: She is gone. And, you know, her answer to me, "I cannot let them die alone."

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: So how it all happened Blechhammer.

Q: Well, but here's my other question: Did you have much choice in being split apart or were you split apart by the authorities?

A: No. We didn't have much of a choice. We either that or I I couldn't go with my mother.

Q: I see. I see.

A: There was no choices.

Q: Okay. Okay. So that was the that was the situation that you found yourself in.

A: Right. My brother. My brother was little and I you know, we were really surprised that he was able to do that. And we went to that point, the Blechhammer, we found a lot of people from our own town.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. And so, you know, again, we worked. And some people died. They had people that smoked, for instance. And they had everybody had to go out to the to the I don't know the word.

Q: Hello? Hello?

A: All the prisoners

Q: Hello?

A: what they called a pentplas (phonetic). Hello?

Q: Yes. I'm here.

A: And the pentplas.

Q: In the pentplas.

A: And they did some hanging of the people that committed what they called a crime like smoking, like doing something that they didn't want to show the people that if you commit anything, we're going to do that to you. And they did hanging.

Q: So you would be forced to see these things?

A: And they hung a 15 year old boy who smoked, who worked with me.

Q: Oh.

A: Because he smoked, they hung him. So anyhow, we were there for almost two years.

Q: Tell me, what kind of work did you do?

A: The place that we worked was a conglomerate of all kinds of things. They produced oil, coal extract oil from coal, fuel. They cement pipes all over the place. They used to bomb this place often. I don't know chemicals they used to produce there. Our job unloading cement bags of cement, mixing cement. These are, you know, things that they can hide like, bunkers, we used to do. And when they bombed, they couldn't penetrate the bunkers.

Q: So you were there from 1942 to 1944?

A: Something like that, you know. I you lose track of time.

Q: Of course. Of course. Of course. But do you remember if you got there in the fall or in the winter? Do you remember the time of year that it was that you finally ended up there?

A: Well, let me put it to you this way: What I remember that we were picking fruit at home, whatever we can find. And around that time of the year.

Q: Okay. So it could have been harvest time? Could it have been

A: Harvest, yes.

Q: And tell me

A: Almost two years.

Q: It must have been hell on earth.

A: Well, it was.

Q: What did you eat? What did they give you to eat?

A: They gave us spinach that they had, coal or little pebbles. They gave us soup. I don't know what it was made out of, but people used to swell, you know, because they ate that soup.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And I ate two slices of bread a day.

Q: Did a lot of people die just naturally because of exhaustion and hunger?

A: Yes, very much so. I don't know how many. You know, there's a couple people that I knew. One person in particular that I knew ran away from prison. He was from Poland.

Q: Uh huh.

A: He went back to Poland and he had no place to go. He finally came back.

Q: He came back to the concentration camp?

A: Yes.

Q: To the labor camp. Excuse me.

A: So when he came back, the Germans let him run, told him to run. And they used the German shepherds. And the only thing that I heard is a little scream, and that was the end of that person.

Q: Oh, my gosh.

A: So this goes to show you cruelty of

Q: Yeah.

A: these people.

Q: Tell me, did your brother and you stay together? Were you able to stay together during this time?

A: Yes.

Q: What was

A: We kind of took care of each other.

Q: Do you think that yeah, how do you how do you explain that you survived?

A: Well, we ate what they gave us, which was very little. Occasionally, the accountant when we walked to work a Yiddish POW contingent

Q: I see.

A: once in a while would send us some bread, threw it at us. _____. We made the best of it. We survived. That was the main thing: Survival. And sometimes at work, we had a guard that was very old that was probably in his late 60s or mid 60s that he used to give us some soup from time to time, a German guard.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. And he was from the Wehrmacht. And he was from Austria, an Austrian.

Q: He was Austrian rather than from Germany proper itself?

A: Yes. He was from Austria. And he kind of you know, he used to say to us, "Just hang in there. It's almost over. Hang in there." 'Cause, you know, he used to he told us about the invasion of Normandy, for instance.

Q: Did he?

A: Yes. It was amazing. I never could believe it, you know. He saw us walk out, throw us a little bit, you know, the best he could, you know.

Q: So you met

A: Anything else than what I just told you, you know _____.

Q: But it's so unusual to here have a guard in the forced labor camp do that.

A: Yes, it probably was. And but decided, you know, he couldn't work anymore anyway because he was evacuated.

Q: But let's just stay those two years in this camp. Tell me a little bit about the barracks that you that you lived in and about the daily routine and, you know, how large it was. And where was it located? Was it in Poland or in Germany?

A: You know, I don't really know. I can tell you this: I went back there.

Q: Oh, did you?

A: Recently, with Lisa.

Q: Uh huh. With your daughter.

A: Right. And we came out to this particular camp where I was. I think it was annexed by the Germans.

Q: So you think it was a part of Poland that had been annexed?

A: Annexed by the Germans. Because my home town was annexed by the Germans. They called it Oberschlesian.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: So because, you know, primarily the industry was coal.

Q: Yeah.

A: Were the coal mines. So I guess they needed coal to produce something there, so where was I?

Q: When you were you were about to talk about after those two years, and I still wanted to talk some more details about those two years.

A: We were at that time at what they called a Yiddish esvangzva (phonetic) arbeitslager.

Q: A Yiddish esvangzva arbeitslager, yeah.

A: So this we were at war for quite a while.

End of File One

Beginning File Two

Q: Okay. This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Jacques Ribons. And so we were talking about the Yiddish Itzvangzaviteslaza (phonetic), which is a Jewish forced labor camp --

A: Right.

Q: -- that you were part of. And I was asking things like what was the living situation. What kind of barracks did you have?

A: We had, we had barracks. We were a little bit overcrowded.

Q: Okay.

A: With straw mattresses.

Q: With straw mattresses, uh-huh.

A: And bunks three high.

Q: Okay.

A: So what they -- well, this is where they really kept us. And occasionally when somebody, an inspection from Switzerland or Sweden came, we had to get rid of the

mattresses. Got new mattresses and new straw. _____ We had a couple of inspections.

Q: I see.

A: And when they walked by, they said how are you treated.

Q: And of course --

A: You didn't tell them.

Q: (Laughing) Yeah, yeah.

A: So --

Q: So they never really found out anything, did they?

A: No, not at all. I think they could see through it.

Q: Yeah.

A: But nothing was said.

Q: So, tell me, was it the same camp commandants the entire time or was there a change?

A: You know, I really don't know. I could not, I could not tell you, really, whether it was the same commandant or not but he was -- I know afterwards -- you know, there were also women which was used by the SS, by the military there.

Q: I was going ask you --

A: There was women.

Q: I was going to ask you were there any women in the camp.

A: Yes, Jewish women. Their husbands were prisoners. And they used them for their own use.

Q: I see. I see.

A: And so they -- we were there about, I guess, maybe a year, maybe not, the SS took over. And they came in and gave us concentration camp clothing. And they put numbers on us.

Q: So you were tattooed?

A: I was tattooed, yes.

Q: What's your number?

A: 178212.

Q: 178212.

A: Yes.

Q: Did that mean that there were -- you were -- there were at least 17,212 prisoners?

A: Probably. I don't, I really don't know. I could not account for anything, you know. Really, I can only tell you what I saw and what transpired there.

Q: Were the women ever used for anything else? I mean, did they ever have actual jobs or was it they --

A: No.

Q: -- they were prostituted?

A: They were prostituted. That's -- I wouldn't -- I didn't want to use that term.

Q: I know, I know. But it --

A: They had husbands there. That's the irony of it.

Q: Well, it's a tragedy and a catastrophe all the way around.

A: Right. Then they gave us the concentration camp clothing and I was tattooed.

Q: Yeah.

A: And we were part of Auschwitz, became part of Auschwitz.

Q: Oh, really? So then you became one of the subcamps of Auschwitz.

A: Right.

Q: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And so you -- did your treatment change? Did the food change?

A: The food was the same. There were -- only thing, you know, they used to -- they got people, the prisoners, to play music as we marched out and as we came in.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

A: You know, there was people that were -- you know, they had people, like Jews from Holland, Jews from France.

Q: Yeah.

A: Jews from just about everywhere. The Polish Jews were, I think, the predominant, you know, people, so. But --

Q: Do you remember the kind of music they were forced to play?

A: March music.

Q: Marching music.

A: Yes. And, you know --

Q: Was there anybody, in addition to that old guard, was there anybody who behaved in a more humane way towards the prisoners amongst the guards or the, you know, the army or even the SS or were they all pretty brutal?

A: I wouldn't say -- only if they think you committed a crime.

Q: Okay.

A: Like smoking.

Q: Right.

A: Like stealing. Things, you know, of that nature.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: They put you up on the gallows so everybody can watch. And we watched quite a bit of that.

Q: Oh, my dear. Oh, my dear.

A: Can you hear me?

Q: I can hear you. I can hear you. Again, but I'm just speechless because I'm trying to imagine a young kid -- I mean, for anybody this would be, this would be horrifying but particularly for young teenage boys, you know, young teenagers.

A: There was no _____.

Q: Excuse me?

A: They took us out. We had to watch while they do it.

Q: Yeah.

A: We were beaten up by them but it's something -- I don't know what I did. I don't remember. I was hit a couple times, you know. They hit me over the back, over my rear end, you know, and --

Q: And your brother too?

A: My brother, basically, no.

Q: Okay.

A: He was with me. I tried to protect him the best I could. And I did, you know. I couldn't do much for him, you know, except we kind of were very close together. He -- I slept in the middle bunk and he slept in the down bunk.

Q: Uh-huh. On the bottom bunk.

A: The bottom bunk. And the third person, I don't remember who it was. You know, you, you were only fighting for your own life, so, you know.

Q: Did he do the same work that you did?

A: Yes. He was a year younger than me. And he was very skinny. He was a little guy, period.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And I had people from my hometown, you know, kids like myself from my hometown. Three sets of brothers, in fact, that survived.

Q: Three sets of brothers.

A: Three set of brothers.

Q: Wow.

A: Myself and my brother. Another couple, which they -- I don't know whether they're still alive. They were their friends. We had another set of brothers that were very close to the -- one of the brothers was a _____. He was very close friends with Elie Wiesel.

Q: I see. And you were in that camp.

A: Yes. He was a scientist who worked for Brooklyn -- the naval yard and died of cancer.

Q: So you kept in touch with them after the war.

A: Yes. In a roundabout way, yes, yes. Elie Wiesel I haven't seen for -- since we got here. Since we left Europe, in fact.

Q: But was he in this camp with you?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I met him in Buchenwald.

Q: So were you transferred at some point?

A: Yes, we were transferred. Let me, let me back up a little bit.

Q: Yeah, let's go back to the story.

A: Continue the story.

Q: Yeah.

A: We were taken out and the Russian army came close.

Q: Yeah.

A: We were taken out and -- to walk. So we started walking. We slept outdoors. And this was, mind you, during the winter season and it was snowing.

Q: Yeah.

A: We kept walking. Probably half the people didn't make it. Either froze to death or didn't take care of sufficiently. I did the best I could. I washed myself with snow. I told my brother to do the same because you get your blood going. And the walk, we walked and walked for probably a couple weeks, maybe more.

Q: My goodness.

A: Time was not of essence.

Q: Yeah, of course.

A: We tried, you know, we tried to run into the homes. We slept in barns. From time to time -- we finally, after two, three weeks, we got to a place called Gross-Rosen.

Q: Gross-Rosen, okay.

A: It was sort of, I think, a death camp. They packed us in in barracks. And, I mean, we were packed. The place was filling up almost. And I didn't think we were going to make it from there. But they took us from there. We were there about a week or two weeks.

Again, time wasn't --

Q: Right.

A: -- important anyhow. And they took us and packed us on open freight trains to Gross-Rosen. Now, come to find out, after the war when I went back with Lisa, that it -- they produced marble in that area. They were digging for marble. And the place was surrounded but you -- the people outside could not look in. No access to it. So nobody knew what was going on in that prison camp.

They took us. Anyhow, they put us on freight trains.

Q: Okay.

A: And they transported us to Weimar.

Q: Right. And Buchenwald is really close to Weimar.

A: Buchenwald is very close to Weimar. Well, lo and behold, there were air raids. And unfortunately, the U.S. Army didn't know, they of course didn't know who was down there and they bombed that train --

Q: Oh. My goodness.

A: -- unfortunately. Anyhow, a lot of people passed at that time. And then they took us into Weimar to Buchenwald.

Q: So those that survived were taken to Buchenwald.

A: Buchenwald, right.

Q: Okay.

A: And we were with kids, with other kids.

Q: Yeah.

A: We had two or three barracks or four barracks. I don't -- I'm not -- don't remember which, you know. And we were on the, I guess on the famous barracks, 66.

Q: Uh-huh. What makes them famous?

A: I don't know. I think everybody that I heard about, they were talking about barracks 66.

Q: Huh. Okay.

A: _____ older kids. Maybe that was the reason.

Q: Okay.

A: And anyhow, they gave us a little bit of soup a day and they took us from _____ out, to march us out. Then put us back. We were supposed to go down for a while. And I got so sick that I really begged them to take me away. I had, unfortunately, diarrhea so bad --

Q: Oh, dear.

A: -- I could no longer take it.

Q: Oh, dear.

A: So they took me into a -- I'm shaky. They took me into a barrack with a lot of, a lot of kids. I think -- what I saw was mostly kids.

Q: Was it an infirmary or what should have been an infirmary?

A: It was barracks set up for that purpose. I don't know -- I can tell you one thing. They took so many people out every day and they didn't come back.

Q: Oh, my goodnesses.

A: After the war, I found out they were giving them -- they were killing them by giving them an injection.

Q: I see.

A: Now, what happened to me is I kind of lucked out. There was a man that came up to me that was working there. Whether he was Jewish or not, I don't know. Whether he was a doctor, I don't know. So he came, of all the kids, he came up to me and he said, "How old are you?" I said, "Sixteen." He says, "You have a long life ahead of you. Let me see what I can do for you."

Q: Oh, my goodness. So what did he do?

A: Well, let me get my composure. I'm just, I'm choking.

Q: Shall we pause for a little bit?

A: Please.

Q: Okay. I'm going to pause.

A: Just take a few minutes.

Q: Okay. I'll pause.

(Pause)

Q: Okay. This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Jacques Ribons. Okay. I'm back. So he came -- I was asking you, what did this man do to help save you?

A: I don't remember if he was a doctor or not. But anyhow, he says, "I'm going to see what I can do for you."

Q: Okay.

A: He said, "Let me take your stool."

Q: Yeah.

A: Which he took my stool and he took it. Wherever he took it, I don't know. He came back a few days later, which I was lucky they didn't put me into that room where --

Q: Yeah.

A: He says, "I think I can help you." So he took me out and put me on a two-wheel transportation thing, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: Like a wheelbarrow. And he took me out. They took me to a hospital. I guess -- there were beds there, bunks, and things like that.

Q: Within Buchenwald?

A: It was in Buchenwald.

Q: It was --

A: They had other prisoners there, international prisoners.

Q: I see.

A: So they used these hospital primarily for non-Jews, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: Occasionally they did have, like myself, they took me in there.

In comes a guy with an injection. It looked to me like it was a foot long. He gave me an injection. He says, "That will make you feel better." And they started giving me, I forgot what they call this, like a very plain cereal that you cook.

Q: Oh. Could it have been, like, farina or cream of wheat? I mean, whatever --

A: Cream of wheat.

Q:-- the generic name would be?

A: Cream of -- this is what they fed me.

Q: Okay.

A: And I gained a little weight. And I got news out to my brother, my brother was in the barracks, 66, to see whether he can come. And I gave him some food. And they put me back, sort of, together.

Q: Uh-huh. How long did you stay there in that room with those --

A: I couldn't even tell you.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know. When I got a little better, they sent me back to the barracks. And by that time, the closing of the war was just about beginning.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we were there, I don't know how long I was still there, and the war was coming to an end.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: All of a sudden -- we used to hear the artillery from far away. It was -- I forgot the word for this. Erfurt. It was called Erfurt, the town.

Q: Erfurt is a town, yes, a small city.

A: Erfurt, we used to hear the artillery. They were firing across to Weimar.

Q: That's right.

A: And so we used to hear the cannons. And all of a sudden, we had a plane that came in, a tank that came in with U.S. soldiers. This was quite a while later. And they took out people. They took them out and never heard from them again.

Q: So this is a tank, a German tank.

A: No.

Q: This is a U.S. tank?

A: No, it was -- yeah, it was made in the -- I was there for quite a while longer.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then when the war was coming to an end, they broke through the lines, I suppose, from Erfurt --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- the U.S. military, the Third Army moved up and took over Weimar and they came in to us.

Q: So, in other words, the Americans liberated you in Buchenwald.

A: The Americans liberated us in Buchenwald, yes. But it took -- it's a longer story than that because they used to take out people out of the prison camp, either kill them or get rid of them. I don't know what they did with them.

Q: When you're talking about they took them out, who took them out?

A: The Germans took them out.

Q: That's what I thought. Okay. So the Germans --

A: Before the U.S. came, the U.S. Army.

Q: Before they came.

A: Before they came.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: They took out, in fact, one of them, a person, my hometown, their father they took out.

But he was _____. For some reason or another, they kept the kids intact. The prisoners themselves were political prisoners, a lot of them. They made sure that these kids, these Jewish kids, that they kept in barracks 66, 64, 65 got maintained.

Q: Really?

A: They took, they sort of took care of them. I found out later. I didn't know that. And so the U.S. Army moved in and here we were.

Q: What was that like? My God, three, almost three years then that you had been in the camp system, that you had been under such conditions. And all of a sudden, these GIs appear.

A: The GIs, yeah. Let me just --

Q: We can stop. Hang on.

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A: Okay.

(Pause)

Q: Okay. They came in.

A: They came in. There were mostly Jewish kids. And I understand, from what I heard and what I saw, was some non-Jewish kids too among the Jewish kids.

Q: I see.

A: And they took over. They fed us. Put us, really, back together to help and the really, whoever with tuberculosis, with TB --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- was sent to Switzerland, to Sweden, to Germany into the mountains. And they took a group of kids that the French government okayed it and they took us to France.

Q: So you went to France?

A: Yes.

Q: With your brother?

A: One brother and -- there was about three sets of brothers the same way.

Q: Who also went to France.

A: _____. Yes.

Q: How did you get there?

A: They took us by train.

Q: They took you by train.

A: Yeah. When the U.S. Army moved in, they had a rabbi that came over and took the Jewish kids. And some of them were non-Jewish. And they had a segment of the kids

that they sent to France, they sent them to Switzerland, to England. You know, whichever country took them in.

Q: Okay. So you end up in France.

A: I end up in France.

Q: Before we go to France, what was in France, tell me, when you were in Buchenwald and right before the Americans come, what happened with the German guards and the German authorities?

A: Well, the German authority were -- for instance, you know, I was sick. I came out of the hospital and I was laying there on one of the bunks, so to speak, like a shelf.

Q: Yeah.

A: And there was a window and glass and I used to, I watched the main road. All of a sudden I saw tanks moving up in that glass. It was like a mirror reflection in the glass. And I knew the U.S. Army is moving in. So when they came in, they took the kids. And the rabbis, the priests, they gave them, you know --

Q: Right.

A: -- food. They gave them medicine. And some of them had to be hospitalized and they brought us back sort of together.

Q: Yes.

A: And, you know, back to health, so to speak. And they sorted out kids to go to France, it had to do with their health also, to England, and to some other countries, you know, that they -- I don't know all the countries that the kids went to, so.

Q: Yes.

A: But they spread them out. Each country took in so many kids, you know.

Q: But I was backing up to ask you what had happened to all of the German guards. Did they disappear? Were they arrested? Did they run away?

A: The Germans had jumped off the towers --

Q: Pardon?

A: -- during that because -- the guard towers.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And they started running.

Q: I see.

A: If the GIs came up on one of them, they killed them, you know.

Q: Got it.

A: They were running away from the prison, period. And I guess, I don't know who they caught, the main commandant was caught by the U.S. Army. The main people that were caught, the same thing. They had sort of a mini revolution within that prison because there were a lot of Germans that worked in that prison also that were there for many years.

Q: Yeah.

A: Germans that were not Nazis.

Q: That's right. Political prisoners. There were a lot of political prisoners.

A: Political prisoners that were put in there.

Q: Yeah. And so --

A: But they're the ones primarily that run that prison.

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Q: Yeah. Did --

A: Had access to armament. There was a munition factory --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- and an armament factory in one of the prisons down the road. And they had a man over there that _____ worked in that prison, the munition factory. And one of them was Leon Blum.

Q: Really? Well, I --

A: I don't know whether he survived or not.

Q: Yeah.

A: But he was one of the people that was in that. But _____ prison, the armament.

Q: Yeah.

A: And the U.S. Air Force bombed it. And after that, I don't know what happened to the people.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. So you end up in Paris. I mean, excuse me, in France. Was it Paris or was it somewhere else?

A: Yeah, they dispersed all the kids.

Q: Excuse me?

A: They dispersed the kids.

Q: Okay.

A: Some of them went into _____.

Q: Yeah.

A: Others went into a religious home. They had -- they divided them, you know, in different homes.

Q: Okay.

A: Then they had, I want to say they had homes for the French kids also there. So they put them together.

Q: That's right.

A: Jewish kids that had, you know, that survived the war.

Q: Okay.

A: The French kids. One of my friends -- and the OSE took over. I don't know whether you're familiar with the OSE.

Q: Well, tell me about it. What is it?

A: OSE was an organization that was from, I guess -- a French organization which took care of the kids to make sure they go to school and some of them had trades and they paid for the education.

Q: Was it a government organization?

A: No, no.

Q: Was it a Jewish organization?

A: It was a Jewish organization.

Q: Okay.

A: Primarily Jewish. I don't know whether it was totally Jewish. It was like --

Q: How do you spell the acronym?

A: I don't know. It was initials O-S-E.

Q: O-S-E, okay. Okay. OSE. And --

A: They sent a friend of mine to school. He came to the United States and became a millionaire.

Q: Wow. And what about you? When you got off the train, what kind of a place were you --

A: I went into a Jewish religious situation.

Q: Okay.

A: Even though I wasn't religious, I went into that home.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know. I don't know what I was thinking. And I started going to school a little bit and then I returned to the United States in 1947.

Q: So you were in France for, let's say, almost two years?

A: Almost.

Q: Did you learn --

A: I would say a year and a half. April, in April, to be specific, April the 11th was my freedom day in Buchenwald.

Q: Well, those kind of dates you don't forget.

A: No.

Q: April 11th was freedom. And was your brother with you?

A: My brother was with me and there were other two sets of brothers, one of the brothers of the father that they took out and disappeared.

Q: That's right. That's right. So did your brother go with you to France as well?

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A: Yes, yes. He was with me all along.

Q: Okay.

A: He was with me --

Q: Same school, same everything?

A: Pardon me?

Q: He was in the same religious family, then?

A: Yeah. It wasn't a family. It was a home --

Q: It was a home. Excuse me. Uh-huh.

A: -- for religious kids, I think donated by the Rothschild family --

Q: I see.

A: -- you know, for the kids to stay there.

Q: Yeah. The Rothschilds, yeah.

A: And they had Jewish religion, Jewish food, and Jewish upbringing, so to speak, you know. And, like, again, like Elie Wiesel was there also with us.

Q: Oh. So is that where you met him?

A: That's where I met him, right.

Q: Okay. Okay. Did you learn French?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Did you learn French?

A: Oh, yes. I went to French school. You know, it's been a long, long time. I still speak it but I'm a little rusty on it.

Q: Well, but it's such a huge change, where one month you were a prisoner in a concentration camp and month and a half later you're in a home in France and the following September you go to school.

A: It wasn't just like that. First of all, I don't know the time --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, the time it took.

Q: Right.

A: After liberation, again, after a while, we went to Switzerland, went off. A Jewish serviceman, who was a rabbi, he saw to it that the French government, they picked out certain kids that were, I guess, a little healthier than a lot of them --

Q: Right.

A: -- and, you know, designated for France. We were there _____ for several months before we left for France.

Q: Oh, really.

A: Yeah. I don't know about several months. Maybe a couple months. Three months.

Q: Yeah. But you were there for a while.

A: Just for a while.

Q: Yeah.

A: Again, the time wasn't important to me then.

Q: No.

A: So then they picked kids to go, the sick kids, some of them went to Sweden.

Q: Yes.

A: Some of them went to Switzerland that had TB so, you know, to get -- to recuperate. Myself and my brother and a whole bunch of other kids, I don't know how many it was, we were designated to go to France. And when we came to France, we had doctors --

Q: Yeah?

A: -- that checked us over. And they placed us in sort of a vacation home in the country, which was also one of the Rothschilds' homes.

Q: I see.

A: Excuse me. And so we were there for a while. The time element, I just don't, couldn't tell you.

Q: Okay. That's okay.

A: Then we went back to Versailles. We went to Versailles, rather, back -- the first time. We went to Versailles. And then they sent us to school, to public school. Some of them had families, they found families in the U.S. Some of them found each other. We had French kids also for a while but very few of them, what we did have.

Q: Well, in 1945 -- you say your birthday is in August. So in 1945 you turned 18 years old, right?

A: Actually, I -- the truth of the matter, I was born in October.

Q: Excuse me. You born in October.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. So it's October --

A: The reason for August is this. I came to this country. The guy, the guy who had my certificate that I had from the U.S. Army from, you know, from, Germany --

Q: Right.

A: -- read it as August.

Q: Ah, I see.

A: Because it's very similar. And he misread it.

Q: Okay. So you --

A: So I just let it go. I didn't want to change it. I changed the name but I didn't change the date. It was a couple months. It didn't matter.

Q: Okay. Okay. So officially you were born --

A: October.

Q: -- August 15th but in reality you were born October 15th?

A: Right.

Q: Okay. 1927.

A: So I left it, you know, for, you know, August.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, August. I go by August.

Q: So here's my question. By August 15th, 1945, you are free.

A: Right.

Q: And -- but for one --

A: No, in April. We were freed in April.

Q: Correct. Correct. But what I want to say is, at age 18, one-third of your life had been spent in, one could say, absolute fear from the time the war started, when you were 12, and it started just a -- you know, just before your 12th birthday --

A: Right.

Q: -- on September 1st. And I wonder what kind of a person you were at age 18, you know, having gone through all that. How would you describe yourself at the time?

A: You know, I had here an uncle. And also an aunt.

Q: Okay.

A: I didn't know much about the aunt.

Q: Okay.

A: But my uncle, when he found me in the newspaper, he found the name in the newspaper --

Q: Okay.

A: -- wrote me a letter. He couldn't write nothing else but Yiddish.

Q: Okay.

A: So he wrote me this letter and asked who my family is.

Q: Yeah.

A: It turned out that I was his sister's kids, me and my brother.

Q: So, in other words, your mother's brother?

A: My mother's brother was in the U.S.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Had you known about him before?

A: No. I knew she has a brother but I didn't know where and what. I didn't know even how to go about it anyhow.

Q: Yeah.

A: There was -- he was illiterate. Excuse me just a minute. I need to cough.

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Q: Sure.

(Pause)

A: Thank you.

Q: Okay.

A: Are you on again?

Q: I'm on. I'm here.

A: Yeah. Okay. So he, he was -- I didn't know where he was but they told me
_____. He was illiterate. Only he knew how to write in Yiddish.

Q: Okay.

A: He came and found a job as a weaver. A weaver is people that make cloth
_____.

Q: That's right, uh-huh.

A: And he worked for Botany 500, which is a famous company.

Q: What kind of company?

A: Botany 500.

Q: Botany 500?

A: Yes. They went out of business now.

Q: Okay.

A: Because of the innovation of the mechanical, you know, that they have. The factories,
you know, they run it on electricity but -- so he worked for them for many, many years
because at home he was trained as a weaver, weaving fabrics.

Q: I see.

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A: Excuse me.

Q: That's okay. Do you want to take a pause?

A: Thank you. Yes.

Q: Okay. We'll pause a little bit.

A: Thank you.

Q: Okay.

(Pause)

Q: Okay. So we're continuing. And you're saying your uncle was a weaver here for many years in the United States. And he found you through a newspaper.

A: _____

Q: He spoke to you and asked if you were so and so's son and it turns out that he was your mother's brother.

A: Right.

Q: So what happened after that?

A: Well, he didn't have money. He was a very poor man but had a soul. But he -- I don't know where he went. I understand he went to the people that make matzo. And they supposedly had signed papers for me and my brother. And the thing was, you know, we communicated at that time in Yiddish.

Q: Yes.

A: Which I can still, I guess I can still write. But I don't use it. But at any rate, he -- I -- he sent me papers, immigration papers.

Q: Yes.

A: The matzo company signed that I would be important in the government, which is a normal thing for immigrants.

Q: So they guaranteed you. The matzo company gave their guarantee.

A: Right.

Q: They were like your official sponsors.

A: They were official sponsor. So I got the papers and of course the people in France --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- made sure that everything goes smooth. We went to the American consulate, x-ray taken, so on and so forth. And we got immigration papers. For whatever reason, they said that we have to hurry up and be in Sweden by such and such a date --

Q: Okay.

A: -- getting on a ship to go to the U.S. So we got on a train and we went to Sweden, a whole bunch of kids.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know how many.

Q: Okay.

A: They put us on the ship, a Swedish ship.

Q: Do you remember the name of it?

A: You know something? It kind of -- yes, I do but it slipped my mind.

Q: Not right now. That's okay. That's not a problem. So, anyway, they put you on this ship and you're on your way to the United States.

A: That ship was a troop ship during the war. That I know. In fact, I have probably a picture of it too.

Q: Okay.

A: Excuse me.

Q: There are a couple of them that were pretty famous but the names slips my mind as well. One of the first ships out of Europe was used for military purposes. Anyway, was it a --

A: That was a ship _____.

Q: -- Swedish ship or a U.S. ship?

A: It was, yeah, made into a troop ship or whatever.

Q: Yes, but was it -- belonged to the Americans?

A: I don't know who it belonged to. It had the Swedish name.

Q: Okay.

A: It was a Swedish ship.

Q: Okay.

A: As far as I know.

Q: Okay. Got it.

A: We got the papers. Put us on the train. And we came to Copenhagen.

Q: Okay.

A: We went all through Germany, which was bombed out.

Q: Yeah.

A: We finally got to Copenhagen. And from Copenhagen we went to -- I guess by train. The train. Got on the ship and took us across the waters and wound up in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Q: I remember, yes, it's the tip of Sweden. The bottom part, yes.

A: Yeah. So in Gothenburg, we boarded the ship to the U.S. And I don't know how many days it took. I don't remember. And believe it or not, we wound up in New York City. The ship pulled up to dock. And it docked. And my uncle was supposed to come to get us. Well, he couldn't. We got off the ship. We don't have -- we have just clothes what we had on. We thought, well, when we get to the U.S., we'll buy new clothing.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we tossed most of the stuff in the ocean. And we got off the ship. My uncle isn't there.

Q: What did you do?

A: That was the good question. The question was what do I do.

Q: Yeah.

A: But apparently he had enough sense to call one of the Jewish organizations in New York. I can't remember which one. They came and picked us up after a while. And we spent some time there.

Q: Where did your uncle live, by the way? What part of the U.S.?

A: New York City.

Q: Your uncle lived in New York but he wasn't able to --

A: No, no. My uncle lived in Paterson, New Jersey.

Q: He lived in Paterson, New Jersey?

A: Right.

Q: I see.

A: So we went there and they gave us -- you know, I smoked so they gave us, they gave me cigarettes. Brought us some clothing, this organization. Was it HIAS?

Q: HIAS could very well be it.

A: Or one of the organizations similar to HIAS. Or HIAS itself. And he came -- tried to pick us up. They couldn't _____. My aunt had a heart attack and he couldn't come to get me.

Q: Oh.

A: But I didn't know that. Nobody else knew it.

Q: Of course.

A: I'm in New York City with my brother. I have five cents, I swear to you, five cents and I smoked no cigarettes.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

A: Here, I'm in New York City with my brother. I didn't know what to do. So luckily enough, he called this organization. Came, picked us up, kept us for a few days. And they gave -- fed us. Gave us cigarettes to smoke. And my brother smoked. And he finally came to get us. Well, we went to New Jersey. I discovered my uncle is very poor.

Q: Yeah.

A: He lived in this apartment in Paterson, New Jersey.

Q: Yeah.

A: And his wife was sick. What can we do. I couldn't stay with him.

Q: Yeah.

A: So he called another organization in Paterson, New Jersey, which they were absolutely terrific, the people were terrific, and found us an apartment, a room in somebody's house until we, you know -- and put us there. And I went out looking for a job.

Q: And you didn't speak any English.

A: Nope, not a word. Some bad words that I listened to the GIs they used that I found out later what it was.

Q: Oh, dear. Oh, dear. So you were in New Jersey and you started looking for work.

A: For work. And I didn't start school. My brother was young. _____ hired from anybody, you know. We just stayed a while in New Jersey. And somebody came to work that picked him up that lived in Los Banos, California. It was a cotton -- a Jewish guy, who was an American. He owned a cotton farm. And he was going to take him and educate him, you know.

Q: Clear across the country.

A: Clear across the country. And myself, I went to school. Tried to learn English. And of course I met some people and, you know, so on and so forth. And I learned a little at a time and I started going to school, you know. So my brother finally, he got upset about something. He never told me what it was.

Q: Yeah.

A: And he came back. And I moved, I moved to Los Angeles. I couldn't stay with my uncle --

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Q: Okay.

A: -- because he didn't have time. He couldn't do anything for me.

Q: Yeah.

A: I couldn't do anything for him.

Q: Yeah.

A: And New Jersey wasn't the place because I was a young man at that time. I was going to date and all that.

Q: Yeah.

A: And people talked about me in the town. Everybody knew me. I was in the newspaper.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. In fact, you might have a picture of me and my brother.

Q: Really? In the newspaper at the time?

A: Paterson Evening News.

Q: Paterson Evening News.

A: Yes. You probably have a picture of it.

Q: Well, if I can look online, I might just find one. You never know.

A: I think I gave it to you guys.

Q: I'll take a look. I'll take a look in your folder. I don't remember seeing one but I'll take a look.

A: If not, I'll send you a copy also.

Q: Okay.

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A: So --

Q: But I had a question.

A: Yes.

Q: I know I'm interrupting but I had a question.

A: Yes.

Q: And it was when you were still back in 1945 --

A: Yes.

Q: -- before you come to the United States.

A: Yes.

Q: When you turned 18, tell me, what kind of a person were you? I mean, most 18-year-olds today are still -- you can't call them kids anymore but they're not yet adults and yet you had seen so much. You had been through so much. How do you describe the person who turned 18 years old in 1945?

A: I think you grow up fast. I had a responsibility to my brother.

Q: Yeah.

A: And he was really little, skinny and little.

Q: Yeah.

A: So if because of the war, he's that little, the nourishment --

Q: Yes.

A: -- or by genes, but he didn't grow too tall.

Q: Okay.

A: And, you know, I wanted him to go to school. He was smart. And I would be going to work, you know, and just keep him in school.

Q: Right.

A: It turn out that this man came to pick him up.

Q: Yeah.

A: And offered to give him an education. And, you know, and he went to Los Banos, California. You know, I wasn't very happy in New Jersey because I was of age but I was trying to date.

Q: Yes.

A: And everybody knew me in town. Wherever I went, everybody knew me. Wherever I'd go --

Q: So you didn't have much privacy.

A: -- the whole town knew.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I got to a job. I worked for a man who was from Belgium. And one of the reasons he hired me, because I spoke French. So, you know, I had a job for a while and I decided New Jersey, Paterson, New Jersey, is not going to be for me because the people, everybody knew me in town. And I couldn't go out with anybody because everybody knew it.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I had to behave.

Q: No privacy at all.

A: I had to behave.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I left New Jersey and went to California. I had \$50 in my pocket. I bought a ticket.

Q: How did you get there?

A: On a bus.

Q: On a bus?

A: And I traveled to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, my uncle had a stepson that lived in Los Angeles. So I got in touch with him. And he gave me a place to stay. And I kept going to school. I went to high school, going to school, kept going, because I wanted to learn the language, get some education, get some knowledge.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I kept going until about 1947.

Q: Wow.

A: Lo and behold, the Korean War broke out. And me and my brother, who had left the United States and went to Israel, you know -- I forgot this part.

Q: Okay.

A: He went to Israel and he couldn't get a job. Joined the army.

Q: And did he fight for Israeli independence?

A: No. No, no. He went afterwards, after I came here.

Q: Okay.

A: _____ here. So the war was over and independence was in the works.

Q: Right.

A: So he joined the army. He didn't tell me where he was and I didn't tell him where I went, you know, because I didn't want him to worry.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so later on, he told me he was in the army. He was on the border not too far way. Because Israel's not that big. Everywhere's a border.

Q: That's right.

A: So, anyhow, this is where he was in the army. I knew he was in the army but I, you know, I didn't tell him I was in the --

Q: You told me, you said this was the early 1950s when the Korean War --

A: The Korean War broke out in 1950.

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, I get a drafts notice. My brother gets a drafts notice. I went out to the drafts board and says my brother's not here. When is he coming back. Probably not.

Q: Yeah.

A: He comes back to register with the drafts. But anyhow, I registered with the drafts board in New Jersey. I had to follow up here to register. And I got a notice, a drafts notice. Well, again, I was going to school and I had to break the school and I was drafted into the service, in the army.

Q: And did you fight in the Korean War?

A: I -- no, I wasn't directly involved in the fight because I was the guy behind the lines with the artillery.

Q: Okay. I see.

A: So, you know, I spent some time in Japan, at Okinawa and so on, in the Korean War

_____.

Q: Excuse me. The sound is now muffled again.

A: Oh. Can you hear me now better?

Q: Now it's better.

A: Okay. So I was in the, a very little town in Korea. And mostly I spent time on Okinawa, Japan, very little time, and came home and went back to school.

Q: After Los Angeles and back to school?

A: Back to school.

Q: Okay. And this was high school or were you already in college?

A: Well, I didn't -- don't have much of college.

Q: Okay.

A: College, maybe six months.

Q: Okay. So this was finishing up school.

A: Yeah. Well, you know, I had to support myself.

Q: That's right. Okay. Okay. So you came back to Los Angeles and you started working as well?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I got a job. I started working and, you know, and quit college.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And tried to support myself. And I met somebody and I got married.

Q: You met your wife, yes?

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A: My ex-wife.

Q: Your ex-wife. Okay.

A: My ex-wife, unfortunately.

Q: Oh.

A: But I had four kids with her.

Q: You have four children.

A: Four children.

Q: So Lisa is one of those four children?

A: Lisa is second in line.

Q: So she's the second oldest.

A: The second oldest.

Q: How many girls and how many boys?

A: One boy and three girls.

Q: Okay. One boy, three girls?

A: The irony of this, I don't know whether you know anything about Lisa --

Q: No.

A: -- Lisa was a baby. She contracted spinal meningitis.

Q: Oh, dear.

A: And almost died.

Q: Oh, dear.

A: She went to the Children's Hospital in Los Angeles. Because it's a contagious disease.

Q: Yeah.

A: And she came back, although it affected her hearing. And she had a hard time to go to school, go to high school.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I used to go to the high school and talk to the teacher and I got so angry, I was going to kill her. She was _____.

Q: We should probably -- hang on just a second. I want to pause for a minute.

A: Sure.

(Pause)

Q: Okay. So you were -- you had quite an odyssey. You, you know, at age 12, not even 12, you experience war and by the time you were 18, you have been through a forced labor camp. You've lost your mother, your sister, your father. You have only your brother. And you'd been through two concentration camps and through hell. And you end up in Los Angeles, where you marry and have four children. Tell me, when did you start talking about what you had gone through? Did you tell your kids when they were growing up --

A: No.

Q: -- about what your experiences were?

A: No.

Q: Or did you keep it from them?

A: Well, one of the reasons, you know _____.

Q: You know, it's the muffled voice again. Can we --

A: When somebody loves somebody --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you don't want to -- you don't want them to know your agony, your past.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, you kind of protect them.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I never talked about it.

Q: You didn't -- did you tell your ex-wife?

A: No. My ex-wife, you know --

Q: No. Okay.

A: They had meetings, kids, you know, people from Europe.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, we had gatherings or whatever; she would never go to any of those.

Q: Oh, I see. I see. So in other words, there wasn't any interest on that part and so your children, you wanted to protect them from this --

A: Oh, yes, yes. You know, I didn't want them to know the agony I had been through.

Q: Yeah. Did that change at some point?

A: Yes, it did.

Q: When did it change?

A: Well, I was prompted by Lisa, by the kids --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- to tell my story, to let people know --

Q: And when did you start doing that?

A: -- about you. You know, we didn't know about you. So all of a sudden they had interest in me and my life and my past. Before that, you know, nobody ever -- I never talked about it. They know that -- where I came from.

Q: Yeah.

A: But we never talked about anything.

Q: Were they already grown up when they started asking questions?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: They were already grown up.

Q: Do you have grandchildren?

A: In fact, yes, I do, quite a few of them.

Q: Are the grandchildren interested?

A: They are. They are. But, you see, I have -- my wife wound up marrying somebody who's not Jewish.

Q: I see. Okay.

A: My kids, for the most part, they're not Jewish.

Q: I see.

A: So I don't have -- you know, what I mean? It's --

Q: That's right. It's not, it's not --

A: It's sort of --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- a different situation here. Who are you going to talk to.

Q: When your brother was still alive, did you talk to him about the past, because you both had been through it together, or did you not talk about it?

A: Well, we talked very little about it because we both went through the same thing so, you know, there was really not a lot to talk about.

Q: You both knew it.

A: You know, we just kept it in. And my brother in particular, he wouldn't talk about anything, you see.

Q: Yeah.

A: I finally started talking and, you know, and started telling and -- but he didn't. He didn't want to.

Q: Tell me, when you did start talking and telling, did it change you?

A: Change me?

Q: I'm asking, did it?

A: No.

Q: Did it change your relationship with your kids?

A: No, it didn't change. They have sympathy or -- what is the other word. I don't remember the word but they have, they were sympathetic to what I went through. They wanted to know more about it when they got older.

Q: Yeah.

A: And, well, when you go through, I guess, a marriage, I wound up broke after so many years --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- what do you do. I couldn't take them where I wanted to take them.

Q: Yeah.

A: So Lisa suggested let's do this and this and this. And I did.

Q: So you went back with Lisa?

A: I went back with Lisa one time, Lisa and my son. Then I went back another time to Poland. It was my granddaughter -- no, grandson, rather, and my son and Lisa and I.

Q: And what kind of -- you know, did you go back to your hometown?

A: I went back to my hometown. I showed them where I lived. It's so often that the night was -- we got there late in the afternoon. I couldn't show them the main town. We showed them the area where the ghetto was was still fenced up, sort of. And I guess -- I don't think anybody's living there now --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- after so many years. And so we went through the killing camps. The first one, which was Blechhammer, Gross-Rosen, and Buchenwald. So there was not -- you go through this and you really don't see what really happened.

Q: No, it's so many years later but nevertheless, it's the same -- it is back in the area, back in the places where it all happened.

A: That's right.

Q: And I can't imagine that it wouldn't have made an impression on them, that it wouldn't have had great meaning for them.

A: It did make an impression, mostly Lisa.

Q: I see.

A: My son, I don't really know whether it made that much of an impression.

Q: Okay. Well, what about you? When you went back, was it like it was in your memory? What kind of impression did you have of your hometown?

A: My hometown, if I could have disappeared when I was a baby, I would have.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's how I felt about my hometown, so.

Q: Yeah.

A: But there was nothing there, you know.

Q: Have you spoken at schools?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Have you spoken in classrooms to young kids?

A: No.

Q: No. Or to teenagers? Or has it been mostly when you talk now, it's been to your own family members?

A: To my own family members. You know, there's another situation, that some people that project themselves, that did well --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- I happen to know one or two, that did well financially and they try to project themselves as the people that it happened to. So they want to write a book and they want to do this, they want to do that. And everybody else is left behind. So they do that and they come in the forefront of all this.

Q: Yeah. That's right.

A: And they went to schools right here in _____ --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you know, and teach in schools, you know _____. Unfortunately, the way I see it, some of these people that go to the school and teaching of what happened --

Q: Yes.

A: -- don't tell them the whole story. They make up some of the stuff.

Q: There's always a danger that that can be, you know. Sometimes people remember things differently but --

A: You remember things differently but also this guy, this person is in the forefront.

Q: Yeah.

A: He wrote a book. He's pushing himself. Like he went to see the governor and _____.

Q: I think I know what you're saying, is that you found that a little bit distasteful.

A: Pushing themselves out in front.

Q: Yeah.

A: And you're kind of left behind if you're a little reserved, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so people call him. You know, they know that, so. I don't know. I just --

Q: Have you ever, have you ever given an interview to a newspaper before?

A: Yes, I did. In fact, there was a man here that was in the newspaper business -- not in the newspaper business. He worked for the newspaper.

Q: Okay.

A: He worked for the newspaper.

Q: He was a reporter.

A: He came to me and asked me because what happened in Buchenwald itself --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- I have seen -- first, if you're a kid, you move around.

Q: Yeah.

A: They have a, they had a -- I don't know how you say it in English.

Q: In Dutch, Dutch?

A: They have a quarry, rather --

Q: Okay.

A: -- that they were getting stones. I don't know for what purpose. Probably for making cement or whatever. And they buried artifacts. And what I mean, artifacts, what I have seen is primarily jewelry, cases and cases and cases of jewelry that, military trucks that drove up and they loaded all that stuff up and _____. And they had GIs with machine guns guarding all this.

Q: And this would be at Buchenwald?

A: At Buchenwald. And I told him the story. And he was going to write. And his bosses said you can't do that because you'd be accusing the government. It disappeared.

Nobody knows where it's at. It disappeared. What that was _____. Nobody knows why. And, you know, he says do you have any witnesses. Yeah. I called up. They probably have their story too, you know, the Kaleckshtaud (phonetic) in New York.

Q: Yeah.

A: We had one in France, a couple brothers from my hometown _____ with me.

They witnessed that. They told them. There are a couple of other people that I met that were there at the same time I was, you know. And that didn't do it. He says the government would be accused of what.

Q: Well, it could be that it was sold -- either they gave -- either they transported that jewelry and gave it up to the government or the soldiers themselves just took it.

A: I got to tell you, people went over there after they left and they found all kinds of stuff buried in the ground because they stepped on it.

Q: So you --

A: Whole cases opened.

Q: So you're saying jewelry that was buried in the ground on the site of Buchenwald.

A: On the site of Buchenwald in the quarry.

Q: Yeah, in the quarry.

A: And knowing what I knew after the war --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- what they did is they took five prisoners or ten prisoners to dig these tunnels, you know, to bury that.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then they shot them.

Q: You're talking about the Germans who did this before the war.

A: Yes.

Q: I mean before the war ended.

A: Before the war ended. During the war.

Q: Yeah.

A: We were still prisoners. They dug these tunnels and they killed them.

Q: Yeah.

A: So there would be no witnesses. The guards who came forward and said, told the story was a German --

Q: Okay.

A: -- that -- who saw what happened. So they started digging and they found all this. And the little reporter, he didn't want to write it because you're accusing the government of hiding things or stealing things. He says you can't do that.

Q: So this was the interview that you gave to a newspaper man.

A: The newspaper man.

Q: Yeah. And it never went anywhere.

A: Never went anywhere. So --

Q: Well, I'm grateful that you have spoken with us today, you know, that you have wanted to get your story recorded by the Holocaust Museum here in Washington, D.C. We're very, very appreciative that you've done it.

A: You know, I tell you, my mother was an angel.

Q: Yeah.

A: And my mother, when she said that, I have never forgotten what she said to me.

Q: Yeah. Those were amazing words, an amazing, and an amazing sacrifice.

A: And she said to me, go save yourself. Then I tell her I can die alone.

Q: Yeah. I'm glad that you shared that. And I'm glad that other people will be able to hear that and know that about her when they'll be able to listen to your story.

A: I'm very appreciative.

Q: Is there anything else you would want to add to what we've talked about today?

A: I don't know what to think of. Well --

Q: You know, in one interview, you can never catch -- you can never get everything.

A: You can't.

Q: It's just like that in life. It's how -- we've talked for a couple of hours now but, you know, we're talking about your whole life so how can you put all that in a few hours.

A: Well, you know, _____ I'm going to add a few things.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know whether you can put it in perspective or not. But, you know, they used to take people and hang them to teach the people a lesson. If you do this, the same thing is going to happen. And people started making noises. So they had machine guns in the towers and they started firing, you know.

Q: You mean the dying people make noises.

A: Not the dying people. The dying people were hanging. They couldn't make noises. They were just swinging. But they just, they had guards on the towers --

Q: Okay.

A: -- that the prisoners started making noises, anything at all, some movement, they fired right in the crowd, into the prisoners.

Q: Wow. Wow. So you couldn't even show that you were upset.

A: Oh, of course not. You know, they took you out and they did what they call
_____.

Q: Yeah.

A: And you had to watch it, you know, the hanging, you know. You just couldn't stay in the barracks. You had to watch the whole episode. And this 15-year-old kid that worked with me and smoked cigarettes and they caught him doing it, even though I did also, he wouldn't tell them that and they hung him.

Q: Oh, my God.

A: A French kid.

Q: Oh, my God. Oh, my God. And there but for the grace of God it could have been you because you smoked as well.

A: Right. And, you know, nearby there was some English prisoners of war. And we used to encounter them when we walked to work. You know, sometimes we walked the opposite direction.

Q: Yeah?

A: And, anyways, in that place --

Q: Yeah?

A: -- we end up -- we used to hike. We were in an open, open field in the open area and they bombed the hell out of it. And they came very frequently because of the fact that they produced oil, fuel --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- out of coal. They extracted fuel.

Q: So it was --

A: _____

Q: It was a target. It was, you know, trying to take up something that could help the German war effort --

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you know, so when they bombed the place, you had no place to go. And we were in the open. For some reason or another, I walked in through one of the bunkers that they built, that we built for them.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: They had -- I went in there and for whatever reason they didn't kick me out, this one part.

Q: Okay.

A: And they bombed the hell out of it. You know, they -- it just choked. They couldn't penetrate. It didn't kill anybody except a piece of cement fell on some person there that killed them.

Q: But it meant that you were a hair's breadth away from death so many times, so many times. And it's incredible. It's incredible. I mean, it gets me -- gives me the sense -- I mean, one of the questions that I have is did you ever not have fear? For the entire six years, was there anytime you were not afraid?

A: No. I was afraid. I was afraid for my life. I'd run into -- one time during an air raid, I went into a shack --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you know, that had a shed on top of it. And basically people do that for shrapnels. The debris starts falling when the bomb explodes.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they buried all the -- the whole -- there were about ten people there. And we were all buried. Fortunately enough, another bomb dropped nearby and uncovered us and we found each other right on top of one other.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

A: Well --

Q: Well, any final thoughts?

A: No. I hope it never happen again.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. Well, as I say, I know that it cost -- I know that it's not easy to remember these things but I also, on behalf of the museum, I'm very appreciative that you've taken the time and that you have shared all of this with me today and through us to be able to share it with those who will research and those who will show interest in what happened to people, in the future. So with that, I'd like to say that this concludes --

A: Well, excuse me one second.

Q: Anything else you want to add?

A: I only want to add one thing.

Q: Okay. Let's do that before I --

A: I want to go back in time.

Q: Okay.

A: _____ whole thing. But this man that they shot that I told you, they took us out, an old man.

Q: The father?

A: The father.

Q: The father of those _____.

A: The father they shot.

Q: Yes.

A: They had me out there. And for whatever reason, you know -- we were against the wall. For whatever reason, he just couldn't do it. And they told me that --

Q: Are you talking when you were in the ghetto, you mean?

A: In the ghetto. When the ghetto was closing.

Q: When the ghetto was closing. So was it a German soldier who was doing the shooting?

A: It could have been a Pole also.

Q: Okay.

A: Or a German. I don't know who they were, you know. It wasn't the SS.

Q: Okay. And it was in a --

A: I think they were SA people. You know what they are, right, I'm sure?

Q: Excuse me. SA?

A: SA.

Q: Yeah. SA, yeah.

A: Okay. The SS people.

Q: There were SS and there were SA too, yeah.

A: SA. They are the ones who did the shooting.

Q: I see. I see.

A: So anyhow, I didn't have to go for burial. You know, I don't know what they did.

There were about 19, 20 people there that were killed that day -- that night.

Q: That's right, in the middle of the night.

A: Yeah.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much.

A: I know you probably had a burden on you, you know. _____ people.

Q: Well, it is -- I'll finish, I'll finish our final statement and we can then talk a little bit more. But what I'm going to say right now is that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Jacques Ribons on May 20th, 2014.

Thank you again, Mr. Ribons.

A: Thank you.

Q: Yeah.

End of File Two

Beginning File Three

Q: Hello. This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Jacques Ribons on June 10, 2014, taking place between Washington, D.C. and Las Vegas, Nevada. It is a continuation and addition to the interview we conducted with Mr. Ribons on May 20, 2014. There were some topics that were omitted from the original interview, and Mr. Ribons would now like to complete that picture. So please, Mr.

Ribons, let me know what it is that you wanted to add to what you originally talked to us about.

A: I am not sure that I gave the interview on the subject of a march from Blechhammer to Gross-Rosen.

Q: Let's talk about it in detail, even if it might be in the original interview. Tell me about that march and as much as you remember. And what about it is significant in your mind?

A: Well, the Russian Army came close, took over just about all of Poland.

Q: Yeah.

A: And you can hear the rifle shots, and the Germans took out the whole tent, with the exception of some very sick people that were left there. And we start walking. We didn't know where we were going or nothing.

Q: So which camp was this?

A: This was Blechhammer.

Q: Blechhammer. Okay.

A: So from Blechhammer we walked. And every second night or every night, if I remember right, they took us to a farm. And we slept outside in the barns, where they had the cows and the pigs, and you know, the prisoners went there to sleep.

Q: And so what time of year was this?

A: What time of year?

Q: Yeah. Was it winter?

A: January.

Q: So it was cold?

A: Yes. I think it was the month of January.

Q: Okay. So was there snow on the ground?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Was it difficult to walk?

A: It was difficult to walk. Mainly, we walk on the main streets, where the German Army started retreating. We walked alongside the ravine, so to speak, you know, alongside that main street. And there were guns, but the Russians machine gun the area where the Germans were walking. And occasionally, they hit us as we were walking.

Q: Can I interrupt just for a second?

A: Sure.

Q: When they machine gun, does that mean they were flying overhead and doing this?

A: The Russian Air Force was flying overhead and had machine guns, primarily, aimed at the Germans. So they had German guards with machine guns watching us. So they kind of machine gunned along the line of the prisoners.

Q: I see. So they must have been flying pretty low, and it was nevertheless dangerous because you were walking right next to them --

A: Right.

Q: -- on the side of the road?

A: Correct. So occasionally, they killed some prisoners. I don't think they could have helped it. They were aiming at the guards, primarily, and they carried guns, machine guns and rifles and so on to watch the prisoners. And we walked. Probably every night

we stopped. We slept outside in the snow. And on a Sunday, we wound up in a barn with the cows and pigs.

Q: How were you dressed?

A: In -- very skimpy, in the prisoners' uniforms that we wore. Myself, personally, I had a -- I happened to have a sweater somehow. I don't remember how I got it. And I wore that sweater. And I also wore bags, you know, the empty bags of cement as protection to keep warm.

Q: And you would wear that under the uniform?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q: And what kind of footwear did you have?

A: Myself, I had a pair of boots somehow I got, and there were no soles on them.

Q: Oh, my.

A: So you know, they were very skimpy. It was actually -- you know, we got all wet. My feet got all wet. And well, I didn't have any shoes. So I wrapped, you know, some of the stuff, my feet in cloth, that I could find or whatever I could get, you know, so my feet wouldn't freeze.

Q: So when you were walking along the side of the road, and it was January, and there was the machine gunning from the Soviets, and the Germans as well, were there snow drifts? Was it loud? Was it icy?

A: No. We actually walked not on the outside of the road, because it was impossible to walk, but we walked on the main road to the side.

Q: I see.

A: And you know, on one side of the street. And as we were walking, the Russians, I don't know if willingly or not, the machine gun, primarily, they tried to machine gun the guards.

Q: Yes.

A: And of course, the guards moved in among the prisoners. So you know, I guess they must have hit some prisoners.

Q: I see. So the guards would realize this, and then they would intermingle with the prisoners?

A: With the prisoners, correct.

Q: I see. And by that point, were there a lot of German guards, or was it few and far between?

A: No, it was a lot of guards. Again, they carried machine guns. However, you know, the roads were full of people going west, because the Russians were right behind us. So we could hear rifle shots from time to time. So they were very, very close behind us.

Q: So you were about to talk about one Sunday you ended up someplace.

A: One Sunday, we ended up in a barn. I don't know where that was. And they gave us coffee. And they were shooting, practicing, I guess, either that or shooting at the legs of the prisoners. So of course, they fell, and us, we left them there.

Q: Who was doing the shooting?

A: The Germans.

Q: The Germans were shooting at the legs of the prisoners?

A: Right.

Q: As you were drinking coffee?

A: Well, we were getting coffee from that big -- what do you call it -- pot, and they were giving the prisoners coffee. Well, the prisoners did, but the Germans are the ones that allowed that to happen, the coffee pot.

Q: Yeah.

A: And as we got the coffee, they were shooting at the legs of the prisoners.

Q: Oh, my.

A: So when that happened, of course, they fell. They couldn't stand up.

Q: Of course.

A: And we had to leave them behind. And I am sure -- I personally didn't see it, but I'm sure they killed them after they left.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. Did people die as they were marching?

A: Oh, yes, many, many people. They were actually froze to death. We had to sleep in the snow. Occasionally, on a Sunday -- we walked about three Sundays, and I was able, with my brother and some other kids, get into a barn with the cows and the pigs, you know, and keep warm, you know.

Q: So you were walking for at least three Sundays?

A: I believe it was three Sundays.

Q: So that would mean at least two weeks, maybe more?

A: Three weeks.

Q: Three weeks?

A: About two to three weeks. And again, I don't know how many prisoners died during

that march.

Q: Yeah.

A: I mean, it must have been an enormous amount of prisoners that passed on. I try to --
I'm sorry.

Q: No, I was going to say, it's the kind of stamina you would need in order to survive
that would be very high, and some people just couldn't hold out.

A: That's correct. We fought for our lives, literally.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I was fortunate. I was able to make it. I tried to help a man that I knew in
prison. He was from France. And his name was Ribak.

Q: Ribak?

A: R-I-B-A-C or B-A-K. I don't know how he spelled it.

Q: R-I-C --

A: No, no. R -- Ribak.

Q: Oh, R-I-B-A-C-K?

A: R-I-B, yes. And I helped him as much as I could, and then I finally gave up. I
couldn't do it any longer, and --

Q: In what way were you trying to help him; by helping him walk?

A: By helping him walk. Yes, by helping him walk. I mean, I knew him in prison. We
occasionally worked side by side, you know, so.

Q: Did anybody try to escape?

A: Probably. I didn't have the stamina. I wouldn't know where to go.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know.

Q: Yeah.

A: We were in Germany at the time, so.

Q: Were there civilians on the road, too? I'm sorry I interrupted.

A: Oh, yes, there were civilians. There were people with push carts and their belongings. There were all kinds of people that walked, because they were trying to avoid the Russians, you know, particularly if they were Germans, you know.

Q: It sounds like chaos.

A: Yes, it was, absolutely. And we had Russian prisoners, and you know, all kinds of prisoners walked alongside of us. The road wasn't big enough for all of these people that walked, including the German Army.

Q: Tell me this, how many lanes did it have, or at least the main roads you were on?

Were they single lanes, one in each direction, or were they wider than that?

A: I believe they were wider than that. I'm not sure, you know. Again, we were fighting for our lives. We didn't pay attention too much of what was going on around us, except, you know, we tried to hide from the bullets.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, and we didn't know they were Russian planes until they came down real low.

Q: Yeah.

A: So it was chaos, absolutely chaos.

Q: Yeah.

A: And it was a 250-mile stretch. And I took my daughter and my son and my grandson on that stretch from Blechhammer to Gross-Rosen in a van.

Q: Oh, my gosh.

A: Just recently about a year ago.

Q: So that would be like in 2013?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: So you redid the whole death march walk?

A: The whole trip, yes, the whole trip. From my hometown where I was born to the trip, all the way to Gross-Rosen and from Gross-Rosen to Buchenwald.

Q: So tell me, the 250 miles, does that go from your hometown to Buchenwald, or does that go just from Blechhammer?

A: From Blechhammer to Gross-Rosen was about a 250-mile stretch. At least, I didn't know. My daughter told me that it was that distance.

Q: Of course. I mean, at that time, how would you know. It took you three weeks or so at that time. How long did it take by van when you went?

A: By van, I don't know, about eight hours, ten hours. I'm not sure. I didn't even think of paying attention to that, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: I drove with my daughter, my grandson and my son.

Q: Did any of it look familiar to you, the road, when you went on it again?

A: No, no, no. It was totally changed, because they -- first of all, you know, with so

much chaos, you didn't even pay attention to anything, except, you know, you try to survive. You know, the food was very scarce. I was in one of the areas where you ate in one of the farms that we walked in. I saw a house, people, that the farmer, I guess, lived in. And I run to the farmer, knocked on their door asking for food, for bread. And the commander, so to speak, the person in charge of the prisoners, he said, What are you doing here, in German. And I said, I would like to have something to eat. So that young woman -- it was a young woman. He said, he says, you can give him bread, provided that you sleep with me tonight.

Q: Oh.

A: So she says okay. And she gave me a loaf of bread. And when I went out, I got hit over my back with a cane. And I went to my brother, and I gave him half of the bread. We ate that just one night, you know.

Q: Oh, my gosh. What a horrible -- what a horrible situation and how cruel, how absolutely cruel.

A: It's much crueler than anybody can even anticipate.

Q: Yeah, yeah. What human beings will do in order to kill the humanity in others.

A: Well, I would imagine, you know, it happens all over, even today.

Q: Yeah.

A: So the cruelest animal on earth is the human being.

Q: Unfortunately. Unfortunately.

A: So anyhow, then we got to Gross-Rosen. We were there for several days. We were packed like sardines. And we had just a bowl of soup during the day. And I don't

remember whether we got bread or not. We were there for almost about a week. And that was Gross-Rosen. And Gross-Rosen was very secluded, because they had -- they were mining marble in that area. So the people on the outside couldn't see what was going on there in that -- in Gross-Rosen. And you know, after five days or so, a week maybe, maybe longer, they loaded up -- they loaded us up on the freight trains. They were going and taking the marble to market, I guess. And they loaded up the prisoners on these open freight trains, and they took us. We didn't know where we were going, and with guards on them. Each car had two guards with machine guns or regular guns. I'm not sure what. At that time, I wasn't really familiar with the weapons.

Q: Yeah. Just that they can kill.

A: Right. So they -- when they loaded us up, we were on the way. And we got all the way to Weimar where we were bombed. I think the allied's air force made a mistake and didn't know who it was, because they did see guards watching these things, you know, and they bombed the train. A lot of Germans, the guards, including the prisoners, were killed, a lot of them.

Q: Yeah. And this was allied bombing?

A: This was allied bombing. I don't know what air force that was there.

Q: Yeah.

A: But primarily, I think the U.S. Air Force was in that area, or the U.S. Army was in that area, you know, so.

Q: Did you ever make it then to Buchenwald --

A: Yes.

Q: -- or just to Weimar?

A: No, we made it into Buchenwald. They took us to Buchenwald, and I --

Q: Excuse me. Can I interrupt you for a minute.

A: Sure.

Q: Did the train go until Weimar, the Town of Weimar, or did it go up to the camp at Buchenwald?

A: To my knowledge, the railroad into Buchenwald, the railroad tracks, to my knowledge, if I remember right, were bombed out. So they took us by truck.

Q: I see. I see.

A: Into Buchenwald. It was not all that far.

Q: No, no. It isn't that far.

A: So in fact, we used to walk it after the war. Because Buchenwald is in the mountains, and this is below the mountain. So from there, we were there, I don't know, from January until April.

Q: So you were in Buchenwald for all that time?

A: Oh, yes, and we were in what is called a children's barracks. It had three -- I think they had three or four barracks where they kept just children. And I guess, there was a whole story behind it, because the -- also Germans, since the 1930s, were -- they were prisoners.

Q: Yes. In Buchenwald, it had had a lot of German political prisoners.

A: Right. So they sort of protected, to my knowledge, the kids. And at the time that they tried to take the kids out, we went to this appellplatz, and you know, we all lined up.

And then they took us back to the barracks. What happened in the interim, I don't know. I guess they had -- they had, within the prison, you know, people that carried guns. In fact, outside of Buchenwald, there was an ammunition factory.

Q: Now, I'm a little confused at this point. When you were in Buchenwald from January to April, --

A: Right.

Q: -- who was in control?

A: Well, the Germans were in control. However, there also, since the factory where most of the German prisoners worked, and the other prisoners, I don't know which one of the prisoners they kept work in the ammunition factory, they smuggled in a lot of arms, the Germans.

Q: Okay.

A: And to my knowledge, they had Germans with guns roaming the prison. So I guess, the Germans feared a lot that the prisoners, whether it was the Germans or Russian prisoners, I don't know, but I know there were Germans.

Q: Okay. But when you are saying Germans, are you talking about German political prisoners or --

A: German political prisoners that smuggled in arms.

Q: Oh, I see what you are saying. They were working in the ammunitions factory.

A: In the ammunitions factory.

Q: They were smuggling in some arms that were kept secret from the authorities?

A: Absolutely, yes.

Q: And yet, they would patrol the place with those arms; is that correct?

A: Not patrol, but they watched. As soon as the Germans left, they took over.

Q: I see. As soon as the regular Nazi, you know, they left, then these political prisoners

--

A: Yes, these political prisoners came out and tried to help -- they were not just Germans. They were all kinds of prisoners. There were Swedes, and they had Danes. I don't know where -- the Danes I can understand, but I don't understand the Swedes, how they got there.

Q: Yeah, because they are supposed to be neutral.

A: Right. I don't know how they got there, but they had them there. So and the reason I know that to be a fact is because I was hospitalized. I had extreme diarrhea that they -- I begged them to take me away already. I couldn't take it anymore.

Q: I remember that part in our conversation before, yes.

A: Right. So --

Q: And what was -- what did you do and your brother when you were there? Were you also put to work or --

A: No.

Q: -- or not?

A: No. In Buchenwald, we didn't work.

Q: I see.

A: At least the time, the period of time that I was there.

Q: I see. Okay.

A: You know, there were deaths all over. People cut out the innards of the dead and ate, you know. This is the kind of stuff that I saw. It was a matter of either dying or doing that, so.

Q: What about, when you say that the Nazi authorities left and the political prisoners took over, could you say that they liberated -- the German political prisoners liberated the camp, or was it another army that did it?

A: No, no. I think it was -- I can't think of the general's name that came in. Let me kind of put a little emphasis on the whole situation, the whole picture there.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: They had a -- if I can remember the town -- Erfurt.

Q: Erfurt, yes, is near there.

A: It was in the mountains, across the mountains. You could see from Buchenwald all the way into the mountains of Erfurt. They had a battle going on in Erfurt. At night, we used to see the cannons going off, the artillery going off at night from Erfurt, because it lit up. So the general who was the tank commander, and I can't remember his name. My memory is not like it used to be.

Q: That's easy to find out though. We can look it up, you know, who that would have been.

A: Well, he got killed in Germany in a car crash or something. I'm not sure how he died, the general.

Q: Oh.

A: He was in charge of the tank unit that came into Buchenwald.

Q: And did you see then American soldiers?

A: Yes. There was just a tank came in with a couple -- they opened the turret, and they peaked out. And the Germans were already gone. They jumped off the guard towers, and the prisoners were chasing them. You know, so they caught some. You know, it was all chaos, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: They killed some, you know, and they brought some back to prison. So they -- the Germans were gone.

Q: Yeah.

A: The army came in and -- the American Army came in, and of course, they start giving us food, you know, rations and stuff like that. And then organizations came in from western Europe that fed us after a while. So but as a whole, Erfurt, they were there for about a week or maybe more. They were shooting at the Germans across the mountains, and you could see it. At night, you could see it.

Q: So when they finally came into the -- into Buchenwald itself, the tank and with the solders, --

A: The tank, yeah, with the people in it, opened the turret and looked out.

Q: And did they get out?

A: You know, I don't recall that.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't recall if they got out or were in the tanks.

Q: Where were you when you saw this?

A: We kind of roamed around, because there was nobody there to keep us anywhere, you know, because the Germans were already gone. I saw the Germans -- you know, I used to sleep on the top bunk. It was three high.

Q: Yeah.

A: And the top bunk, I could look out the window. You know, what it is was glass, and when I got the window in a certain position, we could see the main road.

Q: Really?

A: Right. So they -- because we were on top of a mountain.

Q: That's right. It was high up.

A: Right. So we looked in there, and I saw the tanks, the Germans running and Germans jumping off the towers. And it was just like a movie scene of some sort. So this is what I saw through that window. And I was kind of -- you know, because they were shooting into the barracks. So we got to the ground on the floor, and we just waited it out, you know.

Q: Were there any revenge killings?

A: Yes. They had, some of the people, I don't know what rank they were, what capacity they were, the Germans, they took them in to where they held the prisoners, the Buchenwald prisoners, you know, that they tortured them there. And they took the Germans, and they gave us two hours for people to go in and beat them up.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: So --

Q: And things took place then, huh?

A: Well, you know, you punch the guy. How much revenge can you take, you know, so.

Q: Yeah. What did I want to ask you? Now, there is a famous photograph of, I believe it is Eisenhower. I'm not exactly sure. But when he comes and he sees what has happened at Buchenwald, he is so appalled that he orders the townspeople of Weimar to come and be forced to look at --

A: Right.

Q: -- what was going on in the camp.

A: Correct.

Q: Were you still there when that happened?

A: Yeah. That was in the beginning, you know, because we were there several weeks after.

Q: Okay. Can you tell me about that?

A: About that, I cannot tell you very much. But you know, because first of all, the army kept away the prisoners from these people that they brought in.

Q: Oh, so you saw them at a distance?

A: We saw them in the distance. We couldn't get so close to them, because of the fact that, you know, revenge would have taken place. And in the U.S., don't take revenge on other people, you know, even, you know, they come into a town, and they don't kill other people.

Q: Yeah.

A: Either they keep them prisoners or whatever.

Q: So in other words, the reason why the prisoners were kept away from the townspeople was because to prevent any kind of violence happening?

A: Well, you couldn't help some violence.

Q: Right.

A: Because the prison -- the wires were all torn down. You could go out through the wires anywhere you wanted to go. I used to go to the villages and ask for things to eat, you know, in the beginning.

Q: And did they give them to you?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I think they had so much fear in them, that it was beyond belief. You know, a guy nearby Buchenwald was a mayor of this particular town. He was made mayor right after the Germans moved away and the Allies came in, the Allied Forces. I don't know who installed him as mayor, but he was the mayor. I walked into the mayor's house, and I asked him, I would like to have a bike. He says, no problem. He gave me an address, and I went up there and tried to get the bike. And of course, the bikes were all hidden. You couldn't find them. So you know, the idea is that the -- the reason I'm saying that, that the Germans had so much fear of being beaten up or being killed. And in fact, some of them were.

Q: Yeah.

A: By the Russian prisoners, you know, the ones that were older, not the youngsters, you know.

Q: Finish the story about the bike. Did you finally get a bike?

A: No. They didn't have it. It was all empty.

Q: Okay.

A: All the barns were empty. Everything was empty. You know, so I didn't get a bike.

Q: So but it means that by the time that the Americans got -- they were entrenched there, you were able to move out of the camp?

A: Oh, absolutely. Somehow or another, we got right through the fence. The fence was torn apart, and we just walked out. And we went to the nearby towns. I went a couple of times to Weimar.

Q: What was it like? Did you still wear your prisoner's uniform?

A: We didn't have anything else, really. Just a prisoner's uniform.

Q: How did people behave?

A: Fear.

Q: Okay.

A: Some of them were beaten up by others, by the prisoners. So, you know, I was a kid incapable of doing anything, too weak.

Q: Yeah.

A: So.

Q: But you saw it in their eyes?

A: Oh, yes. I saw it, saw them being beaten up, and they were beaten up when they brought the Germans in. I don't know whether it was soldiers or civilians that were brought in, and kept them where they used to torture the prisoners. They kept them there. And they used to let them in at, let's say, 3:00 in the afternoon for a half hour to beat the hell out of them, you know. But you know.

Q: But were these civilians that were brought in there? A: Yes, civilians. I don't know what capacity, or if they were soldiers, they also were, you know, in probably civilian uniforms. I have no idea.

Q: But what I'm trying to get at is, they weren't former guards that you could recognize?

A: No. No.

Q: Okay. The reason they were brought in is because they happened to be German, not because they happened to have been a particularly cruel guard?

A: They had some too.

Q: Oh, yeah. I'm sure.

A: But they watched how much beating they could get, you know. They wouldn't allow, even though that person had seen about 19 Germans being shot, you know, soldiers.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I couldn't tell you who shot them. I know they wore military uniforms, but whether there were civilians in the uniforms or American or any other nationality that shot him, you know, so.

Q: And how old were you at this point?

A: I was born in 1927. This was '45.

Q: You were 18 years old when you were seeing this?

A: Yes. You know, we were used to seeing all kinds of stuff.

Q: Yeah.

A: I have seen dogs chasing the prisoners and eat them up alive, you know, kill them

and eat them. You know, it was not something -- or people being hung, for whatever reason that they found, you know. So it was not something that --

Q: It's not new to you, in other words?

A: -- I hadn't seen before. It wasn't new.

Q: It wasn't new to you?

A: No.

Q: It was already --

A: I, myself, were under a gun once or twice, you know, but I -- they let me go.

Q: You mean you were under threat of being shot?

A: Right.

Q: And this was where?

A: This was still in the ghetto.

Q: I see. Oh, I remember. I remember. Yeah, you had told me about that. How long did you stay at Buchenwald after the Americans arrived?

A: It wasn't really that long. There was a -- you know, I didn't know, because I didn't -- there was a rabbi, I suppose. He was an American chaplain that worked on taking the kids out of Buchenwald. And I guess, each government, to my knowledge, I found out later, let in so many kids. And some kids, I understand, went to Cuba. Some kids went to England. Some went to Switzerland, and they went to France, they went to Belgium. It depended on the government how many kids they would allow in, into the country.

Q: I see. And so you were amongst that group?

A: I was amongst that group that went to France.

Q: And how long did you stay there? Where did they take you?

A: They took us, if I -- if my memory is right, to a home that the Rothschild family owned.

Q: That the Rothschild family owned?

A: And they gave the home, I guess, to use for the kids for the summer. I don't know. They had their hires in France to take care of all the kids. To what capacity, I have no idea. They gave us a home. They gave us food. They gave us schooling, you know.

Q: Yes.

A: They sent us to school, you know. So it was a variety of things, and I don't know who was what.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, like for instance, my friend, Elie Wiesel, look what happened to him. He went to the Sorbonne in Paris.

Q: Yes.

A: You know, the guy that was also his friend, my hometown friend, a fellow by the name of Gallenstein (ph.), he went also to the Sorbonne, because they were geniuses. They were geniuses, these guys. And I don't know who else. And they sent them to trade schools, and they sent them to different things. I came to the United States early enough, you know, right past -- it wasn't that long after that, about a year, year and a half maybe.

Q: Do you remember the date that you came to the U.S.?

A: The date exactly --

Q: Or the month?

A: Yes, I do, but I have it written down.

Q: It's okay. I'm just curious.

A: Yes, I do have it. I have it written down. I used to know, but I don't know now.

Q: Yeah. Did you sail into New York?

A: At the moment, I cannot remember.

Q: That's okay. Did you sail into New York or some other port?

A: No, we came -- we went to -- from France, they took us to Sweden. We came from Sweden across the SS Gripsholm, which used to be a cruise ship in War World II. It was reconverted into a passenger ship. And they brought us into New York. There was a lot of other people. There were a lot of Russian immigrants and all kinds of stuff, all kinds of people that were on that ship. And we came to New York. When I came here, they didn't have Ellis Island anymore.

Q: Okay. How did you -- where did you land?

A: Well, I had an uncle in New Jersey. My uncle, supposedly, was going to come and pick me up.

Q: Oh, I remember this from the interview itself. And he couldn't on that particular day.

A: That's right.

Q: And you --

A: So the hirers, I believe, came to pick us up and kept us there for a few days.

Q: Okay. So in order -- here's another question. Is there anything else from your first interview, because I do remember we talked about coming to your uncle in New Jersey and then your life after that. Is there anything else you think you didn't cover in your

European experiences that you want to add, or do you think we pretty much touched it?

A: Yes. We covered this. When we were in the ghetto.

Q: Okay.

A: And they took all the Jewish people out.

Q: And we're talking about your hometown ghetto?

A: My hometown ghetto, when they took out all the Jewish people, the transportation to take us to the next town, big town, was by horse and buggy.

Q: Really?

A: Right.

Q: Not by truck, not by train, nothing like that?

A: Nothing.

Q: By horse and buggy?

A: They wouldn't spend money for gas to take the Jews across a couple of towns down.

Q: Okay.

A: So how long we traveled on that, you know, with the horse and buggy, I don't know. I can't really remember.

Q: Yeah. But you remember going that way?

A: Oh, yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: Okay.

A: My mother and my sister and my cousin, you know, my grandmother, we were all on that horse and buggy thing.

Q: Yeah. Well, any other thoughts you'd like to add now? You know, we can always

do this again, by the way. If there is something that comes up that you have forgotten, we can always make an appointment to talk again for a brief moment and then record that.

A: The march was very important because a lot of people died. I don't know how many. Hundreds and hundreds of people died.

Q: Yeah.

A: From Weimar going to Gross-Rosen.

Q: Yeah.

A: Because they'd shoot them. They'd shoot them in the legs. And when they did that, they couldn't walk. And when we left, they shot them.

Q: It's just --

A: Or left them dead to die, either one of the two.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I've seen many kids my age, their legs were frozen. The flesh was peeling off their legs.

Q: Oh, dear. Yeah.

A: So I mean, it's --

Q: Were there girls on the road too? I mean, was this usually young men, or were there women on the road as well?

A: They had women. There were no girls. They had women that they kept for prostitution there in Blechhammer.

Q: I see.

A: So these were the women that they kept, that many came with us.

Q: I see.

A: And then they parted company. Where, I don't know.

Q: Yeah. Well, I'm very grateful that you have gone into more detail. It's not called a death march for nothing. It sounds horrific and amazing that you were able to survive it.

A: Incidentally, another thing I need -- I don't need, but I'll tell you.

Q: Okay.

A: I came to Paris.

Q: Yes.

A: And I was roaming the streets, you know. We were kids and curious or whatever. I ran into a young girl that looked very familiar. Because the guy that I dragged to help walk --

Q: That's right, Mr. Ribak.

A: Mr. Ribak.

Q: Yes.

A: Showed me pictures from his family. And he said his wife and his kids -- I don't know if he had one child or not -- showed me pictures of them --

Q: Yes.

A: -- being in Paris.

Q: Yes.

A: And I came to Paris. And now, you know, we were roaming the streets, and I see a girl, a young girl that looks familiar. Well, I walked over to her.

Q: Yeah.

A: Believe it or not, it turned out to be this guy's daughter.

Q: No.

A: I swear on my life.

Q: So how did that happen? Did she say, My name --

A: I apparently remembered from the picture what she looked like. I suppose this is what happened. And I asked her the last name. She told me the name is Ribak. And the first thing I said, is your dad alive. She says, yes.

Q: So he made it?

A: He made it. She took me over to their house.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

A: I saw this guy Ribak, and it was really something.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

A: And if I could remember that from a picture, it's really something. I don't know. She looked just like him.

Q: It is. I mean, there are many amazing moments and miracles here. One, that you recognized her from a picture. Two, that he made it. Three, that she was able to bring you to him and that you were able to find out what happened to him, and it's an amazing story.

Do you remember, after you left him, did he tell you how he came to make it?

A: No, I really didn't talk about it.

Q: I see. I see.

A: I didn't talk about it. I saw him, and I was so happy to see him, and I met his family. I don't remember if I met his wife, but I did meet his daughter. I saw her on the street. She was going somewhere, you know.

Q: Now, did you ever see him or have contact with him after that?

A: No. No, I didn't.

Q: Okay.

A: I think I was busy with myself, you know.

Q: Your own life, yeah.

A: My own life and trying to put my life and my brother's life together.

Q: Yeah. That was a big enough task.

A: So anyhow, I told you about the story, I was drafted into the army here.

Q: Yeah.

A: So on and so forth. Now I cannot recall. There was something else I wanted to tell you. And I, for the life of me, I'm trying to remember.

Q: You know, if you have forgotten now and you do remember it, write it down and get in touch with me again, and we'll talk about it.

A: Hold on just a second. I wrote something down.

Q: Okay.

A: Let me see what I -- let's see. The march from Gross-Rosen -- to Gross-Rosen, the freight train, which you are aware of. People froze or got shot or whatever.

Q: Yeah.

A: And let's see. I just told you about the frozen limbs.

Q: That's right.

A: The legs and whatnot.

Q: Yes.

A: Unfortunately, these kids were my age, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's all, really that I had written down.

Q: Okay.

A: Oh, yes. When I was in that hospital.

Q: Yes.

A: My brother --

Q: And this hospital is in France?

A: No, this hospital is in Buchenwald.

Q: Oh, the one where you got sent for diarrhea, that one?

A: Yes, right. And we used to get two slices of bread a day in rations when I was in the barracks before I got sick. And my brother saved -- collected my rations and saved as much as a whole loaf of bread, a loaf wasn't that big, but it was a loaf of bread that he saved for me when I got back. And he put his life in jeopardy.

Q: Oh, my.

A: And you know, of course I shared the bread with him later. But when I got back, when we were still in prison, he had saved a whole loaf of bread.

Q: Amazing.

A: In fact, when he passed away, I talked about that to the people that were there, so.

Q: Yeah. It is a very -- it's a moment that is -- shows truly what he was made of. Like the moment when your mother tells you why she can't leave shows you the stuff she was made of.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah. Thank you for adding that detail. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you very much for listening to me again.

Q: Mr. Ribons, it is my honor. And I appreciate -- I appreciate this.

A: Well, I do have tears in my eyes.

Q: Oh, I know. It's not easy.

A: Thank you. I never had the nerve to do that, to be quite honest with you.

Q: Well, I don't know what it's like to have gone through what you have, but I do know there is a cost to bringing all of these things up. And I appreciate it.

A: I did tell you about my Army life, didn't I?

Q: I think you did.

A: Yeah, I think I did.

Q: Yeah. If -- yes, you did. Now that I recall, yes. We talked about your Army life and being in Korea and some of the experiences you had there. Again, if there is something, we will -- at this point, I will wrap up our addition to our interview. This concludes the addition to the interview with Jacques Ribons, and today's date is June 10, 2014.

End of File Three

Conclusion of Interview