

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Norbert Wollheim
February 18, 1992
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Norbert Wollheim, conducted on February 18, 1992 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.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

NORBERT WOLLHEIM

February 18, 1992

Correction, this will be Sound Roll 1 syncing with Camera Roll 1, Take 1, Norbert Wollheim's interview.

Should I look at you or, or look at...

You should look at me, and I will interrupt you when we run out. When we run out, I will actually hear it. I'm sitting close enough to the camera. And, I'll probably let you finish your sentence, but then I'll stop you.

Beep.

I'd like you to describe when and how your parents were deported, and the resistance that you and your wife felt at the time and your joint pledge to each other.

Well, my parents were deported in December, 1942, and they were part of the first transport, also found out later to uh, Auschwitz. Um, I've never see, I've never seen them again after that. And we were aware, suddenly, of the fact that one day it will be us too that will be taken away from Berlin or wherever we used to live at this time. My parents, uh, had lived on the Eastern part of Berlin. My then wife and I were living in, in, uh West, uh, the Western part of the ----- with our child of 3 and a half years, and so, therefore, we knew that certain preparations had to be made before that day in a way to get uh, we had knapsacks prepared, and some books, a chess set, toys for my child, and so, and, irrespectful of the fact that we didn't know where, uh, uh, uh we had to go, when we would be taken away, and um, so uh, we thought that uh, to be go, to go away would just be a, uh, a another, another part of this chapter, and that we had just to uh, um, uh, uh...find the endurance to uh, to uh, to uh, to uh survive, and then in order to survive the regime and, and, and wait for the -----liberations because when uh, my parents were deported and the turn came on us uh, the tides of, of the uh, of uh the uh, military events had ch, had turned already. It was of the Stalingrad?? and my hopes and my feelings were that this was more or less the end of the uh, uh superiority of the uh German forces, and the German military power, and it was also certainly already after -----, when the British had broken uh, the uh, power of Oman and North Africa, so the Germans were, were, were on the run. So, uh, we had hope that uh, also America was also already in the war, and we uh, at least I feeling that Germany couldn't match the power

and the economical and military power of the uh, uh Allies, especially of the America. America had become part of the, that uh, the Germans didn't have any chance to win that war. And, so uh, we build up this kind of inner resistance and hope that uh.

We have to stop because of the timing???

Beep.

Two.

So, actually eh, when we were deported from Berlin in uh, February, yeah, so they march in 1943. It was uh, after the uh, the uh, um, defeat of Stalingrad had become obvious to the whole world. But also uh, interesting enough, uh it was the time when, for the first time uh, the uh, uh, allied air forces showed their superiority, and because I remember uh, a week I think before we were actually deported, the uh, um, American Air Force made a major raid against Berlin, and the one of the hopes we had were that um, the railways leading to the East or wherever it was where we were going would be destroyed, but this hope was in vain.

Can you describe the actual deportation when you and your wife and son were taken.

Well, we were, we were, you know, they appeared. The uh, the Gestapo appeared in our--we were living uh, in, in our own apartments at this time. Germany never had a ghetto. In Germany never had ghettos. So uh, we were living in our apt and uh I had gotten some advice that I shouldn't go to my, to work. I was at this time part of the slave labor program in Berlin, and uh, stayed at home with my wife, then wife and child, and uh, uh, then uh, uh, we somehow heard that in, in the morning the uh, elite SS had uh occupied uh the places where Jews worked in, in working groups, had taken them away. And uh, then they came and appeared in the afternoon, asked us to get ready, and um, uh, we were not complete, full-fully surprised. But, uh, I remember my, my son was just sleeping, and my -----, my wife, asked, uh, these people, who were by the way not in uniform, uh, to give them a few more minutes to get the child ready and so, and uh, they agree. And then when we, when we left our apt, they sealed it with a, with a, with a, with a eagle of the uh Nazi Reich, and they walked us down, and then when we came down, we saw a truck with SS guards with rifles, and for a moment uh, that was um, um, uh not a, a very discouraging and, and, and, but um, still we didn't know what they wanted it, but they, but then um, um, ask us to, to ascend the truck, and we found other people on that truck uh, which was completely covered. People from out-inside couldn't see what's going on on the outside, and it turned out that these

people who were driven around, who had been driven around before, were people who uh, whose husbands had been taken from the, the different factories in Berlin. In other words, when they took this action which they called the final solution in Berlin, they took a man from the uh, from these places where they were, where they were working, and then they went after the members of the family, and their different places, so that uh, uh, uh the families uh never saw each other again. They were deported in a different way. I, luckily, was with my then with my then and, and, and child, and then we were taken around in Berlin, that was the time of the blackout. You, you uh, even if we could have uh, looked out, you wouldn't uh, know what was going on. And we were riding around for quite some time, and then we landed somewhere, and, later found out it was, was some kind of soldier barracks, uh, uh, where we were put overnight, and then uh, shifted to, to our collection point from uh ----- in, in Berlin, and uh, then the procedure of deportation started with all kind of uh paperwork. Uh, certainly the, even in the middle of that war when everything was short including paper, there was enough paper for all kind of procedures and, uh, we had to uh, uh declare our so-called uh funds, uh, our possessions, and we were served with a uh, with a uh, with a uh, kind of uh, summons if you want to, saying that we had been uh, uh declared enemy of the Reich uh because of our behavior, and that we would be deprived of our property, and uh, these, this uh, this was served on all of us, including my then child of 3 and a half years, uh, because of also his outrageous behavior towards the German Reich. Uh, after 2 or 3 days when we were taken, uh, kept there, we were, uh, taken by trucks to uh German uh, uh Freight railroad station, and uh, put on on cattle cars, and uh, then uh this train with approximately 1000 people left Berlin. We were uh, we were on, on each of a, uh, uh, uh, uh, of these boxcars, there were approximately 60 to 70 people, just a bucket for uh sanitary purposes. Uh no water. Hardly any air because these were uh, in, and uh, in, in the afternoon, if I'm not mistaken, it was March 12, 1943, we left Berlin in the direction to the East. Uh, I also vividly remember it was a Friday night, and uh, there was a lady, when uh, remembered it, and, obviously in preparation of the event, I don't know, had taken some candles along, and, uh, uh lit the candle, uh, uh to celebrate the Sabbath, the Jewish, the Jewish uh, uh Sabbath. And uh prayers were said, and uh it is----- when you look back on this, that uh, and you consider that was probably 95 of the people uh going with me on that night, um, did not live to see the next evening anymore, but still, on that Friday night, they were saying their prayers and, and, and, and, um, um, praying to God, and, and uh, uh, giving him credit uh, for I don't know what.

We're running out.

(Sandy and Norbert talking off camera)

Beep.

Three.

Uh, when we boarded the uh boxcars, uh, we found ourselves, and we were very, not too happy about it, found ourselves in the presence of other young people who uh, with whom we had grown up in the Jewish Youth Movement. So, we were not completely alone, uh, many of the people, other people just were isolated uh because, their husbands, uh, or, or, other members of the families have been taken custody, into custody before, and uh, somehow uh, for reasons are, are difficult to explain, we had a certain amount of relief because after all these weeks of waiting and these weeks of expectations, knowing that so many trains in transport have left Berlin already before. We thought now it's, now it's a, it's a new chapter, and we were looking, we were actually um, looking forward to that chapter with optimism and uh hoping or believing or envisioning that we would be taken to some kind of a labor camp and so where we would uh work, but survive, and wait for the end of the war. And, uh, uh, I was as, with my, with my child and my wife, and uh, our child slept a lot, and, and uh, uh when, was difficult to find out where we were going, but when we saw that we are going toward the east, we, my wife and I talked about uh, the time when we had made this trip in this direction voluntarily on our honeymoon a couple of years earlier, in the direction to Silesia, and also uh, uh, she and others wrote uh cards, postcards because uh, we knew it from, from, from things what, from uh, transports which had left Berlin before, that the people have thrown out these cards, and these cards had been picked up on the outside and had been mailed, interesting enough. So, uh, uh, to repeat, we, we were in such rather good mood that we even started to sing. There was a song in the youth movement that's uh, it's in Hebrew, how nice it is when friends sit together, and, and are together in, in friendship. So, uh, therefore, I say, in general, it was uh, uh a mood of expectation and, and since it was Friday evening, uh, after darkness fell in, uh, one of the elderly ladies uh, uh remembered that, she had taken some candles along, and she was lighting the candles and saying the prayers and uh, we found this somehow encouraging uh though it's so uh absolutely irrational, almost irrational, that here uh, well nobody but nobody knew about it that 95% of the people uh on that train would not live to see the next evening. Uh, but nevertheless, uh, uh, people prayed, praising God, uh, um, for what? So, uh, the train took approximately 24 hours from Berlin to the East. We still didn't know exactly where it was going. We saw at one point in the morning the name of Katavitz, which uh, we knew was upper Silesia, and then, uh, uh, not far from Katavitz, the uh, uh, train came to a halt, and, and, the sign somehow said uh, "-----." When the train came to a full stop, the doors, which had been sealed when we left Berlin were opened, and we found uh, outside, SS guards with rifles to the same extent that we had seen them in Berlin, but, an almost completely different type uh acting, almost

like animals, yelling and shouting and, and, and hitting with sticks, and everybody had to jump out from these boxcars which was not easy after 24 hours--it was rather cold winter night, it was only in March, and um, then came the order, um, leave all the luggage where it is, forget about the luggage, and, but what was far more important and, and, and more gruesome that the order came um, men to the, to, in one group, women with children to another group, and women without children a third group. And this is, that was the moment when, when um, I said, had to say goodbye to my then wife, and, and child, and my wife who had always been very courageous, very optimistic, uh, looking forward uh to a better future, said, "This is actually the moment I have feared most, that they would separate us." And um, then when we, when we were had uh, uh -----
-----, we had to form these groups, we had to pass by uh some SS officers. I, I was, later I learned one of them was the infamous Dr. Mengele, uh, though it was already a couple of years into the war, they looked very well-fed, almost elegant in their uniforms, and uh, this SS officer asked certain questions, about your age, about your occupation, about your state of health, and then with his hand, with his thumb, I would say, move to left or to the right, which means, uh, to the right was life, to the left was death. Uh, children, and the women with children, then, uh we noticed were loaded on special other trucks, none of us had any idea what, what's going to happen with them. I saw the SS trucks leaving, my wife, uh, somehow I had uh, uh found a place at the end of the truck, so we waved to each other, and that's the last I have ever seen of her. Uh, the women without children were also then uh, uh loaded on trucks by a group of women in SS uniform, for the first time I had seen these women in a uniform with their uh revolvers hanging out and also acting with their sticks and, and, and, and acting like animals. Uh, not very charming...and, and women-like. And, but then we were, we were uh, uh, from that station, which was Oswientian, we, the uh, we were taken along a tremendous uh area of factories, factory buildings, and, uh, -----
--- place we didn't know, and then we noticed that the trucks turned into a campsite surrounded by barbed wire. And, uh, watchtowers. There was SS guards on the watchtowers with machine guns, and then I realized that uh, uh, we had reached a point, uh, where really a question of survival was of utter importance, and I said to my friends with whom I luckily had found, we were always trying to keep together, may God help us to keep us, to get out of here alive. And this is when we, when we landed in, in that camp, which uh, uh, and still we didn't know where we were, and, we were received by, by uh, uh, some, some people in peculiar kind of uniforms. I uh, never seen these kind of uniforms, uh, before, although I later realized that was the same kind of uniform we had to wear later. We were asked, we were ordered to give away all valuables. There were hardly any valuables we had on us, like, besides watches and rings and so, orders was, we take, was taken in by the SS uh, uh, have the people there, and uh, then uh, uh, uh, we were directed to a, to someplace uh, uh, after being undressed, where we, we they gave us a shower, and they treated us with a terrible kind of an ointment, probably for disinfection purposes, and uh, they cut completely

our hair, uh, which means that we lost our kind of personality in this respect. We still didn't know where we were. And, standing there and waiting and some of these people got almost alarmed because there were rumors in Berlin about uh gassing and so forth, but we really didn't know any facts. And uh, then one man who came up, he always, all, uh, he was obviously an old-timer, which he was, and uh, he had been uh political opponent of Hitler, Jewish fellow who had fought in Spain against the Franco regime, had been caught there, and then been transferred to the, to the Nazis, and we ask him, "Where are you, and what's going on here?" And then he said, "Well, be aware, you have just come in to the concentration, concentration camp of Auschwitz. Uh, don't ask about your uh, wives and your children if you have come with them. They have to take care of themselves. We are here already for years and years. Praise yourself for lucky that it took you that long. Uh, we are building here a, this is a place which is called Buna, which is a bran--

We have to reload.

beep.

When you finish describing registration, can you talk a little bit about how everything happened so fast and you couldn't believe--take in what it was. But then go on to your decision to resist in the different ways that you did resist.

Yes, but, uh, uh, for me uh wanted to bring to--in, what, I think which is of importance, that information then, at this moment, uh when, when we still were not fully aware, where we were, what, what uh this man, who give us the information, ----- if you were in Auschwitz, but also give the information that we have been brought there in order to be uh slave laborers in uh a big um uh, ----- factory, built by----- of Germany, which is the equivalent to DuPont in, in, in America, where this factory is being constructed in order to produce artificial rubber of which Germany was short, and uh, that this must be our task, and um, if we could do the work and we would have the chance to survive, and it would not uh, uh, we, the um that would be the end of our road. Um, so, suddenly having come from, from the outside, having just been there, though the shock, the culture shock was tremendous because after having uh, uh seen our hair shaven and so and having uh received our new uniform, uh, it was not uh, it was, I mean, your mind was almost completely blotted out to, to accept that, and to, to realize and then to adapt to it. Uh, but, uh, it was hardly time for that. When we were, then after these procedures, released into the, into the, the barracks, and found the people who had come to this place just a week earlier or a few days earlier from Berlin and so, they told us, uh, or shared their experiences with us, said that

the, the work was ha-harsh, that was, that the conditions were, were, were very, very difficult, that certainly your food was scarce, but that uh, uh, since most of us, of us, had worked in so-called forced labor in Berlin before, we were somehow trained for, for heavy work. Um, and um, then also, what was important too, too, what added to this culture shock was that uh, we lost our names, we lost our identity, uh, we got a number, and this number was tattooed on our arms. Uh, mine was 107984. And, uh, uh, uh, therefore, y-y-you had become a number. And the questions which came up certainly, would you turn into a number? And, uh, especially at the beginning, we still, we pledged to ourselves we will endure it, we'll, we'll try our best to fight for our lives and for survival, if possible, because uh, uh, we wanted to outlive Hitler. And then uh, we had a first day of experience when we were uh marched to the, to the tremendous area of, of factories of Codbuna?? Uh, it was a vast area of mud in these days, uh, it was March, uh rain had uh had come down mercilessly, and, and, and it was, it was, there were no real roads, and so to, to walk was very difficult, took a lot of strength to do it. And then uh, we were put uh, especially in, for newcomers, this was the destiny, you were destined to do the most difficult work, which was transport and, and digging, and uh, this was not just done in a, in a leisurely way, but uh, mostly running around with cement and iron and things like that, and, and, and uh there are certain techniques how to handle, for instance, a transport of iron in order to protect yourself, and , but with, with cement it was terribly difficult because especially when you, when the rain came down, and these bags, these cement bags opened, then, uh, cement uh, turned into cake and then covered your, your, your uh, clothing, and your body, and uh, uh, the other side of our so-called existence or life there was that there was hardly any, any chance to keep clean because we were not allowed to possess anything, and, no, no, no, there was certainly no money, no uh, no uh, we had no toothbrushes, we had uh, uh, no knives, we had, the, the, the only thing they gave us was just a, a bowl, uh, to be used for, for the, for the soup uh, uh, to which they treated us, but nothing else. And, uh, so uh it was, it was, difficult, almost impossible to keep uh yourself clean, especially under these working conditions, and we were fully aware that, that uh, uh, without uh being able to keep clean, all kind of uh, uh disasters could strike, diseases and so on. Uh, one of the things, for instance, we learned very fast was that when the cement bags, which had 3 different layers of paper, uh opened you could use the middle layer to uh, for as, as, as a kind of toilet paper, or to uh, to uh protect your wounds and things like that. So, in other words, you come back to a very, very primitive kind of existence to which not everybody was used. And uh, after, I would say, a couple of days, we had the first victims, people had enough. Uh, uh in the morning, for instance, when we www-walked this stretch from the camp, which was outside of the factory, to the factory which was approximately a mile or more. Many of those, of the people said uh, uh, they had enough, and they ran out of the, of our group, and the SS guards uh accompanying us, then were shooting these people to death, uh, which they liked to do because, I understand, they were, got a certain compensation for that--so and

so many days uh, of vacation, and the next a bonus or something like that. So, uh, in this way we lost people because of exhaustion and, and, and ,and uh people lost their, their will to survive there, their, their, their -----, will to survive, and their lon de vivre?? as the French say. Um, a question certainly came to all of us, how long will we be able to hold out. And um, uh, uh, I was, uh, when I was pondering that question, uh, I was lucky then to be shifted to some other command uh, uh, uh, different work styles, and so it still was the, the conditions were terrible, the, the, the, the, the, was hardly any protection uh against the rain especially, and against the cold weather. Uh, our clothing was very thin. We were freezing, and, and especially in the morning temperatures, and that's a reason why, why, very often when we came back from the camp, we had to carry the bodies of our people who had perished on the spot in, in the factory, and uh, I think of the 4 weeks of existence there, we had lost, we were approximately 220 men, if I'm not mistaken, out of a thousand, who had been uh, selected for work, uh or 240 if I'm not mistaken, almost 100 had already uh, uh, uh, uh perished, and so the uh, th-this group became thinner and thinner.

Tell me about your friend, Fritz Schaeffer, who sort of resisted by deciding to die.

Well, he was one of those victims. Uh, uh, they called it an a, an a, a terrible expression, which was meant in the camp for reasons I did not quite, have never quite, the etymology of it has never been, become clear to me, were called musselmen. In other words, if people were so exhausted, and, because, you know, the food was, was so poor that you couldn't uh work up any energy or, or replenish the energy. And, he was one of those, my friend, Fritz Schaeffer, who, uh, had suffered a lot. He was a wonderful man, uh, he was, he was a good mmmman, he loved music, he had a beautiful tenor voice, and he has, had acted uh, uh as a hobby, as a cantor, in, in his community. And, one evening, he came to me, and, and he looked terrible, and uh, he said, "I have enough. I am giving up." And I tried to convince him that uh, that this can't be since he was a man of uh trad-a traditional Jew. I said, "You have no right to do that. You know the teachings of the bible." Uh, he said, "Well, but uh, what we see here, what we suffer here, for this, there, there's no provision in the bible, and I simply cannot go on." And uh, he was sick. Also, he had uh, probably an uh, uh, uh, it was called by Pneu, pneu-pneumonia. Uh, and, in the evening of uh, uh, he had to try to be admitted to the so-called hospital, which was feared by all inmates because to go in uh to the hospital always entailed the danger to be selected and to be sent away for death. So he had gone there, and the people had refused to admit him, so in the morning after dawn, he ran against the barbed wire, and it was a rule there that if any, anybody ru-was running against the barbed wire, which was electrified, by the way, that the guards will, would, would shoot this per, this person to death, and I didn't know that it was him. We heard the shooting all, all, all night, sometimes the guards...

We have to reload.

So how is it going, all right?

Beep.

Why don't you just pick that up. I thought you said before that he didn't want to be kicked to death.

That's right. He said, when we had -----, uh, when we had our little talk, and I tried to convince him that uh, he should go on, and try to go on, last of least because of his religious conviction, and, and he said that uh, the bible doesn't provide for this situation, and, and, and also, he has enough because he doesn't want to be kicked to death. And, um, then, uh, the next mor--during the night, we, we heard shooting. Now, shooting was nothing unusual. Very often the guards, in order to keep themselves awake, were shooting. And, uh, we heard it in the morning, and I heard it in the morning. We didn't know anything, uh, but then uh, when we were walking uh, uh to work, uh, a fellow um, a friend of mine who had been on the, on the same block with my friend, Fritz Schaeffer, said, "You know, did you hear the uh shooting this morning?" I said, "Yes, what happened??" He said, "Your friend, Fritz Shaeffer, he ran against the barbed wire in order to be shot, and because he, he, he said, he had enough." So, when I heard this, and reflecting on the discussion we had the night before, the thought came to my mind, my goodness how long will you be able to hold out, and isn't it what he did, actually uh, more rational. Though it might be uh irrational reasons. Uh, so I was pondering that question, and uh, certainly it was, uh death was cheap in Auschwitz, so it could be attained immediately if you wanted to. But then, uh, as, as, as very often happened in, in my situation and other situations, always something special came up. Uh, on that evening when I came back, and was an awful day again, uh, they called the people back to the central labor office in, in the camp. When, uh I entered, uh, Auschwitz and I was asked what my occupation was, I didn't tell them that I had been a student of law, and I didn't tell them that I had worked as a social worker. I told them that I have been a welder, a welder, because, as a matter of fact, I had uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh taken up welding in connection with my own preparations to find a way out of Germany. And I was advised it would be a good idea to have some kind of trade, and welding would be helpful. Uh, so I trained in -----welding, the Jewish community in Berl-Berlin had these uh vocational training uh, uh classes, and, so I said I'm a welder. Uh, the fellow registered me uh completely believed it because of my glasses and so, and, and, and, but, you know, there uh, uh, uh, uh, it didn't matter. And obviously uh, uh, uh, they were interested, they, uh became short of manpower already because it was after Stalingrad, and uh, so they called us to

that labor office, and again the question was asked, uh, what is your profession? And, we were told, uh, working in that factory, that they're in need of certain special qualifications, certain special skills. So, I registered again as a welder, and that raised my hopes that if I had a chance to work as a welder, I might have a chance to survive. Uh, so that gave me a new lease on life, if you want to.

Tell me about the Polish welder who sabotaged the German work.

Well, I was changing from one uh command to another. I got a la- I luckily got out of that terrible murder command of transportation and, and digging because of uh, the registration as a welder, and I was attached to a, to a man, who uh, in our command, in our group, who uh, who um, uh was working with Polish civilians. Uh, the man, I was, I was, uh, I became the assistant of a man, name was Smuda, and he was a, a, a some kind what I called Foksdeutsch, which means, belo-belonging to that group which was not, their loyalties were, were was, was a little bit doubtful, but, here was a, fundamentally a, a, a man, a Pole with a very strong national feelings for Poland. ----- And he was an excellent welder. So uh, we worked together. And, uh, after a certain while, uh, he helped me, he brought in once in a while a piece of sausage or a piece of bread, which was , which was very, very helpful, and one day I ask him, when we had established a certain relationship, and you don't have to forget that everything was strictly controlled there. Uh, I must uh make this uh remark here that at the beginning when we came to uh to uh Auschwitz, our working commands were accompanied by guards, approximately 10 or 20 people and one guard and these guards were not the most pleasant people under the sky. In connection with Stalingrad, and the aftermath of Stalingrad, uh, more of these SS men were sent to the front, to the, to the, to the in order to the Russian front, and, the Germans and the SS build a guard, a chain around the factory so that we were not watched completely by the SS guards in our, our detailed work. So therefore it was easier to come back to uh, to work, was smoother to communicate with him, and uh, one day I, I, I ask him, uh, if he would be willing to send a letter for me to the neighbor uh, where I had lived in Berlin. She was a wonderful human being, uh, uh, uh opposed to Nazism, uh working in a labor dept in Berlin, always being very helpful whe-when we had not the right, for instance, to buy vegetables or, or fruits and so on, and under the protection of the blackout, very often, there was a knock at the door, and all of the sudden we found a, a, a little bag with, with some of these of these so called goodies. So, uh, and I, when I, before we left, we also had left her with some pa-part of our belongings, and some money, so I wrote to her uh through Smuda, and Smuda mailed that letter to her, and she had the courage, and, though she could not realize what it was, she was not, she was not aware of Auschwitz or so, but, she reacted, and sent Smuda uh bread and money, which was very important for me. I couldn't use the money because it was, we were not allowed when we had no use for money, but the bread was, was, was manna. And, uh, so that was Smuda did. The other

thing what Smuda, as I said, since he was such an excellent welder, he had developed a technique since he didn't want to, to uh help the Germans to win the war, to uh, develop a certain technique of um, um, um sabotage. Uh, there is a certain way, when you weld, and we had this spe-our specialty in welding was pipe welding, that was just the pipes under, under high pressure, for pipes under high pressure, that by adjusting your, the burn off, the, off the welding tool, uh, you, you, you, you um uh, uh put certain defects into the, into this uh, uh connecting uh welding uh piece, and that's what he did, and I must say, I loved to see that, and I loved to learn it, and I did it. Uh, because I also was not interested to uh to uh to uh to have that on my conscience later to say that I helped the Germans to win the war. So, uh, uh, uh that's what we did. So, uh, uh, that was my experience with Smuda, which was a very pleasant one. Uh, later I was shifted to another uh, uh commando. I lost sight of him, I don't know what happened to him. I don't know uh if he was able to survive the war or not, uh, but uh he was a decent fellow, and I, I, I, I must, I'd like to, to pay recognition to that.

What is a Kapo? Just describe for me as though I don't know, what is a Kapo?

The etymology that led us to the origin of that never became quite clear to me. It comes, I understand, from the imperative, and the Kapo was the man who was in charge. He was the, he was an inmate himself, and es-especial when you have a bigger command, like I say, of 50, 60 people, there were the, there was a supervisor what they called in German, the forarbeiter, and the fellow who was in command of this labor detachment, and they called him Kapo. Uh, there were mor-they were mainly or mostly uh, an elderly hef, not an elderly, a, a haftling, who had spent uh quite some time in, in, in the camps already, and he had certain privileges as far as food and so is concerned, but, and there were uh, a Kapo is a sensitive issue because uh, certain people uh, we had difficulties especially when we came to, to Auschwitz, where these functions were mainly an ends of Poles, some of them were rather rabid antisemites, antisemites, and um, very, many of them abused the power they had, uh,

We have to reload.

(Long tone)

Under the uh, headline uh, uh, uh spiritual resistance.

Yeah, and I don't know if it makes sense to you but...

Beep.

One of the reactions, certainly, of people as soon as you had uh spent at least 4 weeks or 6 weeks and you were still alive, was the question, how can you build up your, your, only physical resistance, but spiritual resistance, because we are fully aware of the fact that um, we would be prisoners as long as Germany uh, uh, uh, the Nazi Regime was in power, and uh, uh, obviously, uh, the military operations were not fast enough uh for us uh in order to be liberated. Uh, one uh, uh specific thing was that people especially, who were traditional Jews, uh, uh, uh, uh tried to build up their uh, uh spiritual resistance in this way even uh, uh under the danger of being uh, uh, uh detected and uh being uh, uh punished for that, kept up for instance, trad-certain traditions. In my block, uh, there was a man, uh, who had been taken from Vienna with a so-called Polish accent. He was a, was a scholar. Uh, and um, um a man who had spent a couple of years before in Buchenwald, then had been transferred to uh, to uh Auschwitz, and, he organized uh, uh services in such a way that first of all, you had to be very, very careful not to be detected what, what you was, did was, that he assembled uh in a traditional way uh Jews are praying in the morning but in the evening, and especially in the morning, just assembled ten men which we called a minion, uh, uh, assembled them for morning prayers. Certainly there were no books because we didn't have any papers or any books, and so, so, all these prayers were, were, were spoken by heart, and I knew them very well, but just to participate in these, in these kinds of assemblies was very helpful, it was, it was nourishing us, it was, it gave us some kind of lift up to the same extent as for instance even on the day of uh, of Yom Kippur which was the holiest day, in spite of everything, we assembled in, in the block of a friend, and their prayers were said, and whether the people were orthodox or reformed or conservative, it, it gave them something, I mean it was, was so contradictory that here where we thought we were forlorn, and God had forsaken us, that we were praying to that same God, and wrestling with our, with our uh, uh conscience, uh, uh, uh wrestling with the question, "Where is God?" Uh, we had uh, uh in our group also a man, an elderly man, whom I had befriended; he had come from Poland in his younger years after service in the Austrian army, had made his way to Berlin, he was a shoemaker, and uh, he had built a nice family in Berlin, children, and he was stretching out his life, his, his existence, but then he was taken in September, 1939 with a so-called Polish accent, and had been in a couple of the concentration camps-- Sachsenhausen then Dachau and Buchenwald, and when I met him, he, I met him in Auschwitz. A wonderful elderly man, simple, very pious, in spite of what everything had been done to him, he used to believe in his God. And one day, uh, it was a terrible day, the, the rain was beating down, we were standing on the, on the -----road called, on the big square, and they were counting us. And the, these SS uh gangsters were not very good in counting, uh, you know, the order had to be there, and if something was wrong it had to be uh, they had to count and recount time and again

and again and again, and we were standing there, and uh, a wind was blowing mercilessly from the Beskit?? Mountains, and we were standing there in our, in our uh, uh thin clothing, uh clothing, and, and, and people collapsed, and uh, but, these are the days and the moments when, when, when minutes become hours and hours uh became, become weeks. And all of a sudden I saw that friend of mine who was standing there not far from me praying, and I was looking at him, and I ask him, "Yakov, what are you doing, I mean you have said probably your morning prayers, and it's too early for the evening prayers, uh what are you doing?" He said, "No, I, that's right, I, I say a special prayer to God." I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I am, uh, prai-praising God." I said, "Are you out of your mind? Praising God here in this situation where we are insulated, where we are isolated, left alone, uh, uh, uh, in, in, in this, in this, uh hell, and you are praying to God, and you are thanking him?" He said, "Yes, I am thanking him." Said, and I was very irritated, and I said, "What are you thinking? What are you God thanking for?" He said, "I'm thanking God for the fact that he didn't make me like the murderers around us."

And now, can we talk about the old-timers who tried to escape.

Yeah, that was in 4, 1944,uh, we knew already because we had, we had uh, especially I had uh built up a contact with a prisoner, with a British prisoner of war who had been brought to Auschwitz against the rules and regulations of the Geneva Convention. The uh British soldiers and I, I was able to befriend them, and luckily I was able to communicate in English with them, my school English was good enough, and they had uh, uh, uh radio set even in their camp, which was not far from our camp, by the way, which was not under the SS, but under the German army. And, when I became close uh with them, they uh brought me every morning news they had heard the night before on BBC. So we more or less knew uh what was going on, uh, uh, how the Ger, how the, uh especially that the Allied had landed at Normandy and, when the Russians came, became, got closer and closer with, with their armies, and uh, so it's certainly we go excited because we knew that this is the moment we were waiting for because this means either life or death. And uh, in that uh, uh, uh fall of 1944, 3 of our, of our, uh old timers, uh, who had spent years and years in camp, they had decided that uh, they tried to escape because they were not, they were not sure if uh, the uh, if we would live to see the day of liberation, if the SS would not dynamite all these camps and put us to death like, like the others, who have gone before us. So, they had a certain plan to escape, and they, unfortunately, were caught. And uh, the penalty for this uh in the concentration camps was death. And, uh, the Germans had a very, the gruesome, they made out of this a gruesome spectacle of public hanging, and one evening when we came back from work, we saw the gallows set up there for all 3 of them. Uh, we knew already that this was somehow pending because we knew that they had been discovered, and that uh, the uh the uh, obviously the

uh, uh, uh correspondence between Berlin and Auschwitz went back and forth, what to do with them, but certainly the, the sentence was death. So, when we came in and uh, we, we, we heard that there was, that they would be destined to die. And, uh, it was a, a terrible day, it was uh, in fall, it was, it was uh, uh, uh, uh all the 10000 of us who were in that camp were ordered to come out and to watch that gruesome spectacle. And, uh, then the Germans uh kept a certain formality, reading uh the sentence, a death sentence, uh not in the name of any court, but just in the name of Himmler, the, the head of the SS. And, uh, uh, just before the henchman did his work, uh, one of them, doesn't matter who it did, cried out in a voice that, and we were as I say standing there uh with clenched uh fists and our uh, uh and, and uh talking about where's God uh at this moment, and -----, by the way, has written about it because he was also there. And said, just in that moment of when the, when the, when the sentence was read, and before the henchman could do his work, one of them cried out in a voice which could be heard over the whole square by all the 10000 assembled there, and they did it in German so that the henchman should understand, that the said, "-----," which means in English "You comrades, keep your heads, your heads high because we will be the last." And then in a few minutes later they were no more.

We're getting room tone Brett. Stay still.

End room tone.

Beep.

Um (clears throat) I would say some kind of a watershed for the history of Jews in Germany, were the events of November 9, 1938. Uh, this uh, called sometimes Kristallnacht, I don't use this expression because it's a label which came out from Gobbel's uh propaganda ministry. The day there after when they somehow felt ashamed about uh all these heaps of broken glass which covered the streets of Berlin. Uh, in connection with these events, with the burning of the synagogues, the looting of the stores, the smashing of the windows, uh also men were taken uh, en masse uh, to uh German concentration camps, then within Germany. Buchenwald and Dachau and Sachsenhausen Rhinebrook??? near Berlin. And after a couple of days, uh, uh, some of them were released, especially those who had been veterans of WWI, and but then they came out. They, they looked terrible because uh they're clothing had been all the disinfectant, had been treated in a way they, they were, they appeared in the streets, looked like appearing in rocks. And, in connection there with the Jewish community in Berlin, uh, which also was badly damaged because uh, uh, uh some of them, many of the people had been taken away, and uh, for days uh the uh administrative buildings had been closed. They opened their rescue operation for those people who had re- had

come out, especially in Berlin, for, from the concentration camp of ----- . And, uh, people, uh, who uh, came uh out and were directed to the Jewish community where they got their first good meal, where they could uh, uh wash up again, and that was one of my functions, I volunteered for that, because members of the Jewish Youth Movements volunteered for all these things. Uh, I tried to connect the people by telephone with their families in different parts of Germany where they had been taken from, in the middle of the night or so uh, in connection with the events of November 9th. And when we were working there, uh, uh one of my friends was the uh, the head of that relief uh, support, and it was my youth leader for many, many years, he said, "Listen, I just got a call from uh, name is ----- . They just returned head of the executive head of the uh, uh, uh central representation of Jewish in Germany. Uh, there's a job to be done. I understand that the British are willing to take uh children and uh, uh to England, and uh, uh, you are supposed to, to do something, see uh, uh this uh Dr. Hirsch. Next morning I found myself in his office. As I indicated he had just returned also from the concentration camp, but had returned immediately to work again as the executive director of the organization. And he told me that the House of Commons in England, the debate of the situation of Jews in Germany and Austria, had been, uh, there was a debate in the House of Commons, and as a result there of, they have decided uh to give shelter to approximately 10,000 unaccompanied children from the age of 13 to 17 for the time being so the children could relax and could, could recover, and were not exposed to the persecution in, in, in, in Nazi Germany and Austria. And, uh, that uh, operations have to be set up, and uh, he wanted to help me because there was the uh, the uh, the uh, the uh, organization had wonderful social workers, but these uh, uh, uh, uh, especially ladies, had hardly any experience in technical work, and how to run the operations and so, I was not trained in that but uh I had a certain, a certain, uh, uh, uh, capability for organizational things, which I also picked up during my existence in the youth movement, and I uh, uh accepted the offer to serve there. He promised me I was in the middle also of my own preparations with my then wife uh, uh to, to leave Germany uh, if possible. And, and so I got a commitment from the gentleman Hirsch?? that as soon as the work would be done, he will see, the organization would see to it, that I would find also my, my way, into, to safety uh outside of Germany. So I took over the uh technical, the responsibility for all technical arrangements to be made in order to bring the children out of Germany. The project was 10000 children. That's it. Now, that was not easy because we have no experience in this field. The children were selected by, by the welfare organizations in the different cities of Germany, and then uh, don't like to go into the procedures--uh, in a simple way they got their permits, what they hand out at the English consulates in, in Germany, uh, but we had to see to it that they were transported out of Germany, so, uh, and that was not an easy job because there was no, no, no, no, uh, uh, uh, uh fax uh, there were no fax machines, and there, there was uh uh no dialing system for telephones, and so, so this uh and uh, uh, uh ----- , under which supervision all this certainly had to be

done, was very meticulous, they wanted the exact records, uh to be checked, so all this preparatory work required a lot of preparations and labor. We even were allowed to uh, uh send escorts from uh Germany with the children to England, and these had to be selected, and this was not easy because the Istapor??? gave permission for these escorts only under the provision that they would return to Germany from England in order to continue the work. Uh, uh, so what I had to do was to uh to uh to not only prepare the records, but also to see to it that on a certain day on a certain morning, all these children were, were collected in Berlin, for instance, where we had special railway wagons, which would take them on the way of via Berlin, Hanover, to Hopfen, Holland or Flushing, and to Herigen, England, where the committee in England (clears throat) excuse me, was waiting for them to be then distributed (clears throat) at Liverpool Street Station in London to foster parents or to homes or whatever it was. And uh, so, it had to be organized in such a way that they all had to come at a certain day at a certain time in, in order to be ready and then, because the trains left approximately I think at 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning, that's not important, but people had to come there to a certain, so the arrangements had to be made with the railway system, and arrangements had to be made, to be made with the police also, so uh, uh, uh, and, we also had taken over the responsibility so that the police to keep uh order, so that the police should not interfere because certainly that was a tense situation because the parents had brought their children in order to uh, uh hand them over into our custody to, to transport them to England. So, uh, uh, uh, I saw all the transports which left Berlin I saw off because it was my function to see to it that these things were working properly. So uh, on a typical day we asked the parents to come with the children, not only from Berlin, from, let us say those who were to come from East Prussia or from Bressler also, had to travel the night before, but in the morning they all were there. And, that was a very special atmosphere in the air of expectation to a certain extent, there was laughing and there were tears, and there was concern, and at last, last uh, uh, uh, advice by the mothers what to do and what not to do, and then uh, at a certain time when the, the time of departure uh came closer, and we had, as I said, reserved wagons which, which had to be filled with these children, and the, the police had insisted that the parents do not accompany, accompany, uh the uh, the uh children to the railways because there were certain difficulties, uh, they insisted that the goodbye had to be done uh, not in, in, in uh, in public. So, uh, uh, uh and, the time of departures came closer, then I, I was ascending a chair there, that was my -----, and I asked the uh parents uh then that, I addressed the parents, and told them that the day of departure has come, and they should say goodbye because we're on a strict uh order by the police uh to take, just to take the children up to the rail, uh railways, and they have to remain there, and uuuuuh, that I ask for their cooperation, their understanding, because only that uh, that their behavior would guarantee the continuity of our operations. So, um, um, then the parents said goodbye, and again there was laughing and crying and a last hug, and, but uh, later when I asked very often to myself the question, how did I have the

courage to say that to the parents, I only can answer that at this time we didn't know and we couldn't even foresee, we couldn't surmise for a moment that for many or most it would be the last goodbye, that most of those children would never see their parents again, and that a year and a half later, from that same, same station or the same railways, the trains which now were rolling with the children towards the West...

We have to stop because we just ran out. We have to do that part again.

beep.

So let's back up to where you were talking about the goodbyes, and that no one could foresee this.

Yes, I said then that as the time of departure came closer, when I was ascending a chair, telling the parents that now the time for goodbye has come, that we ask for their cooperation because we are under strict order by the police (clears throat) not to let the chil--the uh parents uh come to the uh, to the uh, uh, uh railroad, the railways, uh because they didn't want to uh have uh this see the public because they wanted to avoid any scenes in public. And, I asked them for their cooperation because uh the continuity of our work depended on their behavior. So there were tears, and there was laughter, and there was a last, there were hugging and kissing, but uh, this was??? a tense situation, no doubt, but uh, the children oh, most of the children were in a some kind of a mood of expectation, and uh, the parents tried to uh, to control their emotions, to, to show they are, they are courageous, uh, uh, in order to make it, not have, to make it more difficult for the children. And, um, very often after that I have asked myself the question where did I take the courage from to tell these uh people to say uh goodbye, uh, and the answer to that is just that uh none of us, nobody of us, could foresee even at this moment that for most of the children and most of the parents, it would be the last goodbye. That a year and a half later or so, from over the same railways where the train uh left uh to take the children to a new country and to freedom and liberty, the trains would roll towards the East and take them, the parents, uh to, to the, human slaughterhouses in Auschwitz and other places. Uh, we had of a certain, uh, uh, attempts uh were made uh, uh also ----- received the permission, our own escorts could accompany the, the children because the moment when the children said goodbye, the escorts took over, they were carefully selected, mainly teachers, we had some, some uh young doctors and so uh children doctors and so, who were not busy because they had lost their, their, their, their permits, their license, um, to go with these children, and uh, I myself did it because last not least I wanted to see how it's working. We found, for instance, out that at one place where the train ----- in the direction to England from Berlin, past the border uh line of Bendheim, the SS uh, acting as customs officials, acted like vandals, uh, not touching the

children, but, but tearing all the luggage apart and looking for valuables and so on, which uh frightened certainly the children tremendously but there's nothing, nothing we could do. But the moment we came to Holland, for instance, uh, we were received by wonderful human beings who uh, uh were the committee, and they treated the chil- the children with chocolate and sweets and cake and, and all kinds of goodies, and uh, then uh, uh, the trains rolled uh towards the uh these places from which the ferry went to England, uh that was to Herrich in England. Uh, as I said, I went a couple of times in order to see what can be done to improve the uh technicalities, and then, then if necessary to change the procedure. There are 2 stories I'd like to tell in connection there with, I've never forgotten. Uh, one was when we uh ca-uh uh in, after a couple of months of these transports, a couple of these transports had left, we were twice by the uh chamber of commerce I think, it was in England. Then too many goods were taken into England, uh, uh, uh, uh considered merchandise to be sold in England, uh, and that uh, the uh Chamber of Commerce did not like that. Sure enough, parents had given their, their children all kind of valuables, uh, not, not, not jewels or so, but things they, they, they, they like them to take with them ph-photo cameras and so, which cous, could be uh taken along, money certainly was not allowed, the minimum, or the maximum of money you would take out at this time were 10 marks, which was nothing, hardly a pound or half a pound. So, uh, the people came with valuable music instruments and things like that. And in one occasion when I was uh the uh, the uh, in charge of this transport, we landed in Herrich, and uh, the customs, uh, inspected, they were very generous, uh, but certainly they did their job, and uh, then I heard my name called, and I came to the cusom official, and uh, uh, he said, "Sir, we have a problem here." I said, "What is the problem?" and he said, "Well, here's a young man, and he has a very very valuable violin." Well it was not certainly a Stradivarius or a Vonari or Tomatus???? but it was obviously an Italian violin, and I said, "Well, I cannot understand, you have to kindly understand???? uh the uh the, the boy loves music, and, and the parents gave him, gave him a, a violin, and he likes to practice music. I didn't know that the boy was able to play it. So, uh, the customs official still was very doubtful, and I went there to him and said, "Well, uh, uh, uh, uh, let me help you and convince you that the boy loves music, and let him play if you may, if I may." He said, "It's all right. Why not?" And as I say, I was sweating, uh, uh, cold sweat because I wasn't sure. So, I asked the boy then in German, "Are you able to play?" He said, "Sure." And then he started to play, and I didn't realize in my excitement what he was going uh, uh playing, but all of the sudden I saw that the custom official started uh acting, and that the people, the British people around him became silent, and there was complete silence in that area, and then I realized that the boy had started to play "God Save the King." And, when I got aware of that, then I thought it was a little bit embarrassing, I wanted to stop him, but that boy was eager, he wanted, he played all 3 stanzas of the National Hymn, and the people, and the activities there in Herrich, in the customs uh area stopped, and when he was finished, and uh, uh, uh operations started again, I asked the

customs, said, "Are you now convinced that the boy loves music?" He said, "Yes, sir. Completely. Go ahead." And that's uh the one story I, I, I, I have still very much in my memory. The other is uh, uh shows the, the, the uh kind of human reaction which I appreciated tremendously, I love to, to tell it again and again. We were under the rules not to admit uh, uh to take children on a transport over the age of 17. In other words, if they have completed the age of 18, they couldn't go on the transport. So, uh, on one of these transports when I was in charge of it, and during the night when we made the ferry from uh, uh Flushing to Herrich, we worked in order to bring all these papers into shape, the permit cards in alphabetical order and so, so that the children shouldn't wait too long because uh it was a long uh train ride, and there was a, was a night in which, uh, they wouldn't sleep too long, and so, so we were working, in the lounge of the, of the ship??, and uh, all of the sudden one of my friends said, uh, came to me and said, "Norbert, I think we have a problem here." I said, "What is the problem?" He said, "Here the uhhh, permit, the landing permit said that this fellow is over 18 years old." I looked at it and I couldn't believe my eyes because it had passed the inspection of all of us. So, we went into a huddle and, and, we, we asked the boy to come down, and said there must be a mistake. So, the boy had already gone to sleep, and when they brought him down, I almost fainted because I saw that he came down, uh, with his hair shaven, which indicated to me that he had been taken in November uh to a concentration camp, had been released after a certain time and probably was under the order of the Gestapo to leave, to leave Germany, or would be taken again into the camp. And we went to them after having seen that uh, we went into a huddle with the uh, with our, with our escorts, deliberating what can we do to save the situation. And there were two opinions: one said, uh, that uh, we should reveal it and throw ourselves at the mercy of the civil servants, and the other, and I was uh one of those, said well, we'll simply do something else, we'll play a trick. We'll say that there was a mistake of the German police, and, and, and uh that they had made a mistake, and -----, but that means that the boy had to be convinced that he really was one year younger. So we explained it that that boy was standing in front of us, he knew that something was wrong, and he was just shaking like a shaky bone, and I was, I felt terribly sorry. So he was, and he was a...smart fellow. He was given to understand that when he will be asked how old he is, that he should then say that he was born year earlier, one year before, and uh, we even uh, arranged that that during the night somebody should wake him up to --- ----, to ask him, "When were you born?" and then he should answer. So, we landed the next morning in Herrich, and -----, suddenly, all of the sudden immigration said, "Mr. Wollheim," said, the official said, uh, "Sir, uh, there must be a terrible mistake.

We have to reload.

Beep.

Okay. Let's back up just a little bit.

Well, um, the decision has been made to say it was a mistake, and to try to smuggle him in. So, the next morning, we didn't sleep too much, we landed in Herrich, and uh, sure enough, soon, there was a, was a, was a, I heard a voice saying, "Mr. Wollheim, the immigration officer would like to see you." So, uh, and I knew what was coming. So, uh, uh, he showed me this permit, and said uh, uh, "Listen Sir, I cannot admit this uh boy. Uh, this young man, because uh, under the rules and regulations uh, uh he is not entitled to it." And he pointed out to the date. And I said, "Uh, sir, this must have been a mistake. Uhhh, because uh we checked carefully, and that cannot be. And, uh, kindly asked the boy himself, so, this boy came and he was certainly all and shaking in his boots, and he was white like uh, newly culped wool??. white on his face and sh-really shivering, and that immigration officer looked at him, and I could see that something was working within him, and he said, he asked me, "You really mean that the German police, which was famous for accuracy and reliability is making mistakes?" And I told him, "Yes, sir, because don't forget we're already so and so many years after the Nazi regime, and the quality of those people they are now serving is not the same anymore." He said, "Uh-huh." Then he looked again at us, and he asked me, "Do you take it on your responsibility to say that this is a mistake, and that the boy was born one year earlier, and without waiting, I said, "Yes sir, I do." And there was a long time of silence. And I realized that he knew I was lying, and I knew that he knew that I was lying. And he looked at the boy again, and he looked at the card, and after certain moments, which was a moment of life and death for that boy, he took out the stamp, 'Admitted to United Kingdom,' and he was admitted under false pretenses, uh, which means, uh, the man knew, the civil servant, uh that uh, uh, in this situation, uh, a human gesture would be of tremendous importance, and if I say that, because probably this man is not around anymore, but he has earned his place in heaven.

How many children altogether did you rescue, and, how did that make you feel?

Well, um, I think the war broke out, which, uh by the way, I went, I went also to, to Sweden a couple of times because Sweden took a s-a couple of small groups into their country, uh, but, we were able to bring out just of Germany, and we were not allowed to work with the people in Austria or in, in Czechoslovakia, but we uh, war broke out, I think when we had reached approximately the, the, the number of 7000. Um, the only thing I can say that uh, uh, certainly I, when I came to London, and my friends there are, uh, and I told them that I'm going back to uh to uh to Germany, uh, and, and I had a privilege uh, to fly back, which at this time was a sensation. Flying was not a daily uh, a daily affair, uh, and they said, "Are you out of your mind?" Uh, I said,

"Well, I can't help it because uh, we are under the obligation, and I've given my word to serve as long as I can, and, and also uh, uh, it was so I had my parents still living in in uh, in in uh, uh Germany. I had a sister for which I felt responsible, and certainly my wife and my child, and so that I didn't have a right to desert them and to stay in England, uh, and also it would have meant certainly that the operation would be, might come to an end, and would be the uh, would be damage, so uh, as I say, I'm, I'm, I'm glad that I did it. I'm very proud of it. I paid a p-a certain price for it, but nobody could foresee because the man, who, when he asked me to help him, and promised me, made a commitment to him-----to get out of Germany. Uh, uh, uh, a year or a year and a half later, after the war broke out, he was taken uh, uh to the concentration camp of Mauthausen, and murdered in cold blood there.

Now let's go to before 1938 and 1939. How did life change, both gradually and suddenly?

Well, uh, you have to go back a little bit uh further because, because uh, nobody can forget that, uh, there was a life in Germany and a Jewish life before Hitler, and it was a very active life, especially in the community where I grew up. We had a thriving community, an active community, and I participated as a young man, as a member of the Jewish Youth Movement. Um, we uh, Berlin also, and I enjoyed it especially as a student, uh, I became a student of law in 1931. Uh, Berlin was uh, uh a center of cultural activity. In the field of music, field of literature, field of theater, and uh, we fully uh participated in that, and really enjoyed it to the best of our ability. And even when we are students that didn't, didn't, didn't, didn't have the uh, the means to attend all the operas, uh because it was too expensive for us, and we just uh, went there, and we could do that, uh played, played uh, uh, uh people on the stage. Uh, we were not paid for that, but we had opportunity to, to listen and to participate. So, it was very active. After 1933, and that' interesting, um, uh, things uh, uh, went in waves. The first enemies Hitler took care of were not the Jews; were the unions, were the political parties like the uh social democratic, democratic, and the communist parties. For them, uh, he established the concentration camps. Certainly there was on April 1, 1933, we had the events of so-called boycotts, which uh, uh gave us for the first time an inkling what might come out, but we though, uh, and I was not alone in this respect, that this is just a transitory thing. That uh, Hitler cannot prevail, that for economical reasons he will not be able to uh, to remain the Chancellor of Germany. That uh, the, the countries like England and France (America at this time uh didn't play a role in Europe) would not let him, let him uh threaten them. And that uh, therefore, we just had to have to the cou-not the courage, we had the, the uh, uh stamina to hold out. Uh, then uh, things uh, uh, uh, also uh many people thought differently, then tried to get out, to get out was not easy, the world was not open. America had caught us, people who'd try to get into Palestine needed at least 10,000 pounds. And, uh, uh, uh people would try to get into South

America and so, had terrible difficulties, so, i-immigration was not, not a -----, an easy thing. When we had the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936, things almost looked normal, though, before we had the Nuremberg Laws, and we thought, after that, we could somehow settle on the fact that, all right we would not be, not be citizens like, like the others, but, who wanted to be a citizen? The, the, the Democratic regime of the Weimar Republic, which had come to an end, uh, uh, uh, uh, didn't allow people under, had come to an end and, people under Hitler anyhow did not participate actively in any kind of political life. Uh, uh, it was a totalitarian, uh, country, and we were not interested. We uh, we built, on the other hand, a tremendously active Jewish life. There were, uh, uh, institutions of Jewish learning uh, were created. A, a tremendous amount of uh books of Jewish content were printed. We had our own Jewish cultural activities. Uh, people who had, I wouldn't say lost the faith, but, who had moved away somehow, all of the sudden came back. Uh, the Jewish sports organizations became very active. In other words, it was a kind of life uh, almost uh, uh, an automono--an autonomous uh, uh, uh life within the parameter of our abilities. Um, which uh, was deceiving certainly, but, nobody certainly at this time could foresee what will, what at least, uh, I don't have, have met anybody who, who, who, uh, who, who would say that, who would say that he could exactly foresee Auschwitz or, or Treblinka or Majdanek. And, uh, then when Hitler uh had attained more power in Europe, partly due to the weakness of the allies, uh, and that after, especially after he stretched his muscles, and, and, and that, and that first Austria, and then, then Czechoslovakia, then things uh, uh became more serious, and, and it became clear that the uh, the uh, work outside...

(Sandy says something)

Oh, I'm sorry.

beep.

Uh, I would say that we conducted in German some kind of restricted, almost normal life. Restricted uh because we didn't uh, uh, we were not politically active, but there was only one party, and there was only one totalitarian regime, so who cared. But we were left to ourselves, somehow. With, with, with certain control and all this, but uh, uh, many things were produced which were, which, which were, really an achievement, especially in the field of education. Uh, the organizations, for instance, training people for immigration to Israel, were active, and trained the -- ----- and the young people, the pioneers who want to go out and so. Uh, there were 2 different opinions in, in Germany at this time still prevailing. One would believe that it's just a matter of time, and the regime might collapse, and the others who said, "No, uh we want to get out because

uh, uh, we don't see any future, especially for our children," and that was especially certainly true for the professionals who had lost their license like lawyers and doctors and so on. An indication that the uh thumbs?? were tightened more and more--we got in 1938, I would say, which certainly had something to do with the political success of Hitler on the world scene, also with the fact that probably the radical elements within the Nazi party thought the time has come to uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh realize their param--uh, uh, uh, uh, uh concerning the Jews. And, uh, in 38, you had a development where uh, uh business which was still open, retail business, and, to a certain extent, even dept stores, then changed hands, and uh, Jews uh left the boards of big corporations, and uh, it started uh and, and then uh I would say the total change came with the events of November 10, uh, uh which uh received a misnomer was Crystal Night. It is actually the uh, I call it a night of shame, and -----, it's interesting that in Germany, this expression Crystal Night is not being used. Uhhhhh, I must say, I'm grateful for that. Uh, but then when, when we saw uh what we couldn't believe, that Germany which after all was considered for, for, for all of us, who were educated at German high schools, German universities, that Germany was once considered a center of civilization, uh, had handed over the uh power of, of, of uh government to thugs and to, to people who, who replaced uh the, applied uhh, the political means of violence. And uh, uh, this uh, and it was right what the then leader of the uh, uh German Jewish community, Rabbi Beg??, who was my teacher and spiritual mentor said, I think, at this time, that the historical hour of German Jewry, which had lasted almost 2000 years, had come to an end. And, uh, then uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, started the, the running, uh trying to find a, a place somewhere outside. I, myself, uh, in connection therewith, uh, uh, uh tried to learn a trade like welding. Um, but the uh, the world was more or less closed, and, uh, we were, we were um, jealous of all those who had found a, a way uh, especially after the November events, uh, England took in uh, uh, ten thousand children, and it is to their honor, I must say that, in spite of all the policy Mr. Chamberlain had followed before with his appeasement, and his famous uh peace, when he came back from Munich, uh that he had seen Herr Hitler, and he had brought back peace on our time, um, but uh, uh, uh, uh America remained closed because there were quotas, and uh, uh also, uh, uh, other countries closed their doors so um, um just the, the will to get out was not enough. Uh, also you have to have, find a country which was willing to receive you, and that didn't exist. And there are many infamous cases, one of them, for instance, the chapter of the St. Louis, the boat which went out from, from Germany with refugees, uh, came to Cuba, and Cuba--Batista at this time, the head of the uh, uh-----government, declared the visas as invalid. The boat could not uh disembark the passengers. The uh captain turned the boat around after a certain time hoping that the uh, the Jewish organization would, would help, and that governments would come to his help. The boat actually cruised before the coast of Miami. The people on the boat saw the lights of Miami Beach, but America refused entry. And therefore the people had to be taken back to uh Germany, and uh, the Captain uh who was really a hero, then

very, very slow, hoping that a solution could be found, and then eventually uh, uh, uh, uh, uh ended that, uh, in this way that, that France and Belgium and Holland and England agreed to take so and so many of these uh, uh, uh, uh refugees, uh, but certainly uh, many of them, who, who landed in France and in Belgium and Holland, later were overrun by the Germans when they conquered these countries. So, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh with the November events, uh, there was a complete change, and also, we then realized, especially when we worked, those of us who to save the children, that uh war might be imminent. And, uh, the, the, the speed of our work was dictated uh also very strongly by the fact that uh, uh, we had to try to complete the job before uh, uh, uh there would be uh, uh this terrible thing called war. And, uh, uh, uh, after Jews in Germany, and I can only speak for them, were thrown out of their positions after November, uh, they were drawn into what I called, we called later, uh, uh, uh, uh slave labor, uh, uh, uh, taken into labor gangs as trench boat workers, diggers, and so on, and uh that was the situation uh, uh, uh prevailing between, I would say, November of 38 to the beginning of the war, which was September 1939. (Sigh)

Now, looking back on all you experienced, how strongly do you feel about revenge, especially in Auschwitz? How did you feel about it.

Um...I've been asked that question about revenge uh a couple of times last month these, when I was giving evidence in, in, in, in criminal procedures against the uh the uh the uh criminals, the, the, the, not war criminals, but uh the, the, the, those who had been -----, were, were, were, were brought to trial. The uh the uh, uh SS gangsters of Auschwitz and so on. Um, I personally, I can't speak only personally, I never felt revenge. Uh, because this was not part of our education. Uh, contempt, yes. I have a contempt, a deep contempt for especially those, those, those people who talked so much about their heroism, the heroism of the Nordic race and all that, and then at the same time, they who were not fighting at the front, were fighting children, old men, and, and, and women. Uh, I also say that uh, uh, was, it's part, I think, of the heritage of which I am very, very proud. On the day of the liberation, and I liberated myself together with some friends, by running away from my killers, to the uh American forces operating in Northern Germany near Shrelin--8th Division on the, I think the command of General Geffin, wonderful uh man. Uh, when we got into the city of Shrelin, and when the Americans had taken over Shrelin on May 3, 1945, you could find all kinds of German weapons there, from missi---from, from, from, from pistols to machine guns, to the to the bazookas--whatever it was. You could grab them, and you could start your own private war. And, uh, uh I'm certain that if we would uh, there the, the German soldiers surrendered en masse to the Americans, uh, and they were very happy to surrender to them, and not to the Russians because also they were under the misconception that the American would welcome them, uh, and ask them to turn around in order to fight the war against the Russians. Uh, we uh, when we

uh, uh, amongst those who surrendered there were cert-certainly quite a number of SS men, and SS guards and so on. And if we had taken any of these weapons there and just killed these uhhhh, criminals, I'm certain, uh, especially under the circumstances prevailing in these days, nobody would uh, uh have had objections, I guess. But we didn't do it. It was not part of our education. It was not part of our value system. Uh, because we believed that one day there would be justice, and justice should be meted out by their proper authorities, and that would be it. That we were disappointed by many of these procedures...

Let's reload.

Beep.

You may search the historical records of those days, especially after the liberation, and you will find, do not find one case in which a liberated former concentration camp inmate had taken revenge against, uh, an SS guard, personally. Uh, because, yes, that's what we believed in, in justice. In a proper uh, uh, uh, uh court of justice uh, these people had to, would had to answer for their crimes. Uh, but we were later became rather disappointed, uh, especially with a practice uh in Nuremberg, where, uh, people were sentenced, and then very early released, even if they were guilty like hell. Including the uh, the tycoons of German industry, that's another chapter, a regrettable chapter, which is a part of American history, I'm sorry to say.

Can you talk about your own personal feelings at liberation--the mixture of joy and sadness, the realization you're alone.

Well, uh, certainly uh, uh, uh, I remember that very well uh, that morning of, of uh May 3, 1945 when we saw the American flag hoisted uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, in, in, hanging from the trees in the forest near Shrelin, and then we realized that we had been just reborn, uh, and had uh received a new lease on life. Uh, I remember uh we, we embraced each other. I was in a small group of uh people, and, and we were laughing and we were crying, and, was a tremendous uh, uh feeling of relief, but also of burden because uh we realized that uh this moment for which we had waited years and years, we couldn't share with uh, those of us who had deserved it--our own families. And we re-realized also something else, especially the Jewish uh, uh persecutees, that we had no home left to go to. I, personally, knew that going back to Berlin would be a hopeless--I couldn't find anybody anymore. And I was uuhhh, therefore, uh, I had to settle for a certain transitory existence somewhere else. I knew I wouldn't stay in Germany, because for me, Germany was one big cemetery. And therefore, uhhhhhhh, it, it, it, it was especially, and this is the specific situation for

the, for the survivors, for the Jewish survivors. The world was celebrating, I remember how jubilant the Frenchmen were amongst us when he saw the tricolor hanging from uh, from the roofs in Shrelin, and they were dancing. We couldn't dance. We had no right to dance. So, that was the moment of, of, of, of tremendous elation, but also tremendous sadness, and, every one of us uh felt uh, uh, we were grateful to the Allies who had liberated us, but we were alone. Uh, individually alone. And uh, uh, uh, uh...looking into a future uh, uh, uh, uh, in, in which we, we had hoped will come one day, but we didn't know at the moment how to handle it.

Can you describe for me some of the different kinds of camps that existed. People don't realize that there were more than one kind of camp.

Well, uh, uh, you had in, in, in, in, in the concentration camps have a history. Uh, it started, if I'm not mistaken, with the first camp in Dachau in Munich. Then you have one camp at the at the beginning of the Nazi time. Then you had the uh camp near Berlin, Sachsenhausen -----, where I was after coming back from Auschwitz. Uh, there was Buchenwald. Uh, there were the uh the uh, camps in, in the -----, uh, uh, uh where mainly political prisoners were kept, but the Swool?? system changed completely after uh, uh, uh Hitler invaded Poland, and uh, uh, then entered Russia, and uh...for reasons which are still difficult to analyze, uh, the extermination camps were not established in Germany proper, but on Polish soil, like Auschwitz and Treblinka and Majdanek and Sobibór and -----. We had gas chambers. Crematoriums they had in all the camps, but gas chambers you did not. And the major centers of extermination, which I call human slaughterhouses, were just Auschwitz and Treblinka and Majdanek.

What about all of the work camps? What was the fate of the people in the work camps?

Well, there were, there were different uh, uh, I'm not familiar with ----- because I never, never, never uh, uh, if I may say so, served in them. There were certain labor camps, for instance, uh, at the beginning, uh people were taken out of the, of Polish cities, Jews were taken out to help to build the Audubon, the uh the uh highways and so on. Uh, and they were, some of those camps were not guarded by SS, were guarded by the so-called ----- . They were certain different, different, different kinds of treatment. All this came to an end later when Himmler uh, uh, uh, and especially the SS Economical Dept uh, uh was in charge of, of, of the camps because for the SS, uh, don't forget this, these camps, to a certain extent, was a good, were a good uh source of income. Uh, for instance, in our camp, in, in, in Buna, uh, the SS received for each worker working in the -----Factory, a certain amount of money. We, we never saw a penny of that. But as ----- paid a certain amount. For me, for instance, a little bit more because I was a

so-called skilled worker. Uh, and so, the SS actually uh, uh had the benefit of the slave labor there, uh, which later resulted uh, for instance, in certain suits. I, after 1951, sued Aichfarben?? for the non-payment of, of wages to us, but that's another story. Anyhow, uh, the SS uh, uh, uh, uh, uh managed these camps certainly also for their own uh busin--uh profits in monetary form. It was not only uh a place to keep people and to, to in, to uh, uh, to prote--uh, for, for security reasons. There was also, uh, they, they uh could uh, uh squeeze out as much as they could in order to profit from it.

What do you think survival is a matter of?

Sheer luck. I was once asked by a journalist I should explain to him the art of survival. Uh, there is no art on that. It's a sheer accident. I knew people who were much stronger than I am, uhhhhh, who were, who were looked like, like indes, who looked like indestructible human beings, who, after a certain while, also lost the uhhhh will to live because they have not enough food, or a sickness struck, and so, it's like uh, uh, survival, as I say, is an accident. Like uh, like the survival of a, of a soldier in battle. Uh, uh, he might lose, uh, he might lose a friend to the left, he might lose a friend to the right, he himself uh, uh can survive. Why? Nobody knows. Because, uh, uh, uh, uh, on the bullets uh, uh directed at him, there, there is not his name tag. Uh, we, we were in, in danger of, of death, we lived with death side on side. Uh, even at the last moment when, when everything was lost already for the Nazis, and when, together with a small group of friends, we escaped the killers to reach the American lines. The uh, the uh, the forward section of the American lines. Uh, even then they were still shooting after us. But, luckily, as I said, our nametag was not on the bullets.

What about choices? You made lots of choices which ended in helping you survive.

Yeah, but you never were, uh, know how, how, how this will--you never know the result. You know, under normal conditions, you might uh be able to, to uh, to make a reasonable decision, and say, "It might result in this, or might result in that." Or, as my uh teacher, Leo Begg, always said, "People are thinking, um, ahead, and they are, they are planning a hundred different possibilities, but the hundred first actually occurs." Uh, under un-normal conditions, under outrageously un-normal conditions, uh, for which actually uh the human condition is not prepared, there is no choice. It is sheer luck. It, and it's, luckily, and I am one of the luckies.

I'd like to do one more roll.

Okay.

Beep.

Can you talk about the choices of the guards and the SS, did they have choices? Were they only following orders? Were they acting on their own?

Well, I'm not too familiar with the, I'm familiar only with the literature I've seen after the war. Uh, there were certain, ch-first of all, I want uh state very clearly that uh, uh when the SS or some of the SS men in these trials pleaded uh, uh, uh, uh innocence or, or said that they're not guilty because they're following orders, there's not one case known in which an SS man refused to serve in a, in a concentration camp or a death camp, and was put on trial, or was, was, was, was shot or whatever it is. Number two, um, amongst the SS uh, uh people, there were certain people who uh, uh just tried to uh to uh, uh, uh show their heroism by being more brutal than the other. And, uh, interesting enough, this uh, uh, this uh, this uh, uh enigma or it's a miracle, I don't know, whatever you might say, that especially those who originally from Austria were more brutal because they were not considered by the -----as, as, as complete heroes, and they wanted to show them uh, that they can do better. Uh, so, therefore, uh, uh, in this respect, the SS men had certain choices. Uh, he could have done his guard duty, duty probably without being uh, uh brutal. Uh, but uh, uh, uh, many of them volunteered for these services, and, and felt very good about it. Uh, uh...to be a, a member of this group uh, uh means that you had to have a certain mentality, uh, especially these SS guards in, in, in the concentration camps because uh, certainly they were, they were programmed somehow uh because uh, uh they were told uh, over the years that uh Jews are vermins and that they have to be eradicated, and that uh they are the uh, the race, the, the, the Nordic race, they're the heroic race, and, and, and the Superace, and so, and they meant it, and they believed in that. Uh, but it is their fault.

Did you run into one who was kind or helped or saved anyone?

Not that I know.

You saw yourself in the mirror once when you were in the ----- . Can you describe that.

Well, we had no mirrors in the camp actually, you know, but um, yes, I, I remember that. After a couple of weeks when I was out of these um, um murder commandos, I uh, got a job as an assistant for the, for -----, and was able to work in a hole, protected against the elements, and uh, there was also a

bathroom which could be used, uh, otherwise we were not allowed to use the bathrooms of the German super-superrace, and there found a mirror, and I looked into the mirror, and I got, I was aghast, I was, I couldn't believe myself that that's me. I, I, uh, uh, not only did I, I had uh lost weight, but lost hair, but the expression of my eyes and so were unbelievable to me. And, and, and, and um, it was not encouraging I would say. But, uh, on the other hand then I said, "Well, uh, if that is so, uh, uh, still uh, this cannot kill my spark of life, not at this moment at least.

That spark of life, was there ever, how did you, how did all of you relieve yourselves? Did you ever joke, did you ever have...

Well, there was humor, there was real humor also, sure, sure, sure. And, I was, I must say, a lot of like, I'll tell you the story about my friend, contempt for those people, who, who, who we uh, uh, counted out of the human race somehow if I may say so. They themselves con-considered themselves as supermen, but, but uh, but we does, didn't agree with them. Maybe that's clear. Uh, we counted them out. And we, we the only questions we, we raised time and again, like my friends, was that uh thank God I, I, I, I was not created in the image of those people uh, uh, uh try to understand, I, I remember uh discussions I had with the, with the British prisoners of war. I saw to it that to give them as much information as possible because I told them time and again, "You'll probably be able to uh, to uh, to survive because you're under the protection of the, the National Cont--uh, uh Red Cross, and irrespective of the fact that the Germans disregard the uh rules and regulations of the National Red Cross, but you have more of a chance to survive. And, if you should survive, and we shouldn't survive, please be aware of this and this and this and that, and I told them about the things going on, and the gas chambers and so on. So then one of these people, and they were wonderful, these, these boys, said, "Norbert, explain to me one thing. These are, look like ordinary human beings. They have eyes like others, they have noses like others. Their mouth is the same. How is this possible?" And the only answer is, is that you cannot explain it. And I think we, we lack explanation up to today. Well, if I may say so, especially, in face of the uh, revisionists today, and and, and writing this history, what happened we know, this is, now it's documented, and one day we find another document, and so, the facts are established, more or less. The 'why' will probably never be established.

Can you talk a little bit about the friendships and the support.

Yes, this, this was a very important source of, of ,of resistance if I may say so. That uh, especially with uh, with certain people got together and said, "Let us try to share whatever we have." Uh, you want to share abundance, it's easy, to, to share a shortage is not easy. And, they called this uh, uh, uh 'Powkas.' Where the, where the, where the uh expression came from, I don't know. So, they uh, uh, there were

friendships, and I had certainly my friendships with the people who were in my transport, uh or the same youth movement. We tried to always, tried to get together, to find the beds in the same area, and they have a word of encouragement and so on. I unfortunately lost all of them uh, due to circumstances, and that hurt me badly. Uh, so I was trying then to reach out to others with whom I established contacts and with whom I have contact up to today, as far as they survived, because this was very important, especially when we were aware that uh, the, that on the military front, things developed in our favor. And, uh, I will never forget when uh, the, the, the uh news reached us even behind the barbed wire of Auschwitz, that the Allies had landed in Normandy, and uh, uh, there was a mistake before because I think by some, some, some error, a girl in London had given out uh, uh, uh a telegram, and later it turned out it was a mistake. And that also reached us. And the British ----- and they came next morning, and we heard the BBC News uh, uh told us. But, when the landing had occurred, and when the uh, when the uh, when the uh, uh, uh, uh bridge had had been established, and we knew that uh the Germans had not been able to throw the Allies back into the sea, there was tremendous uh feeling of elation and joy, and, and it was almost like bread. Uh, it uh, because, because, uh, uh, human beings also live on hope, and uh, there was only a question how long would it last that after the invasion in, in, in, in, in June 1944, it would take uh time up to May 45, that Germany would surrender. This we don't didn't expect. But, it gave us a tremendous lift-up, there's no doubt about it. And, uh, so, uh, uh, uh, uh, you know, in this respect, uh, also I have, I would say a word about something else, uh, which has something to do sprit-spiritual resistance. I was working in the camp in Auschwitz, uh, doing some welding work in the camp proper, and then I heard that the British soldiers had been brought to Auschwitz in their own camp and were working on in the factory, and I heard this, I asked uh for a transfer to a commando where, where, where I could meet these British soldiers, which was not easy. And, uh, luckily my school English was good enough to communicate with them. They were very careful. The British were very, very careful. But after a certain while when they when they came to the conclusion that they can trust you, they became wonderful friends. There appearance in Auschwitz was one element of not only joy, but elation and, and encouragement. They were healthy, they uh, they uh, they uh, they had been transferred from, from North Africa to Italy, and from Italy to Upper Silesia, and uh, they had uh, the privilege of their Red Cross parcels, which they shared with us to a certain extent.

We have just run out.

Beep.

Why don't you back up to where you said there were tremendous -----.

Well, the fact that when we could, when we saw the British uh soldiers, uh, who encouraged us,

and, on the first day when I marched out and they came from, let us say, from the left, and we came from the right, they were throwing cigarette packages at us, and chocolate packages at us, and they gave us uh, they, they said, "Don't worry, you'll be home by Christmas." That was, that was, that was like manna, it was, was a tremendous amount of encouragement went out from them, and, uh, then later when, when we had uh some, the SS guards uh were not uh, uh, uh controlling, could not control all individual actions anymore, and we tried to get to, to somehow have contact with them, uh, uh, as I say, I personally uh built a wonderful bond of friendship with them to such extent that they had when I, when Auschwitz was evacuated on uh January 18, 1945, uh, when the Russians approached by the way of Krakow already, I walked out of Auschwitz with British uh army boots, and, and British underwear, and uh, uh, uh, uh really, with a feeling that that, that uh they meant it. As a matter of fact, uh, some of them, I met, I met after the war, uh, two of them or three of them I met when I give evidence in Nuremberg against ----- . Also, later I, I kept contact with them, I'm still in contact with some of them. And uh, uh, even one day, I was brought over to England uh, uh, uh because they had a story of one of them, uh, this is your life, and it was a wonderful get-together with them because these were rather simple people, but wonderful solid people with, with, with character, and they somehow uh extended the uh, the uh hand of solidarity of man, to these, uh, uh, to the, to us, to the prisoners, who were who were who were who were, who had lost everything, but they gave us a tremendous amount of courage and encouragement and, and uh, uh, uh this is a chapter, which up to now has not been described. I hope one day it will be done because uh, I said it on that occasion when I was uh, uh invited to London, that England can be very, very proud of these men, who were, who really proved that even in Auschwitz uh, uh humanity could prevail.

Can you describe for me what were chances of survival were being ----- based on your age and your sex. I think most people don't realize what your chances were a child or if you were a certain age.

Well, certainly that's, there, there are 2 groups of people who had no chance, and always no chance. These were the children and these were the elderly. Uh, and, also for those uh who were uh, uh brought to Auschwitz, uh mothers with children uh had no chance either. Those who were, who were still capable to work, as long as they were capable to work, and able to work, had a certain slim chance, but they had a chance, how long it lasted, that was uh a matter of, of, of uh, uh, uh daily destiny, I would say. Because in the morning you wouldn't know if you would be able to see uh, to see uh, to reach uh the evening, and on the evening you wouldn't uh, uh be sure that you would uh, be able to, to see the sun, in the next, the sun going up the next morning because death was a constant companion. But, uh, uh, uh, uh, this was, this, this was, this was more or less the,

uh, call it the uh, the uh, uh like an assaulting factor uh, uh, only the able-bodied, as long as they were able-bodied, had a chance to survive.

When you say the children and you say the elderly, what are you talking about in terms of age?

I would say, uh, there are certain cases at the age of 10 pretended to be 12 or 14, and they managed to, but these are, these are uhhhhh, a few cases. Uh, elderly, well, there was one camp in, in, in Czechoslovakia called Theresienstadt or Terezin, where uh elderly people uh, uh found their place, and also, uh people who had uh, uh received the decoration as veterans of WWI. That was at a certain time, and, and uh, even the Red, the National Red Cross was fooled by going in there and reporting that that how wonderful uh the existence (coughs), not how wonderful, but the existence, there was bearable, so the Nazis tricked them into them even uh, uh organized shows and so, and after the Red Cross had left, they sent the people to Auschwitz. Uh, and, but, uh, the, the, so the elderly could exist for a certain while in Theresienstadt, but many died there already on malnutrition, exhaustion, sickness and so on. But then, starting especially in 1944, also the elderly from Theresienstadt was sent to Auschwitz for extermination. So uh, you know the uh the policy of, of the Nazis uh changed constantly, but the goal, the main goal, uh, to exterminate the Jewish people, remained.

Can you talk about how Kapos could be good or not good.

Yes, I mean, this is also a mat-a matter of uh, uh human, human disposition. Uh, there were, I remember, uh Kapos who were rude, rude to uh, uh who uh who uh, uh, uh, uh, had, uh, who, ought to be, or were, were to be treated like the Nazis themselves, but I also knew people who really tried to, to do the best in order to help, no doubt. Uh, a Kapo I know had become a, a, a, a curse word, to a certain extent. It is not fair. In general you can say that uh, not all uh, uh passed the test, but uh, I can vouch for it that many tried to behave, and tried to help, and, and, and, and uh had kept their reputation intact.

Can you tell me what an appel is.

An appel is a roll call. In other words, uh, uh since the Nazis were so eager on security, uh, especially when I came to uh to uh, uh Auschwitz, we had at least twice uh, a roll when the morning before we went out to work, in the evening when we came back, and uh, uh, so technically what happened, uh so happened that each com, each block, each uh, uh barrack, uh had its own place where there, where people were counted, and uh, after they were counted, then the whole

camp was called to attention, and the number uh inmates was reported to uh or to the commandant. Now, uh, when the, when the figures tied in properly, uh, uh, it lasted twenty, twenty-five minutes, half an hour or so. When, when, but when the figures did not tie in, then it could last hours and hours uh, uh when they discovered uh their mistake, and that was uh, uh rain or shine, in the winter, during the summer, irrespective of this, uh, under the German motto that "-----," which means "there must be order." And only when they were satisfied that the figures were tying in completely then they, they, they released uh to, to, to, to retire to our barracks.

Well, that's all?

I could go on, but... We have to room tone again. That means we have to stay quiet. We're doing room tone, Brett!

This is without motor.

(Norbert laughing).