

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Isadore Helfing
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Isadore Helfing, conducted on March 9, 1992 in Beverly Hills, California on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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ISADORE HELFING

March 9, 1992

We're starting Brett.

Can you tell me what your transport and arrival at Treblinka was like.

It was mostly from my, from my hometown. Was picked up in those, in those trains you know where you they transfer cattle, stuff like that. Yeah.

Describe what it was like when they opened the doors. What you saw and how you felt and what you did.

The minute they opened up the door, I was facing right about two stories dead peoples right in front of it laying there. These were the people that came before dead right in the trains, in those uh trains, and they pushed them out because they did, they didn't have time to haul away because another train came in, and that's what it was, that I saw.

And what did you do?

What I did, I saw it, we're going all, that's it, and I see boys dragging dead bodies to the grave you know, and I jumped right in and start dragging those bodies just like I was one of them. And they were pulling it to the graves. And uh so this was about 3 or 4 o'clock and you know and then the night rolls around, and I could not join them, so I hide, I was hiding myself between the bodies there, so...And then in the morning, I did start doing the same thing, but I see in that they count fifty people dragging those bodies in this particular time, and two or three were killed, they, they, they shoot them because they couldn't uh drag those bodies, got sick and so on. So I joined right into the group, and I became one of the people. So like in the morning they came you know, and they count out the people how many people uh, uh there were right among peoples there. If somebody is missing so they were looking what's happened, you know, maybe he escaped or something.

So you actually sort of broke into the...

Broken right into the to the crew, like I am one of it. Everybody was wearing the same, the same clothes like they were come, when they came in.

Now describe to me in detail if you remember it how Treblinka was laid out.

The way it's laid out? Well, we, they make you go the people in, in a little, like a little alley go and they say, "Man at right, woman at the left," and over there they had to take off the clothes, and they pushed them right into the gate, and while they're coming to the gate, they come this way, this way and they join together, and they just went, (clears throat) they just went, that time I didn't know where they go, but then, then they went to gas chambers, all together.

What was the camp like? Tell me about the buildings, how big it was, where you slept, tell me

how everything was...

We slept in a bldg just like a barrack, you know. Was ----- floor, sand, and that's the way we were sleeping there in those barracks. This was in the beginning, the first two months when I was there. Later they built, you know, a barracks, where you can sleep like a, they call this

Bunks.

Bunks, yeah.

Tell me how the whole camp was, how many buildings there were, how big it was, where the gas chambers were, describe to me...

The gas, the gas chambers was about ----- . That was the size of a single garage, something like that. A garage, like that. And they, they pushed them in there, and you know, the Gestapo and everything, crying and, people were, they didn't want to go in, they saw it, they, you know, they hit and they pushed each other right in, and they were standing up against -----, and then they gassed them, and from the other side they were sliding them, they just slid out, and another group was taken into the graves. That was uh the beginning when I got there.

Tell me how long you were there, and how it changed over the course of the time that you were there. It did change what they put people in a mass grave, and then when the grave was filled up, and they saw with the ----- a, a new low, something, they dugged out the, the dead people from those graves, and put them in one place where a big fire was going, and they were burning the bodies that I, that was, this was all after a month or so, and they, the new people came they go right in and just throw right into the, to the gr--to the, it was a grave, but, but the fire was a special fire, that was burning there.

When you got there, how long had Treblinka been going?

Oh, I don't know, maybe, they was, was, they were building that Treblinka, it was about a month or three weeks. Most of the people was ,was from the Warsaw ghetto, they, they brought them from the Warsaw ghetto. To build the Treblinka.

Tell me about the transports, and was it organized, was it orderly, how long did it take, how often did they come. Describe to me what it was like.

I I didn't get it.

The transports, when a transport was coming in...

Yeah, oh you mean inside Treblinka, yeah?

Yeah, once you had been there for a while, and you were working...

Some, some transports has to, had to wait, couldn't get in because inside going in Treblinka was

one track, and they put the one in they could not come in the other because was one track. So they were, sometimes they were waiting for hours, till this one pulled out empty and the other came in. This was go into late in the evening. Not at night.

Every day?

Every day.

What did the people think? Where did...

People, the minute they got into Treblinka, they saw what was going on, the dead bodies, and they, they were screaming, that, that's all, everybody was screaming, screaming, crying. The screaming, you know, and that was going on all day.

Was there a time when it was busier than other times or -----?

Yeah, sometimes they had a, sometimes they were waiting, and sometimes they just in and out and this -----went very smoothly that. Some of them, those trains came in, there was 80%, 90% dead, people were dead there. They kept them so long, for 2, 3 days, until they got in there, and there was, they, they had no water, no air or nothing, and they, they died right in the train. I -----
-----dragged out bodies from trains, people, their heads were that big, and the, from the heat there.

Tell me the story of how you were picked up, and when you were picked up, and then transported there.

We, I went together a, when they came in the morning, in uh my hometown, the ghetto, and they, they ordered everybody out from the houses, this was in the ghetto, so we all took packages, you know, bags, and sit right in the corridor, in the house there, because this was, you know, the people lived all the way around in the house, it's like a court. And then about 8 o'clock, 8:30, we had to, they told us to go out and go to file, to march right there, maybe about a mile from my house went to the, to go to the trains. So we all went together, so they picked me up from the, from the group on the side, so they picked up uh 2, 2, 300 people, and put them in a different, in a different barrack, and they, and they, they need the people to work in the city, so I remained as a worker, but I didn't work. The next day was another transport. I got out from the, from the group, and went into -----, to the, to the transport because we didn't know we were going, and I said to myself, my parents were not going to be survive 24 hours if I wouldn't be there. You know, the, the people they -----age, you know, uh, take care of them, you know. So I went, uh, -----by myself in and then we got into Treblinka. They kept us a whole day in a big filth, till they pushed us in to, to the, to the, those trains, what do you call the train, I call it that, where they carry the, the cattles, and the...

Cattle trains.

Cattle trains.

All right now describe for me again, the arrival in Treblinka.

We arrived at Treblinka just the way I, I told you before. They slid up the door, or, open the door, and they told them, "Go right in here, this, this way." And of course there was a little arch, says, woman right, and they go to, you know take a shower and stuff like that, and then they got into at the little field?? there, everybody had to get undressed. They didn't keep the people overnight. (Cough) The, the whole thing has to be finished up, the whole train, and they put them in the gas chambers, and, and the other side was another group, hauled them away, to the graves.

We're going to run out very soon.

Tell me what kind of a camp Treblinka was, and how it differed from other concentration camps.

From Treblinka was previously a death camp. Nobody was used for any uh hard labor or anything, just, labor was just with bodies, pulling people from from the, from the train, and uh, taking out different things, but they, of course, some people, girls, if you worked in a laundry there, not for us, just for the, for the, for the, for the Ukraine, the Germans, and of course, there was a kitchen there, in there, (cough) a shoemaker, a tailor, a little, a little quarter with all the shops, and a blacksmith, you know to put shoes on the horses, they had horses there too, and they used the horses just to bring the, they didn't have cars, so they used the horses to go in a little town to bring supplies for the, for the Germans. ----- . Yeah...

Tell me how many of you there were, and how many Germans there were, how many Ukraines there were.

By the, by uh, there, there was about, about a thousand, twelve hundred people, but uh, by the end was between 13 and, and 15 hundred people in that camp. Working.

Who were all of them? Were they all, they were all prisoners like you?

Yeah, -----the same here???

All right, now I want you to tell me again how you managed, what you did, when the doors opened. Tell it to me as though you didn't tell me before, how you managed not to go through one of those gates, and go into...

You know, when the train arrived, you know, like they do in the, they pushed, opened up the door, not open doors, were sliding, you know, and, and this, in the most, like I, I say, the most of them came from other towns. Happens to be from my time when I came out the, most people got sick there, but not didn't die, but the most trains came in and people were laying dead. And the, and there was a group of the people, that's what I did, pulled out the people, and that why piled up a big pile of dead people because the next train is coming out. They had no time to haul away. And uh, and farmers around, around the neighborhood had a, there was a, they made a law, they should, should bring a buggy and a horse, and, and leave it at the, at the gate at Treblinka. In the evening, they, they, they picked it up, the horse and the buggy. So we used the buggy and piled them on the, on the little, little buggy, and uh some people were dragging dead people without the buggy. Was

so many people, you know. Because the grave was a, was away about uh about 500 yards, 400 yards, from the, from the train, from the railroad. And that's why I, I survived.

Now tell me about your conscious effort to survive. Tell me what you decided to do...

We knew we're gonna die any minute, but at that time, you know, you just, you became one of, one of the, you know because, not a human being, you know. I was, I was afraid to kill a fly, and here I had to lay between the bodies and pull the bodies, and it just became like a nonsense you know, like, like, not like a human being. And this was in the beginning, but then, then I do it, I did some something different.

What kinds of different things did you do? Did you have friends there?

No friends, uh, we, we all became friends. Uh, doesn't make a difference. One is from this town, this town, and practically everybody was almost uh my age. You know, they picked up these young boys, you know, 19, 20 years, 18 years, all, you know, about, about 20, 22, 23, very----- we found one there. So that was too old at that time. And we saw this and then the, the camp got organized and what happened, how do I got survive, so I would work in a lot of things there, I was hauling water. You know, there was a little, whatever you call this, well, you know, you picked up the water, and, and, and carried to the kitchen. I was working on that and maybe a couple weeks, and then one time they picked up a bunch of people. See they separated Treblinka. Was too, the, the, the camp was number two anyways. Number, I'm not talking about number one, but at the number 2 camp, they separate, they put the, at the gate the, was when, when you came out from the gas chambers, there's another group hauling the bodies, and put into the graves. And those people, with this people didn't got together, they was, was in the same field, the same people were running there, the SS and the and the Ukrainians, what we didn't got together. One time they picked me up, and you know, we had to, every morning you had to pull out all the people and they counted how many people were here. Otherwise, there were two or three missing, they know somebody escaped, and they punished and that and that for that. Punished other people, not, not who escaped. So, one time they picked about 20 or 30 people from this group and took them to the other side where they pulling people to, to the graves, and I thought over there, I cannot survive 48 hours. The next day, when I, then they make me hauling water, and the water was at the other side where the train come in, this part of Treblinka, and I saw what's going on, and, and I see them crying and is not looking at me, they just went to somebody and talked. I left the two, the two barrels of water, and got into the, back to the same group that I was before, and started working so that's why and then I got back into the same group. Over there, there was food because people came to Treblinka, and somebody had a piece of bread and that and that, so you, you picked it up, you found the food to eat there. And over the other side, there were, you were dealing just with the dead bodies, and this, I was, was uh people just arrived. They left the clothes everything, over there, just plain dead bodies. So I got back to this thing, and, and that's why, and then I remained there in the, the, stay with the -----, I changed the job, they would have killed me right on the spot. But we knew anyways we gonna be killed, nobody's gonna survive. So, it happens like this. The way I survived is like this. In that camp there was a, a, a horse, and a, and a two-wheel buggy, which picked up garbage, you know and, and wor--picked the garbage and took it to the grave where the people were burning, and he backed it out and, and dumped it the garbage and for burning. There was no trashcans, uh something to haul away, everything that went into the grave and to burn it. Nobody

had cans there or anything, there was not such a thing what uh, this is going to burn, not going to burn. So, what happened, when the guy pulled back the horse, told him the, the horse, pushed him to go backwards, the horse got wild, and backed it up, and went in right to the pile with the buggy. And then the, the German was, was around to see what's going on. He shoot him. There was a stable. There was five horses. And they used the horses for, for horseback riding and two horses for going for, for, to bring this materials you know, the food from the, from the other towns for the Germans. So they need an another guy, and it happens to be, I was in the barracks with a guy, who worked in the stable, cleaned the horses, the uh, uh feed the horses, he said, he said, "You're going to be good???" And I substitute the other guy who got killed. ----- And account of that thing, I survived in Treblinka. I, from then on, I had nothing to do with the people with the, working by the dead people. I just used the horse, and I learned how to clean horses and feed them and water. There was no -----, we had to go the well and get the water. And this fellow, happens to be, was a few years older. And that Ukraine, was a an Ukraine who was in charge of that stable. When he got to the town, he got for himself, uh food you know. All those uh salamis and vodkas and that, so I have uh as far as food is concerned, I was eating then it was, it was okay. And then he want me to drink some vodka. I didn't touch it, and the guy said, "Don't you touch it." I don't know if, if they, they came in and they see you a little, little drunk, you be killed, and I was listening to him, and that's why I survived. That's why I survived that long to be in Treblinka.

Did you have Kapos in Treblinka?

Yeah.

Tell me what a Kapo is.

There, there was one of my kapos, he was a young fellow, he was, he came a little earlier, and his name, -----his name is Monek, I can't say, because we call him that, I remember that. He acted, well, uh, the, the, the Gestapo is rough to the people, but he didn't harm people. He didn't harm nobody, this particular guy. So there was about, about 2 or 3 kapos, but he was my kapo, this particular guy.

We have to reload.

Tell me about the uprising. Tell me all about the whole plan and then go right through it.

So, I was the one who knew we're gonna have the uprising because they came to the stable and they told me, "Listen, this is going to be an uprising." But happens to be, was a little boy, was really young, his father was there with him in a tailor shop, and happens to, he was from my hometown. Happens to be was from my hometown. That little boy was a shoeshine boy in, at the barracks where the, where the Germans were, uh, living there. So, and, and over there they had the supply of ammunition there. Supply, and he had a way of ,of going in. He brought out a lot of, stole a lot of ammunition, he distribute, distributed to some people who knows how to handle it. Not everybody in the camp knew there's going to be an uprising. And I was told, when you hear the uprise...when I hear the uprise, I should grab the rifle from the Ukraine because he had a rifle laying there openly, you know the, I got the access to it all the time, but he didn't care because I been there a few months there. So, they told me that if you hear the uprise, grab that rifle and run

with us in the uprising. So, and the, and the, and the people from the, from the barracks, what they used to tailor shoes shoemakers and, and a, if in this particular time, 11 o'clock, if any of the Gestapo comes in there to, to the room there, to the, to the place, grab him, choke him, he cannot say I would just kill him there because the uprising is, is 11 o'clock. Somehow it did delayed, and the people who knew about it didn't know what to do. So the uprising was a little later, and maybe 2, 3 of the Germans were killed, and then we start running. The wires, you know, the wires around the barracks, was not electric. In Treblinka they didn't make any tattoos on your arms. You wear the clothes which you wear all the time. That was, that's the way this camp was like that. So, so we run, we start running and I jumped across the wires, and the, and the, and the, the people you know, the, the patrols start shooting left and right, and I was running in the field and I saw it how the bullets popping in the in the ground in front of me. And then we got into the, then it got dark and I got into deep woods because we, from the distance we see black, this was woods. We were running straight into the woods. And we hid out overnight. So, and so the, the next, the next day, we didn't know where to go what to go. I saw a little farm, a farmer, all by himself. I was with another guy. And we got into his place, and we told him the story, and he kept us, hiding, uh hiding, but later he used us as to help him work, and this was uh, I don't know what to say now...

Tell me how big an escape it was. How many of the inmates were involved. How many do you think got away and then what happened after that.

It got away a handful. The rest all of them were killed right on the spot.

How do you know of that? How did you find out----?

Because after the war, we tried to get together how many people survived. Was only 27 people from Treblinka. From both camps, the camp where I was called Treblinka 2. There was another one, a labor camp, they chopping woods there, they're making roads. All together was 7, 27 people. After the liberation.

How many people did you kill during the uprising?

Nobody. I was running.

How many did inmates kill in general?

It it got, the inmates killed or, or the Germans killed?

How many of the Germans got killed?

About two or three. Yeah.

Now go back to when you were in the camp, and tell me about any sabotage that you did or that other prisoners did.

There was two prisoners tried to escape at night. Tried to uh, uh throw up under the wire, and they were caught. And they brought them right into the appel in the morning when we had the appel for

counting out the people. They, they hang them right in the middle, everybody should see what's happened when they, they hang them up by their legs. And they were screaming and swearing. They want to be shot. They can't you know they ----- . And then they showed us a sample if we ever, if we do uh run away, that's what's going to happen to us. And then a guy didn't behave himself, they uh and they showed at the appel where we were standing, uh, uh get, 25, you know there was a a heavy belt over his back, and some of them couldn't even make it af-after that. They went with a big ----- . And of course there was a, a guy, g--we called him uh Lalka, he was uh, his face looked, Lalka is a doll. His face was like a doll, but he was a murder, I said this, this guy, he went with a, had a German shepherd walking around, and he didn't like the other guy walking, just to tell the dog and just tear him apart. He was just dangerous this guy. Just dangerous this guy. And at the appel, there was another guy, we called him Kivi. His name was not Kivi, we just gave him a nickname, and looked like a, a Jewish typical guy, you know, the way his nose was, was raised and stuff like that, and he was terrible that guy. I think this guy got killed. This guy, I found out from the guys, after, after the, the war was over. And there was many thousand things, I could not even think, maybe if I lay down in bed and think about it, I can give you twice as much.

Tell me about when you went back and walked through the camp and how, what you remembered about where things were.

Back, what,

Yeah, when you went back recently in the last ten years.

Oh yeah, nothing there, nothing. They made, made a big statue there, and, and then they where the grave was with a where they were burning the people, they put uh stones you know memorial stones, and, and pointed out this Warsaw, my hometown, all the towns where people came into Treblinka, every town. It's just like mushrooms sitting there on a big spot, and, and the and the gas chambers, they poured uh asphalt, just to make known this was the gas chambers. A big, a big line, but you know, but that was the size of a, whatever the size is of the of the gas chambers. It's laying on the ground. They poured asphalt like this and they, there was the, the gas chambers, and this is the spot, was the spot, was the size of it. And the rest, everything is filled. Pine trees is growing up.

Did you and other prisoners talk about getting even while you were there. I mean, at night when you weren't working, were there...

You mean in Treblinka?

Yeah.

Oh yeah, there was a one fellow, one appel, it was right in front of me. A guy went in and stabbed the guy who count the people and then they ss-they sprayed him bullets, and our people from the group, a lot of people -----too, same time. The guy knew he's gonna die, so he took uh revenge you know, and stabbed him right in the back and killed him. This was during the time I was at, I swear, was in the app--appel means that everybody gets off before they go to work and they count them out how many people is here, how many went at night to sleep, and in the morning

if anybody is missing. They didn't want nobody to escape there.

So he he killed a German?

He killed a German. And he was shredded from bullets that that guy who did it. But he knew it, he went for ----- . Yeah, night, night came in with the train. There, there was a lot of people tried to get out of the train so they behind they, they, they grabbed, they tried to go underneath, underneath the train. When the train goes back out, then he can run out and escape. And all of the sudden, one is going through so everybody seeing that whoever was capable, done the same thing. When the German saw it and he shoot him right there under the, you know behind right by some kind of item so he can hang on to it, and the train would go out and, and he, then he would try to escape. People tried to escape when they were sorting the, the goods, you know, the clothing, and packing during the day into the train. So other people got stuffed in, got inside, and they jumped during the time when the train was going, I don't know where the train was going, but there was the clothing, people's clothing, and they jumped out into, through the little window.

All right, we're going to run out.

In other camps when people arrived like at Auschwitz there was a selection made, and mothers and children, and people of 50 and over were often killed, but people who were able to work were chosen for work and for life. Describe to me how arrival at Treblinka was different. Well each camp probably was a different system. What, what, what did they have, I never heard it.

They had selections. Were there selections at Treblinka?

No, there was Treblinka no selections whatsoever. They didn't took out any people.

Did they, at Sobibór they made a pretense. They gave people a receipt for their belongings.

No. No.

Everyone knew what was happening in Treblinka.

True. The, the minute they, they opened up the door, we saw what was going on.

Tell me, talk to me a little bit about choices, the choices the people who arrived there had, and the choices that the guards had, the Ukrainians or the Germans. Did they, were they just following orders?

They, they run the, the whole thing. The Ukraine they were following the orders from the Germany, from the Germans, but they can do anything they want anyways. They could have done, they could have done it. -----they they killed a lot of people, they watched -----and everything. They actually, is, was mostly was run by the Ukraine people.

What kind of choices did the prisoners have?

There was no choice. They were standing both side and making out, out from the from the from the -----, tells you right away go there, take off your clothes, and join this and that's it.

In all your years there, tell me about any people who helped you at any time. Like the guy whose horse you watched.

Yeah, I help, help with my coworker there. He, he helped me. He, he told me "Don't do that, don't do that," and the account of him, I was, you know, I was young that time, you know, so he, he was much older than I am. Do that and do that and that was the help that I had.

Describe for me how, I don't remember exactly what guard it was that you had, but you were worried that in the uprising you might have to kill him. Describe to me that whole relationship as though you haven't--

There was Ukrainian guard. He wasn't there in this particular--

But tell me that whole story, tell me who he was and--

He was, he was a Ukrainian, he took care, that his job was to take care of that stable there. Uh, to bring all this supply of food, he was the one that supposed to bring and he, he watched the horses and all that stuff. He, he was the commander from, of the stable. That's all. Germans used to come and he -----and they told, "Fix me up this horse for riding," so he came he just stepped up, and right away...

Tell me when you were working in Treblinka, tell me what a typical day was like, when you had to get up and how long you stood on the appels, when you went to work, and when you quit.

Oh we get up in the morning probably was about, I don't know, like 6 it was, between 7, 8 o'clock. Then they counted out the people and everybody went to his own, with the, the Ukraine was standing waiting, and went to his own group. Back what he, what, back to the same job.

And then how long did you work at Treblinka?

Well, there was no time, but it was not late at night. Till the, the transport came in and it's all finished up, and they went to the gas chambers and, and they put them to the grave and then it was over. And they count again how many people was in the morning, in the evening, and that's all. And then we went into the bar-barracks, to sleep and that's all.

Was there any religious resistance? Did people pray? Prisoners?

Oh yeah, when they arrived, there was always those people, they took out the shawl you know, wrapped around them and fell to the ground and, and ----- Many people like that. So, the minute when they arrived and they had to go out from, from the train, from the cattle train, and they fall to the ground and the pray was so loud, so was a lot of, of religious people came along, uh, nothing happened. They go, if they see they didn't want to go they just kicked them, beat them, and make sure they goes in there, takes off his clothes and goes right in. -----Was horrible.

Could any of you who were working with them help them at all.

No. No, No. We cannot go and do anything because everybody, because we know if we go over and try to help them or something, they, they shoot right away. There were many times during the day if they didn't like the guy who worked, they shoot them right on the spot, don't care what it is.

Did any of you pray or support each other in friendship.

Yeah, well we didn't pray, uh, we didn't pray, but uh, I got up in the morning, in the barracks, and was right in front of me I see four or five people -----and hang themselves. Then we run over, "Don't do it!" Uh, then the third guy says, "Don't disturb them. If he wants to...", because he knew he he wouldn't make it you know. He got a little sick and that and then, so he hang himself. Instead of being tortured and killed. This I saw quite a few. Right in, in my section. It was all over because there were so many people there.

What other kinds of resistance was there among you people who worked there. Any other kind of resistance.

What do mean by resistance?

Any kind of resistance. Mental resistance, did you joke with each other?

No, no, no, no. There was no joking. But later in, in the evening, they organized a, a got a, they let in the, in the barracks you know there was like a court and, and a guy was singing, they let him do that. And Sunday, nothing, was, was free. Nobody was in there. No transfer came in and that guy was singing a "-----," the Jewish songs, you know, and everybody was crying. So, that's what it was. -----.

Tell me about the sports that were arranged there, some of the, the soccer and-----

Yeah, I just wanted to say that. Sunday we played soccer, and the Germans were standing around and watching us. As matter of fact I played soccer. This finger is from Treblinka. I got up and my finger was like this. I pulled it and pulled it back, and I still have a little nerve here, -----nerve. Yeah, I played soccer there.

Was there an orchestra there?

Yes. Tell me about that, tell me...

Yeah this was late, late in the game, and when they uh the transport arrived and people recognized one the other, and you know, oh he's a, a, a violin player, there, so they took him out and he joins the, joins the orchestra. They didn't play the orchestra while the, the people went to the death, you know to the gas chambers. Was a different times you know, they played the orchestra. There was orchestra.

And what about the boxing match?

There was one was a famous boxer in Europe and another guy on Sunday, and they had a a boxing you know just for like, like roosters, who, who killed, just supposed to kill them dead, that's it. That's the way the boxing was done. Wasn't going to the regular time. Just the, there was not so many boxing, wasn't a, just one or two fights.

How does everything you saw make you feel about humanity?

That time when I arrived there, I became like a, a I don't know how to explain it, just didn't care, like a, a void person. Just didn't, didn't bother me because I know I'm going to be dead, now or in five minutes or ten minutes, and I just became like a, just like a person who uh has been doing this for years.

Tell me more about how the uprising got started and organized.

There was one, he was from Warsaw, a fellow, very intelligent, he was an officer in the, in the, the Polish army from, from, from professionally he was a, an engineer, and he was the camp, the camp leader. He, he...

We're running out, we're going to have to start this again when we reload.

Yeah, okay.

I want you to back up and tell me as though you didn't tell me before, tell me how it got organized and who was the leader of the uprising?

The leader, I forgot his name, he carried a Polish name, which was his name, and he was the commander of the at the Treblinka at, at the camp, you know, with the Kapos and stuff like that. So he got the orders and he told the Kapos what to do, and, and actually we didn't have bad Kapos there in Treblinka. Was one, two, two kapos. The main Kapo was a, as I said young fellow, we called him Monek. Whoever was in Treblinka knows him.

Tell me how the uprising. Did everyone know about the uprising?

All right, so tell me how the whole thing worked and what the plans were.

Uh, uh about the uprising, there was a -----for everybody, otherwise they would get suspicious, and so they would just kill all of us, right in the same spot. So, they told just certain people who were, like at the tailor shop, who was the, the foreman in tailor shop, and from the s-blacksmith, and all those-----, there were shoemakers, that's what they have, carpenters.

How did they decide who to tell and who not to tell, and then did everyone try to go?

The uprising came along and so everybody screamed "Run, and run out," and that's it. You know,

who has the ammunition, use that and that's it. So there was a little bit of ammunition. That that what the shoeshine brought it out a couple days ago.

The Sobibór uprising was triggered by notes that the people in clothes found that were from people from Treblinka, and the notes in the pockets said, "Take revenge." Tell me about, do you know about that?

No, no.

Did you ever hear about that?

About the take a revenge? No, no.

There's no revenge, what are you take a, take a revenge with there? With the empty arms against uh, people who were sitting on the little things, you know upstairs in the with the machine guns, stuff like, what kind of revenge you got. We knew we gonna be dead anytime, so might as well do that, kill all what we can and run out. Whoever, whoever got saved, got saved. In this respect I was lucky, I didn't got killed. I was not a hero, to be, to be to escape, but just happened, all the bullets and the, was falling right in front of me and didn't hit me. People got hit in the legs, I saw it and fell down, couldn't go, couldn't go any farther.

Tell me what happened to your family, and also did you think about them when you were there?

Sure I think about, I knew they, they right around there someplace. Or think that they're on the fire burning, that's all. But you got so much with yourself, that you would not even think of anything. You, you became yourself an animal while you was there you know. Didn't, didn't bother us, we knew that tomorrow will never come.

But you broke into Treblinka in the ----- so that you could go rescue your family.

No they came before I, I got there. One day before. Remember I said I walked out from the appel and go out, they, they choose me to get, to go out and they keep me there, because they left in the ghetto 300 people to do work. To remain in the city. Every city I guess got the same thing, and they, they remained a little portion, they make a little ghetto for those t-people, and they done you know work, tailoring or was some sewing was, so, so they took me out to remain so that and my, and my family and the parents, they just went straight to Treblinka.

How do you feel about the whole thing?

I still have nightmares. Still have nightmares. That was just horrible.

Tell me about before being transported there. Tell me about when the war first started and how life changed and what people thought was happening.

We didn't know that we going to get, they going to kill us out, but uh we know what's going to, we gonna have a bad time. You mean when the war broke out? Sure we got the, just like anyplace

else. Was the same system. So, Ger--I mean, the Germans took over the country, so there was rationing and ,and there was a hard time to survive, but somehow we survived, but we didn't know this is going to happen. And then they put us to the ghetto, and the ghetto was terrible, the ghetto was terrible. So like you hear about the Warsaw ghetto, same thing was in our hometown, identical same thing. People starving and dying laying on the, laying, laying on the sidewalks, so...that's what, that's what it was in the ghetto.

Did you want to take revenge after you escaped?

After I escaped no, I was uh hiding myself for survival. For survival. How can I take revenge. We just were fighting, hiding out in foxholes for survival. And I, when I went to that farm, the farm and stayed there, then came a, a group, boys, Jewish boys, they had ammunition, and, and I told them my story, and they want me I should go with them. Stay with him because I wanted to make sure where they are, and when I went back to this guy, but he was treating, food wasn't much to eat, but he was, he was hiding us out, so we go used to that, so we don't want to go with them, but lately, if we went there, and we heard that the, that the front you know, the, the Russians coming closer, we made a foxhole in the woods, and then we all joined each other, and we stayed in the foxhole, and the Russians came along. That's when I got liberated, by the Russians. There was a, a bunch of people, about 8, 9 people that uh...

What would you, what would you like to say future generations?

Well, the future generations around the world, well I know would -----never again or something like that. This is, this is the future generations, I guess they know that. Anything gets suspicious, uh, where do they go, uh, right into the fire.

Is your survival an achievement?

Sure, there's a, there's a lot of people survived in different forms, in different forms. People survived, people got killed, after the liberation people go this you know. There's a lot of different things. It's a, survival myself, and take a gun and kill a German, no I didn't, after the liberation, no, was not in my thought but I, just, I just hate them, what they did...Can sit there for hours, if I get uh just sometimes, I skip it, can't get this figured out.

Can you think of something you want to say?

Nothing. There is certain things, but I don't, you need a whole story, big story, I don't know.

Whatever you can do.

Ask me some, maybe I'll remind myself.

Describe the camp for me again. Describe how it was set up and laid out. Paint a picture for me in words about the camp.

It just, just, just put together, just barracks, just a roof and a, and wood, that's was, what the people

went from the, you know, to the gas chambers on the other side was a where we were at night to go to sleep. So they're organized, there was a kitchen, there were, they cooked there in the kitchen. They brought horses, killed them for, for food, and cooked it, they have some meat or something.

Describe to me where the trains came in and how long each transport took.

A transport, there was a transport coming in between and 8 and 10,000 people. Long, long train, pack, packed up. And uh took maybe an hour, an hour and a half, two hours. I mean the people standing right, waiting till the, the train gets in the right spot, and they just slide up the two doors, and out, out, out. People have to run out not just walk.

The 8,000 people would be gone in 2 hours?

Yeah, yeah.

But from there, took people was a, quite a bit dead people right there. That's uh, all the many piles.

We can put on another role if you want to tell me some more, but um, but-----.

Change film, camera roll 6 is up; Sync take 6 is up.

I'm going to ask you a different question. Okay, I want you to tell me again the story of the prisoner who killed the Gestapo on the appel, but I want you to tell me as though you haven't told me before. I don't know this story, so explain to me what happened.

What's happening? Yes, tell me what an appel is and tell me...

They bring, the people came out at this particular time, and they the appel means they counting how many people were here and going to work. Then, after the work is all done, you back again and you count if nobody is missing. They want to know if anybody disappears or something, you know, right away. And then uh -----liking the guy or something. -----just very simple. Run out on the appel, and he was standing there, count, count, and he came from the other side, stabbed him, direct--

You've got to tell me that it was your friend and that he stabbed a soldier, a German.

Yeah.

You've got to tell me that so I understand who it is.

The guy was one of, of the our, our workers there, what came out to the appel, so he just uh didn't ask nobody, went over, and stabbed him, that's all. There was easy there to find a, a knife or something because people were bringing down you know every day. That's what, that's what happened. Then they, they start shooting at the people everybody. A lot of people got killed. I mean from the, the appel people. Because bullets were coming from all over on this guy because the Ukraine was sitting on that uh what do you call this

Guardpost

Guard, guardpost that's right. And there was all over guardposts, and he was.

So a prisoner killed a Gestapo?

A Gestapo yeah. Sure.

Just tell me that. Tell me that a prisoner killed a Gestapo, and then tell me the story. And use the word prisoner and use the word Gestapo.

So one of our prisoners came out in the morning what they, and they made an appel, you know, they tried to put him to work, so he got out and killed a Gestapo.

How?

Just, just like uh taking a revenge you know. He knew that he's not going to live. Everybody knew that he's not going, not going to live. He, he thinks what's the sense? Get up, and work and go to sleep, and come in the morning and do the same thing. And by the end they gonna kill us.

Who paid for that?

Who paid for that? Nobody, but the people got, this guy got killed in pieces, I mean they just tear him in pieces. And that's all. Then uh they start shooting, right into the people.

Tell me about close calls when you were hiding. After you escaped from Treblinka.

I was hiding in a barn in a place, this was up, up you know, there was above the, the cows and horses, but they had straw underneath. Then the people, the other people well they were in Treblinka but they, they run away from the towns and, and hide themselves around in the neighborhoods. And they organized themselves ammunition. So they found out that I am there with another guy. At, at this farm and hiding out. So they came and, and they got into the house there and uh, uh one of the children told them, "Oh those guys is in a barn upstairs." So, they went up and start talking Jewish, so, so we came down so we got together. So, we know each other, and they were hiding also in a in a foxhole at, at another farm, and so we, we, we got together in the evening, only in the evening when it was dark, not when the, the, the, not when it was bright, we call it uh

Full moon.

Full moon, yeah. We didn't see each other because you could just uh point you can, you go around, they see you walking at night. You only saw each other when it was, when the moon was dark, just dark. So, so they somehow want me to I should join with them to be together, they, they get to like me or something like that. I told them where I was, so I went with them sometimes and I came back, and then by the very, very end, I remained there with them, and we had a foxhole right in

middle, middle of the field, and we were sitting there, waiting. Then we heard, we heard, after a long time, we heard this big "Russian, Russian, Russian." So we got out and we saw the Russian people right there.

Did you do any fighting with them?

No, no, no, no. This was the front line. This was the front line. ----- fighting. Russians-----

Tell me once more how the buildings at Treblinka were laid out. Where the train came in, where the gas chambers were, how -----.

The train came in, let's see, this way, then, I s--I sat a little distance there, don't know how many feet--two, two hundred feet, a hundred feet or, was a arch, and was, was like, like a with wires around where the people uh they says, "Go straight here, you're going to take a shower." Whatever it is. And the men right, women left, they had the, and they told them, "Get undressed just nude, and then they, they were going in their barr-barrack, and the woman goes there, and then they, they join together. And they went into the, to the gas chambers, at the gas chambers was very rough people standing there, pushing the people, hitting, hitting, hitting. Children, any, any, anybody. Uh, whole families. Then they got into the gas chamber, and it's all packed up standing everybody standing just like, they close it, and then they put together in there. And they put together so, and that's what it is. On the other side, a few minutes, slid open the doors, pushed them, this was a hard job because everybody was, was stick to each other you know. You have to -----break them apart you know, apart, and put them to the, (cough) to the uh holes where the fire was. So in the in the beginning they piled up the dead people in big -----, filled it up, throw lots of dirt on top. Then they digged another big hole there. While I was there in the same time, came a -----, just like you see those big cranes digging the, the, the dirt, that's the way they picked up the people from the graves, turn around, and throw right on the fire. That's how -----. Just came, turned there, all the way. I didn't work there, but I saw it. I was passing by back and forth. So, and they burned the bodies. They burned, they didn't want to have uh a grave with bodies, just to burn them, and that's what was going on the rest of the time. Burning. So at, I can I can I can draw with a pencil and tell you exactly how it was.

Okay, let's cut.

That's it?

Take 7 is up.

Go ahead. Start and describe-----.

Yeah, this is, this is the main entrance, where the train came right on the side. And this is the, this is railway for the train what they arrived...and this is, this is a cattle train, coming around here. That's the cattle trains here. And here was the Ukrainian Gest--Gestapos and the and the the laborers, the workers would open up the the the doors, slide up the doors, and there were coming on here...so the people, they make them walk, walk in here to the, here is an arch, is an arch here, and said, men right, and woman left. Woman left. So the people came out from the train and and

and told them to go right in here to that, (cough) and they gonna have a a a shower, so the people were walking from from both, from both sides into that place with shower. That's what -----
----- . When they walk inside there, and...so the people here inside, they had to get undressed. Had to get undressed and there were, they were walking right into the to the very first two gates here, and the people come in right -----.

Let's put another roll on now.

Okay we can go again.

Start all over again?

No, just keep going.

So the, the men went right and the woman left, and they got, and they got to get undressed, and they, they told them if any has valuable things, gold, to put them in, in this little basket right there, and they were, they were guided right to this rail, and this was a rail, wire fencing, tall wire fencing, and the and the and the people were pushing each other right in, and, and the Ukrainians and the Gestapo were standing right there, and they pushed and chased them into the ----- thing, to the to the gas chambers, and, and here where the gas chambers was, there was right, another group of people, take the people out from the gas chambers and put them right there, and here was the a, a, a mass grave, and here was a, a mass grave. But this was, this was isolated. This, this part where they where they pulled out the dead bodies to the to the, was isolated. And here was a big grave right on this hand side, was a big grave. And, and here when they went to this, this grave, there was the gas, the gas chambers was right over here. That's the gas chambers. And they, they got them right at this, this big, big grave, here. Now, our barracks was here. This was the barracks here. Not far, not far away from the graves, and here was a kitchen. Here was the kitchen right there. The kitchen was this side. And here and here was the, the on both sides was the Germans' upper office of and, and sleeping areas right there. And this was all, all here, all here fill, and here was the stable, and here right exactly here was the stable. Here was the stable where the, the horses are. And that that was the whole Treblinka right there. That was a bigger amount here, bigger space.

How many gas chambers were there.

About 14. -----gas chambers. Here came right the train come from this side, and they stepped out here, they were, here was, and here was a and they came down from here, there was a pile right there in the middle of dead bodies, right here, when you walked out from the train you saw it right there. This was the barracks right here, and that-----.

All right, let's cut for a minute.

Take 9 is up

Okay.

Yeah. Talk about Treblinka here. This was a main gate, main gate coming in to Treblinka. Then the side was the railroad track, right over here, went in right through the middle here, and they, and they stop, right behind them was a wire fence, and here was uh they were guarding to say men go right and woman goes left, and right beside when I I came in was a big pile of dead people sitting right near, near the big arch where it says Woman left, Men right. And right to my right, on the road was the barracks, was, this was in the beginning. Where they put the barracks there for the people who just arrived. And... and this, this the barracks there. And here was the was a big mass grave where they put the people in the, drive them by horse and buggy and people was dragging by, by their hands right into this big grave on the right hand side. The gas chambers was just right coming out from that big arch where it says, "Woman left, Men right" and they had to get here undressed, and they asked them if anybody has gold, they put it in the basket there, and they, they were driven right on into the gas chambers at the left, and walking in to the, the gas chambers. And -----there was a Gestapo and a Ukraine and just with a with a with a, a whip and uh hitting them to each, each one was pushing himself into to the to the to the gas chambers. So of course at the other side, where there they, they slide off the doors, there was a, a different group than this one here, and we cannot communicate with them, just se, just seeing those people over the fence. And they were dragging the people in to uh, dragging the, the, the drag the people out from the camp from the big grave into another grave, on that side they, they were burning the bodies, and they empty out the big ----- . Now all the transports which came after that, came right in, they were thrown in right to the, to the, to the grave there, where the fire was.

Is that all?

Take ten is up.

Start with where the transports came in.

Again with the transports?

Go ahead.

Here were the were the transports where the railroad track came in right here, right in the middle, and they opened it up the doors and they make them walk straight here where it says, "Woman left, men right." And then here on the arch they, they say, you're going to take a shower, take take your clothes off." Okay, from the other, from the other side, they were, they were they were taking off their clothes and everything, and they were going right to the, to the gas chambers right here. The men came along and they joined together right in here, and they were into the, the gas chambers. Here is a, here is a, here was a pile of dead people, sitting there when I got there. Then uh, when I got at night...so I, I, I was in this barracks with the new, the new arrivals came some people was sleeping right there. Here was also a barrack they called it Hofuden. I forgot to get this, this was here, Hofuden was right there. And there was the stable, the horses where I worked most of the time. And this was the, the mass grave and then came a, a some kind of law???, they had to take out from the mass grave here, make a big grave here, and burn all the bodies, took out those bodies from before, and the new arrivals they, they drag them in right to the big grave where they were burning.

Tell me how the gas chambers worked.

Oh they, they got into the gas chambers, they, they pushed them in like a, like a -----, it was a, I guess about 14, and they pushed them right in, all of them, women, men, children all everybody right in there, and they, they closed those doors, slide, sliding doors, those closed it and they gassed them. So, from the other side, was another group of people, but the other group never got contact with this group of people, so their job was pull out from the gas chambers and, and pushing into the mass grave.

(Sandy saying something).

-----the slate was illuminating but not -----on track so use that finger snap for that even though there isn't actually any lip sync. And again, both the add slate #10 and tail slate #10, visual, on film before 8 track was a finger snap.

The following is going to be 30 seconds of room tone for interview with Isadore Helfing. The following is room tone.

End room tone, starting with some airplane and clean after that.

End of Sound roll, short roll.