

Are we ready yet?

OK, we're ready. For those of you who are not in the class, the lecture today, and the future five guest speakers who have been advertised, are part of a course called Workshop on the Holocaust, which deals with the events that took place in Germany and Europe generally between 1933 and '45.

Purpose is to try to bring people who went through that terrible experience to talk to people, to relate what the events were like on a firsthand basis. The speaker today is Henry Oertelt, who was born in Berlin during the period before Hitler came to power, and saw the rise of the Nazi era. Wound up in Terezin concentration camp, which is near Prague, and in Auschwitz, and then various other camps on the way to being liberated in 1945.

So I will just sort of ease myself out of the picture and leave myself-- leave yourself with him.

Thank you. I will probably not waste too much time, because you will find that the hour and a half will go very fast. Although, I am not too much in a hurry, to stay after if there's anything necessary. I try to reserve time-- in fact, I will reserve time for questions and answers afterwards. Although, as was said, that if anywhere in the meantime, somebody wants to ask a question pertaining to what I'm just saying, if there are more clarification, don't hesitate. I'll be glad to explain as good as I can, as well as I can.

I'll start with the beginning, with my beginning. I was born in 1921, as it was said, in Berlin. To you that aren't so hot in math, let me quickly point out to you, I'm 62 years old. Get that out of the way.

Which is really not much of significant-- of any significance, except that probably by pointing out my age to you, and probably reminding you of my age, at the time, as we go along, to some of you it might relate a little bit better. You might be able to put yourself, probably, to some extent into the situation that I'm talking about.

1921 was about three years after the Treaty of Versailles in Germany, which actually left German economy in shambles. I'm bringing this up because it has something to do with Hitler's upcoming. As some of you that may have studied the Treaty of Versailles probably will remember, it did not allow Germany to create anything that has anything to do with war production-- no ships beyond a certain tonnage, no tanks, no airplanes, not of anything-- guns, or anything like that.

The result of which was, of course, an absolute breakdown in the economy, in the German economy. If you would imagine that, for instance, tomorrow, or as of tonight, President Reagan will close all the war production-related factories, I think we would have easily something like better than the 50% unemployment here in this country. Regretfully, employment is still regretfully related to some amount of war production.

In Germany-- and as it is, by the way, I'm not necessarily going chronologically year by year. I'm jumping a little bit back and forth. It's really of no importance to be exactly in chronology.

When Hitler came to power-- jumping ahead-- in 1933, there was a 40-- 4-0-- 40% unemployment raging across Germany. And that was not an unemployment that just lasted already for a month, a few weeks-- literally years, and years, and years. Families were really starving. The crime rate was unmeasurable-- thefts, and break-ins, and things like that, were just going out of control.

So also, during the 1920s, there were several-- there was a multi-party system. There were well over 20 different parties. And every one of them had a crack at governing Germany once in a while. And every politician would stand up in front of the people and say, if I am elected-- we have heard those things, and we also know very often what happens after those speeches.

And so, again, this happened in Germany. Really, by the time Hitler came around, they had been practically through all the parties that would promise something, and Hitler was sort of the last resort. I'll come back to that a little bit later.

In 1923, a book was written, Mein Kampf, my struggle. Most of you probably have heard about it. I doubt very much

that anybody of you have read it. That book, at the time, when it was brought into the public eye, or tried to-- and they tried to bring it out into the public eye, it was just demolished by the book critics.

In fact, the old headlines in the literary critics-- would actually headline this new book of written by a fellow by the name of Adolf Hitler, by the name of Adolf Hitler, was-- they used the word, an abortion, in the literature of this age. And so really, regretfully, in retrospect, nobody read this book. If people only would have read it, I suppose many-- very few of them would have believed what was written in it.

For instance, it describes very simply Hitler's plans about creating the master race, the Aryan race. He pictures the blond, blue-eyed leaders of mankind. He also, in various degrees, describes the various races, and what degrees they are to be subservient to this master race.

And as I say, the various degrees-- on the bottom of the ladder, of course, were the Jews-- and the Gypsies, of course, too. He didn't like Gypsies, either, for some reason.

This book did not, at that time, talk about the destruction or the extermination of Jews. But it talks about the isolation in some area of Jewish people. And there are many, many other crazy things-- of course, yeah, it talks about the idea that this Aryan race is destined to rule the world, to be the head of the people as a policing body.

And many, many other things-- I don't want to waste too much time on that. So I just wanted to point out, it was not a new and unknown idea, and it would have been better known if people would have read this book. Nobody bought it. Anybody that joined the Nazi party was receiving this as a welcome present, one of the most wonderful presents you can imagine to get when you join something.

But that's the way it went. Finally, in 1933-- just as a little reminder, I was 12 years old at that time-- Hitler came into power. I have witnessed and heard songs that these Nazi groups-- by the way, also, I'm sorry, I should point out, too, that in 1921 was the first time that a handful of brown-shirted characters were marching up and down the streets, for the first time, and would sing songs, like in German, [SPEAKING GERMAN], or to you that don't understand German, today, Germany belongs to us, and tomorrow the whole world will belong to us.

Another song that I didn't recognize when I was a baby, but I can remember back when I was probably five, six, seven years old, the song that frightened me as a child. And I think it would frighten you, too, if you would change the words around that would be applicable to your race or religion, if you will. For instance, a song that had the refrain, and I quote, [SPEAKING GERMAN], and all in the very catchy, marching tempo. The translation of that is, yes, once the blood of the Jews squirts off our knives, everything will go twice as well.

These are songs that you heard constantly. Whenever there was one of those-- these were their favorite marching songs. When they had their exhibitions, these characters would sing those things. And you would stand there-- if you want to get the feeling of what that means, translate it into your-- use the words-- instead of Jew, your own religion, or your own racial group that you belong to, or whatever. And then you probably get a little bit of feeling, and imagine a group of those characters marching up and down and singing those songs.

Of course, in-- probably that will make you understand a little bit better what that is like. I grew up with these songs, and these songs did not cease. On the contrary, you heard them practically every day-- another group marched here or there. And then, later on, of course, as the masses swell.

1921, as I said, the first handful of brown-shirted characters, 1933, 12 years-- 12 years only-- this group had grown into the major power in Germany to make it possible to have their leader, namely Hitler, to be voted to head the government. Just an imagination-- at this time, the handful of people in 1921, people laughed about it.

In fact, my mother told me that when, in those years, those characters would have a big advertisement somewhere hanging on a tree or on a paper, that on Sundays, so and so Sunday afternoon, such and such park, this such and such group will be there, and hold speeches and march up and down. People actually packed their picnic lunches to go to that park, and say, hey, listen, there's one of those idiot groups, apparently. We got to listen to this. We got to hear that.

People laughed their heads off.

Now, remember this-- it took only 12 years, as I said before-- forgive my repetition because it's important, took only 12 years for this group that was laughed about and not taken seriously, to grow into that power. In fact, we are still, after this length of time, feeling the aftermath naturally of what happened in Germany.

1933, three months after Hitler came to power, the first concentration camp was built. It was not an extermination camp. The idea of exterminating came later.

It was Dachau. It was meant to be a heavy special prison, of course. Not just for Jews, also for political opponents. The first book burnings started-- books that were written by Jews, or anti-Nazis, were condemned as trash. There was even a book at that time written by a fellow, a young fellow, by the name of Einstein, was burned in those burnings.

Heinrich Heine, the poet that every German child grew up with for the last some 100 and some years, because he was a Jew, of course, all of a sudden was declared as trash, was burned. And many, many others.

1933, I was, as I said, I was 12 years old, I was in school. I was pretty much immediately excluded from all school activities, being a Jew. I was not allowed to take in sports activities. The first thing that happened in schools, by the way, was that children were kept after school-- all political youth organizations, church organizations, were prohibited. Organizations like the Pathfinders were declared anti-government, and therefore, were banished from the Earth.

Pathfinder, the Scouts, of course, Scout movement.

I was not allowed to participate even in after school. The after school activities were immediately like military type drilling, the kids were kept after school with the teachers, and they started to march around the schoolyards. After about a half a year of this kind of-- if you were attending all the time, and you were very much forced to attend-- people, the kids were put into uniforms.

From small, from six years old, and very, very snazzy uniforms, which, of course, impressed the children very much, naturally. Even like the smallest child, after a few months of being attentive to all these meetings, received to attach to their uniforms-- little kids, as I said-- six, seven-year-old kids, to uniforms a stiletto, a knife, which was very, very fancily made.

And a beautiful leather sheath, the handle was a carved handle, depicting the German-- the eagle, the German eagle, with the swastika on there. Was very shiny. The blade was a shiny chrome blade, with an inscription on there, blood and honor. And these little kids-- this was a sharp, like a hunting knife, were allowed to wear this.

Of course, you can imagine, the youth was taken over pretty quick by these ideologies. The classes were plastered with-- my own class that I attended until I was 14-- were plastered immediately with pictures of all kinds of races of people all around the world. You had overlarge size heads of people, blonds, all kinds-- blond and blue-eyed, and all kinds of shades, Blacks, Latins, you name it, all various shades.

And then, every once in a while, the teacher was forced to, once in a while, interrupt the class and say to-- hey, Jimmy, now you tell me, which one of these people do you think is the best looking? And lo and behold, while you didn't know exactly what was coming up, if you have pointed at the snazzy, maybe at a snazzy South American type guy, then you had to listen, first of all, to a long speech why this person is one of the ugliest person in the world.

And of course, naturally it belongs to one of the dirtier races. And so therefore, you got to understand that you-- and then, finally, you got the idea, if you are being asked again, just point to that blond, blue-eyed guy, and you don't have any problems.

And so besides that, by the way, when you did that terrible mistake that you made, you had also to write a minimum of 1,000 words, a piece of paper, why the cleanliness of the race is such an important thing.

Indoctrination started early, and I can't just give you all the details. There are more and more of those things, actually, to come and happen along.

At the same time, dehumanization of the Jewish people began, too, in many ways. The dehumanization, for instance, started when these groups saw, for instance-- when these marching groups, for instance, saw maybe some of the very religious type Jewish people-- at those days, the long beard was a rarity, but then their caftans, when they saw them walking on the street, they would just single them out and start beating them up.

And do all kinds of things. And say, the dirty Jew, and so on and so forth. Naturally, the simple kind of things that appeal to an awful lot of the masses.

One very important aspect I should bring out, coming back to the time when Hitler was voted in, practically overnight-- I'm interrupting my speech about dehumanization because it might come into your mind, why did people go along with this? And you've got to understand this picture now.

Practically overnight, Hitler opened all the factories, not paying any heed to the Treaty of Versailles, all the war factories. And immediately, started building, without any secrecy, the weapons that are needed to handle a war situation. People were called to work. They worked not only their regular hours, they worked overtime.

They were well paid. Hitler started to print money like crazy. People had their wallets full of money. All of a sudden, these families that had starved for years and years, all of a sudden, found themselves being fed, having work, and living beautifully. He created spas for the workers, that for very little amount of money, they could go and visit.

And so you know, I'm going to give you an example-- and of course, I know it's an oversimplification, but it's just the same thing-- human beings are not much different from animals. If you, for instance, would come home tonight, or this afternoon, and you find a little kitty in front of your doorstep that is apparently lost, and you put out a dish of milk, you got that kitty forever.

And so I realize, as I say, it's an oversimplification, but it's about pretty much the same thing with human beings that have suffered for such a long time. So therefore, the German people, at those days, went along with everything. Some would probably say, well, I don't like what I see, and what I hear, but look what he did for us. He saved us from disaster, and so on, and so forth.

And in the best case-- in the best case, I say-- they did not pay any heed to the beatings of Jews, to the demolishing of the Jewish stores that started to take place. And so they would turn away, and would say, well, that's just some wild hordes that will do this kind of stuff for a little while.

And actually, frankly, some of our own Jewish people said also the same thing-- well, that's a temporary thing. Once Hitler is going to be in the saddle and doesn't have to fear for his security politically, he will straighten out. He just can't do it any other way.

Well, the same talk was going on in our family. By the way, it was feared many years-- and I remember very well as a small child, before Hitler came to power-- the talk about our family members, that they feared that Hitler would come into power and the Jews would be in very, very bad shape. But then again, some of them said, well, that can't be going on. He just wants to get into power, and then everything will be forgotten and everything will be fine.

I had an uncle who was a military hero in World War I. He had gosh, a cabinet full of-- what do you call these things? Merits, and stuff like that. The highest Iron Cross, he had. And he said, well, Hitler was a soldier, too. He certainly will not do anything to us that were soldiers, and so on and so forth.

People would try to catch straws and hold onto it. Well, it didn't help. Also, my uncle was taken to the concentration camp.

1935, I was 14 years old, I was thrown out of school. And this particularly is not because I was such a lousy student-- I

wasn't the best one-- but at that time, the law came through that no Jew is allowed anymore to go to public school. There were some Jewish schools, which were overcrowded.

But I was fortunate at that time that a manufacturer of furniture took me in as an apprentice. And so, therefore, I learned to be the trade of making furniture and designing furniture-- which, as I go on, probably is one of the reasons that I am sitting here at all.

But so I was in that apprenticeship. Of course, I also had the chance to go to designing school, yet, for another couple of years. And then, I was also, before finishing it, thrown out-- now remember, just because one is Jewish, that's all that's needed not to be allowed to go to school.

So 1935, I was just-- and I'm jumping ahead very quickly-- I just-- oh, yeah, no, let me talk about 1938. 1938, a very funny thing happened-- funny thing. A young Jewish student in France at the Sorbonne found out that his father was taken to a concentration camp, was severely beaten, held for four weeks, and nearly killed, and was returned back then to his home by giving the promise to leave Germany within 48 hours.

This young student was so upset about it, that he stormed into Paris, into the German embassy, and shot, point blank, one of the German officials there. Of course, he was immediately taken prisoner and was immediately executed. At the same time, in the afternoon, in the late afternoon at 6 o'clock, all of a sudden, all over Germany, all synagogues were in flames, all Jewish stores were demolished.

It was easy to find out what store was Jewish, by the way, the law had been declared previously that all Jewish stores had to be marked over with a Jewish star, in white paint, over a foot size. Big, so it was obvious, very obvious to see on the entrance window. So it was very simple for these hordes to go and just demolish and ransack those stores, beat up the owners, killed many of them.

And the next morning, the paper was-- the German papers were headlining, the revenge of the German people was not to be controlled, when one of those Jews goes and kills a German official in Paris.

At the same time, Jews were picked up and thrown into concentration camp. There was a group of Jews thrown into concentration camps before, and they were specifically picked out-- these were the well-to-do elite of Germany. The big factory owners, and people that were known to be rich, were picked up, put into the concentration camp, like this fellow's father was one of them, and were kept there.

And only on the promise-- and on the promise-- that they would leave all their wealth behind, sign it over to the German government, and leave with a suitcase within 48 hours. These people, many of them died in the concentration camp in the meantime, being beaten. And the ones that were lucky enough to come out would leave everything behind and would therefore leave Germany. That was 1938.

And what I was described before with the burning synagogues, and the demolished store, was the famous, or infamous, Crystal Night-- the Kristallnacht as it's in German. And so from then on, things became quite rapidly worse.

In the meantime, by the way, things have happened. Hitler had flexed his muscles-- in 1936, he marched into the demilitarized Rhineland zone, which was part of the Treaty of Versailles-- a 100-kilometer wide stretch, which had to be absolutely demilitarized. And so he marched into that.

And there was hardly a line in any of the papers of the world. He had marched into Czechoslovakia. He had annexed Austria.

And so he found out that nobody ever squawked very much. Chamberlain had made a trip to Germany, and practically allowed Hitler to do whatever he wants to, under the promise that he will not start any warfare.

And so Hitler had found out that he practically can do now what he wants to do. Therefore, in 1939, in November of 1939, he marched into Poland. And that was the beginning of World War II.

He had conquered Poland within one week. The blitzkrieg, that was, by the way, where the word blitzkrieg comes from, they called it the blitzkrieg. And so things started to roll.

I was, in 1939, 18 years old. I was not allowed, fortunately, in my particular case, in that case, not to be a member of the military. And so on the other hand, though he declared right away that all the Jewish people have to be taken out of their jobs, no matter what they're doing, and put on street works-- and to do just ordinary labor.

I had just had finished my apprenticeship, fortunately, I finished it as four years were up, as being furniture maker and designer. And so before I could keep on working in this profession, I was then thrown into straight work-- slave labor, it was. For instance, the people that were working under those circumstances, the employer had to pay the full wages, but not to the employees.

50% of the full wages right away were taken off to send to the German government, and to Hitler's treasury. The other 50%, then, was, so to speak, handed over to the laborer. But out of the 50% that, for instance, I received, I had to carry the whole tax load. And there were now war times, you can imagine taxes were very, very high.

And so really, there was not much left once I got my money. Of course, it really didn't matter too much, because at that time, Jews couldn't buy anything. Before the rest of the population had ration cards, Jews received ration cards for groceries, as well as for clothing. And it was just for a minimum existence. The clothing was-- the clothing rations were just enough to probably buy either a couple of pair of socks or one pair of pants per year. Was very, very, very limited.

And this had something to do with the following situation. I was talking about dehumanization a moment ago. Let me give you one very important picture of what was done. Hitler, in other words, tried very carefully and very definitely to show to the German population that Jews really are what he called the untermenschen, the under-humans. That's another word for it-- I can't think of it right now in English, but you probably get the picture.

And so, for instance, I worked at this road building site now. First of all, the group of Jews that worked at-- groups of Jews that worked at road building sites did not have any machinery of any sort. It was strictly all shovel and hands. There were no tractors, there was no steam shovels, or anything that they used at those days, steam shovels, all over the place, otherwise.

Where Jews worked, it was all strictly worked by hand. So we shoveled sand onto the wagons. We rolled huge rocks onto the wagons. And when these wagons were loaded, then we had to go in front-- there were heavy ropes, or leather straps, sometimes, and we had, ourselves, to go into these things and pull those heavy wagons to the side where they belong. And then, again, go through the routine to unload in the same way.

Now, if you will-- if you can-- try to picture a group of people that are not used to this kind of work. Don't picture hardhats. Picture frail people that have been businessmen, lawyers, doctors, all their lives. I was a young fellow, and I could take it-- that wasn't such a tragedy for me as far as that's concerned.

But next to me, to give you one example, next to me worked a fellow that was head shorter than I was, yet. He was at that time one of the most famous doctors of the Berliner charity-- they call it the Charite-- that was one of the most, at those days, most famous hospitals of Berlin. He was the chief surgeon, very famous man, frail man, with thin little fingers.

And he worked next to me, very-- to shovel dirt and roll rocks. He worked like he had two left hands and two left feet, very uncoordinated. And of course, not that strong. And on top of it-- and he wasn't the only one in that, I just picked this man, he worked on my side-- on top of that, of course, picture this, he came to work in a dark pinstriped, double-breasted suit, shoveling dirt.

At one time, I said, my gosh, I said, doc, what's the matter with you? Don't you have any work clothes? He says, what are you talking about? That is my work clothes.

Well, he was a famous doctor. He was a well-to-do man. He lived in a penthouse. I don't think he-- I know he had-- he told me about his flower garden that he had in the building, but he didn't do it himself. He never-- I don't think he touched ever a piece of dirt in his life.

Of course, he wanted to-- naturally, he was a famous surgeon. Don't forget that. So he worked in this out suit.

A very, very bizarre group of people, when you see them work like that. And as I say, he wasn't the only one like that. Try to picture this, if you can.

All of a sudden, remember I'm still talking about dehumanization, all of a sudden, after a week or two weeks of work, I noticed a group of people stopping about 100 yards away from the work site. And I noticed there appeared like a teacher, and some kids from the lower grades-- a whole bunch of them from lower grades coming. And I see the teacher gesturing, pointing over to us, and looking, and kids were laughing, and the teacher had fun, apparently, too.

And naturally, you think the kids just happened to pass by, they were on an outing trip. Well, they went away after a while, and another group came the next day, or the following day or following week, but you saw groups like that, on and off.

And I was wondering what was going on, although all of a sudden, I had some kind of a hunch. All of a sudden, a teacher appears whom I knew from my school years. And I knew he was a very, very fine man, and I hope he was not yet the big Nazi that most of the people were and became. And so, I figured I'm going to dare to call this man. I did.

And I said, hey, say, what is this? I saw you with a group of kids. He says, oh, God, Henry, he says, you were there? I said, yeah, I was there working among this group.

I said, would you mind telling me what this is all about? He says, I'm so ashamed, I'm so embarrassed. But he says, I'll tell you what it is.

It goes like this-- like on a Friday afternoon, the speaker goes, such and such grade will be here on Monday morning at such and such time. There will be a bus waiting. And these are the words that he said. And there will be-- and we will take you and show you what a bunch of Jews look like. In this kind of an expression.

Now imagine, small children, that probably have never seen a Jewish person in their lives, face to face, are confronted with such a really bizarre-looking group of people. So that must, of course-- and I'm sure did leave a lasting impression.

We all grew up with having certain imaginations of some kind of people. For instance, when my daughter was six years old, she was in first grade, and she brought home a school picture. And one of our friends that was there looked at the school picture and made a remark, and said, oh, my God, Steffi, there you are. I see, oh, and look at that cute little Chinese girl.

And my daughter says, Chinese girl? There's no Chinese girl. Well, there was a Chinese girl, but you know, she had seen from books, storybooks, what a Chinese is supposed to look like-- with this flat round hat, and those pigtailed. That was, to her, whatever a Chinese would look like.

And so that would have been her lasting impression, if she wouldn't have had a chance to find out otherwise. Just for what that example is worth.

So anyway, this was dehumanization. Another time, I'll give you one other example of what the dehumanization process was-- and this is very important, at the danger that I'm wasting some time. In 1939, Hitler decreed that no Jew was allowed to either have any kind of music equipment-- stereo, at that time, we didn't have, we didn't have stereos, but radio and record players. No more bicycles. I was proud-- was able to get my bicycle. Of course, cars were already taken away from Jews a long time before.

So the Jews-- also, no pets. Now you think of pets, a dog, a cat, OK. But you saw also a little old ladies going down the

street on a Saturday afternoon, when most people were roaming around in the city, on a nice, Saturday-- summer Saturday afternoon, you saw little old ladies going down with their cages, and the parakeet, or a little canary in there, having to deliver those to the nearest police precinct.

At those days, the big cities like Berlin were divided in police precincts. Every few blocks was a police station, and which, by the way, had registered every citizen. And so, I had to-- yeah, and for instance, I had to deliver my bicycle, and I wasn't allowed to ride it over there. The law came, you're not allowed to ride a bicycle. I had to push it over there.

And believe it or not, people were standing by the side, along the streets, yes, you saw some here and one here and there shaking their heads. Others would laugh. And even make cracks and holler, and have fun seeing those people delivering those things.

Dehumanization process worked. And this is important, because later, this is why the approximately 400,000 guards in the various camps were killing Jews without any feeling. They didn't think that they were human beings.

As I say, now, I was working on the roads, on the road like that. In 1941, the war was in full swing, and Hitler, all of a sudden, found that he was short on so-called skilled help. Including like myself, furniture makers. Also scientific help, like the doctors, like this doctor that still worked with me on my side.

His suit, by now, looked a little bit more like a worker's suit-- it was torn and shredded and dirty. And so he also was a little bit more handy. He learned how to roll the rocks up onto those wagons, and shovel dirt a little bit better. He had learned a little bit about that.

But 1941, and people that had a profession like that were taken out of that work. He was allowed to practice medicine, but only from his home. He certainly didn't get his job back. Only from his home, and only-- he was only allowed to have Jewish patients, because he couldn't touch one of those clean, Aryan-blooded people. That would be vilifying the Aryan race.

And so therefore, he was at least doing what he liked to do best, helping the Jewish people that were sick, with a minimum of medications that they were allowed to prescribe, and all kinds of restrictions.

I was put into a factory. For me, was created like a miracle for me. A little room with some machinery in there. And I received some blueprints, and was ordered to make furniture.

There was apparently some big-wig Nazi somewhere-- not apparently, there was some big wig Nazi, and I never knew who it was-- who found out that there's some little Jew that knows how to make furniture by hand. And so he wanted to have a furniture piece built by one of those. He couldn't get it anyplace else anymore. And so therefore, he took me away from this terribly important road work to make himself some terribly-- for himself, some terribly important furniture.

And so I was happy. I even had my own personal guard standing there all day long, in this little room, with his gun over his shoulder. And once in a while, so he didn't get too bored, I guess, he brought a dog along. Which looked at me steadily. And I didn't dare to make any move that I wasn't allowed to move, to do.

So 1941, as I said. This went on until 1943. In the meantime, by the way, already in 1941, many Jews have been picked up-- many of my colleagues at work didn't show up anymore. And that wasn't because they didn't want to come to work-- because you didn't have any chance not to come to work-- but they had been picked up, usually during the night, one or the other disappeared.

By 1943, I would think that approximately, maybe, 80% of the Jewish population had already been picked up. The people that hadn't been picked up yet had some important jobs like I had. Where apparently this man was of influence, he couldn't get rid of me-- he wouldn't want to get rid of me, because I had to finish his furniture pieces that he wanted. And so I couldn't be sent away until that time.



And my brother, who was also put in this kind of work-- my brother, by the way, was at that time studying philology, was a philologist. And so he was put on a truck to haul furniture for the Nazis. And the man in this particular case, like there are many reasons that I'm here before you, and that many of us that are survived are-- it's not just one happening, it's a combination of many.

For instance, my brother, for instance, was not picked up yet, because he worked for an outfit that used their trucks to pick up Jews-- that was a furniture mover. And in evening and during the night, he was ordered by the Nazis to use their trucks to pick up Jews from their homes during the night. And he had some influence with some of the big wig Nazis-- and my brother worked for him, and he liked my brother-- and he was able to convince those Nazis that they shouldn't get to our house to pick up my brother.

Because they would have picked up my brother, and I was there, that would have made no difference. For instance, when some of my friends visited some friends, stayed overnight, and when they came to pick up that family, they grabbed everybody that was in the way, grabbed them right along with them. So that made no difference, but that was just the family.

Oh, you're visiting? Fine. And we saved the work later, come along.

And so anyway, so my brother was sort of safe for a while on that, too. But one night, about morning, at 2 o'clock, the inevitable happened. We hear heavy bangs on our door-- obviously not polite knocks, it was obvious with gun butts. We opened the door, and two SS men in their black uniforms stood in front.

And one of them looks at his watch and says, you got 15 minutes. Get ready. They both, of course, had their guns over the shoulder, and a dog in between for additional security. Because we were terribly dangerous people, as you know by now.

So they gave us 15 minutes. They didn't cheat us out of a minute-- they were very exact. But of course, even though we expected it to come, when it happens, you don't quite believe it. You're not quite ready for it.

And so we are throwing things in the suitcases, running around uncontrolled and nervous, and sort of things. And then, in the 15 minutes were up, they said, that's it. Let's go. So we were taken down to the truck.

And there were some other Jewish families from the neighborhood in there, already. And so we were then taken to a collection center, which was, in most cases, there were other collection centers-- one of these burnt out synagogues that people were taken to. There were usually no roofs over anymore.

And so after about a couple of days they had collected enough people to make a trainload ready we were then put on trains-- and we were off-- our mother, my brother, and I-- my father had died earlier. And I always like, almost like to say, thank God. Based on what you would find, or can imagine what happens.

So we then were on our way to our first concentration camp, which happened to be, in this case, Terezin, or Czechoslovakia-- or in Czechoslovakia, or Theresienstadt, as the Germans called it.

Hitler had the habit, whenever he got into a next one of the countries, he created concentration camps there. One of the reasons was, he tried as much as he could to keep these things away from the German people. To some extent, he succeeded. And others, he didn't.

But anyway, this was the case. We were taken to Terezin, or Theresienstadt. Which was actually considered one of the milder concentration camps, if you can believe that there were some differentiation.

For instance, in Theresienstadt, were, for instance, the people that-- the Jews that were coming from Denmark. Let me quickly-- this Denmark is, I think, it's worth mentioning a little bit from the point of a human story. The King of Denmark was a very slight man, reigning over a very, very small country. Hitler practically invaded it without a shot fired.

And one of the first things when Hitler invaded Denmark, he ordered that the Jews have to be marked with the Jewish stars, as they had been already in Germany since 1939. That star is the Star of David, about the size of my hand. In bright yellow, with a black encircling. And in it, across in black, like Hebrew-looking letters, the word, Jew.

And so very, very show-- showed very easily, it was ordered to be on the outer garment. To be worn on the outer garment. If you wore the shirt, only it had to be on the shirt. If you wear a suit jacket, had to be on a suit jacket, or coat, whatever.

So he ordered the Danish people to wear that. The King of Denmark stood up and said, no, our people don't do that. We have no differentiation in our citizens. We only have Danish citizens. We don't know any difference at all. So we can't make anybody wear those things.

Well, obviously, Hitler had some persuasive powers, and the King of Denmark found himself cornered. And in the last resort he said, well, anybody that works in the court of the king-- no matter who it is, including he, himself, from the day on that the Jews have to wear the star, to show their solidarity with them, any member of the court will wear the star along with them.

Now, it has no value, in regard to saving any Jewish lives. But it has a tremendous value, nevertheless, in showing that people showed that they cared, which was a rarity at those days.

Now, also, the King of Denmark apparently had heard that Terezin, or Theresienstadt as the Germans called, was a so-called milder camp. He was able to persuade Hitler that the Danish Jews were sent to that camp. I suppose he said yes to many things just to get rid of the little pest. Naturally, you know what I mean.

So the Jewish people were sent-- the Danish Jews were sent to this place. Now, this little king didn't give up. After a while, he wanted to find out how his citizens are doing in those camps.

Now, Theresienstadt was-- or Terezin-- was the only concentration camp that ever any kind of an organization was allowed to send a delegation to. Twice, there was the Red Cross. And one time, a delegation of the King of Denmark.

When the delegation of the King of Denmark was to arrive, I was there. And I was called out in the middle of the night. I had been registered already as a handyman, furniture maker, cabinetmaker, carpenter, what have you. And so I was called out to build up the things that this delegation-- and I found out it was the same thing when the Red Cross came two previous times-- where this delegation is supposed to be let through.

And so therefore, we worked all night and the next day and the next night to spruce up the route the delegation goes through. For instance, this is an old, old city created by Marie-Therese, in what was it, 16th century, something like that. And until Hitler took over, it was used as a stockade for the Czech soldiers.

So you can imagine, it wasn't running hot water and air conditioning, and all that stuff. So it was really decrepit. Frankly, what sounds like a joke to you now, let me point out to you, is no joke. It's a fact-- when we came there, we found out that we couldn't tell what we had more on our bodies, lice, bedbugs, or fleas.

They were all there, fighting for an existence. And people were dying of infections, left and right. What malnutrition didn't do, infections of this kind of stuff did do it. Many people couldn't control and would scratch, and so on and so forth.

So now, the house fronts were cracked, windows were hardly existing. Window panes were always out. So we actually put-- dug out of the warehouses-- I was surprised to see that artificial house fronts, like stage things, that we put against the walls, front. And we would hang flowerpots out there, and all kinds of stuff.

It looked just beautiful. The marketplace of that little town was spruced up. White barrack was put in there as a nursery. The kids were dressed well. We were collected from there-- they were dressed well.

And some good-looking Jewish young women were picked to use as nurses. They got their white uniforms. This barrack was stocked with toys, with food, with chocolates, with everything.

And finally, the delegation came around after this and were led around. And the kids were prompted to ask for chocolate. And of course, those nurses said, of course, Darling, here you got a piece of chocolate. You can have a chocolate drink. And then lunch was served, which they had never seen for years.

And so and everything was watched by the delegation. The delegation, as well as it's on record the Red Cross at that time was hoodwinked. They came back and reported that while the people don't have their freedom, but they are well treated and well fed.

The German newspapers, which are on the archives still today, would headline, and I quote, while our German soldiers bleed to death on the fronts, the Jews are eating chocolates. And quoting the delegate-- mentioning the delegations that were there that have witnessed it.

OK, I was-- well, of course, then we had to dismantle the whole thing again, and life was as usual-- its usual misery. There are other scenes, but it takes too much time. Let me quickly go on.

About after we were there for a year, my brother and I were called down to the train station, and we were told we are being sent to what they call a work camp. We didn't know where or what. We were put into train loads. I will probably describe some scenes which may sound callous to you, and if they do, please remember that I am trying to point it-- to talk about it under the stress of that time.

I'm not speaking like this right now. So I will describe a few scenes for you that will sound that way.

Anyway, so we were put into cattle wagons that were lined up down there. When we came down to the train station, there were people milling around that were ordered down there. And the guards, SS guards, and their helpers were there, and pushing people into these cattle wagons, with gun butts, pushing and get in and hollering, and swearing, and so on and so forth.

And people, naturally, when they are out of a crowd that stands in front of the door, and they are pushed in the back, when they are hit in the back, naturally they are pushing like crazy to get in. And of course, naturally, that creates a disturbance at the door. And it takes-- it's a terrible mess.

So people were not counted out in these wagons, they were just pushed in, and shoved in. And until the guards out there thought that nobody else goes in anymore, then they would close the door, and that was it.

Now, here, my brother and I were in one of those wagons. And we really stood there and felt like squeezed like sardines. We didn't think we had any other room. And after a few hours, this train started to roll.

Now, we had no idea where we would go to. We had no idea how long it would take. There were no toilet facilities. There was no food given out. There was just-- and now, also, picture this-- there were old people, young people, men, women, children, infants were all in that kind of a situation. And everybody that was there for some time was already weak, and many of them were extremely sick and ill.

And so you got a picture there, too. And of course, naturally, the crying and the complaining. So some of us young people, that I was at that time, my brother and I, and some others, we tried to figure out something. We figured, hey, there are some people that hardly could keep on their feet. We got to see if we can't find somehow, some way to make some room.

So we started to push and shove, and explain as much as we could to everybody that it's needed, so that there are some of the very old people, or very sick people, or even maybe somebody with an infant, could sort of slide down and sit a little bit for a while.

So actually, it worked. We had some room, the people with their knees under their chins could slide down among the people, and could take their load off their feet. And we tried to rotate this as we could. It was an almost impossible thing to do, by the way.

But nevertheless, in the meantime, help came for that situation. Let me remind you of what I said a moment ago, for that situation, that the first person died. And that first person died, I remember standing up and hanging on the other people in that tight situation, and we figured, my gosh, that's rough on the other people. What are we going to do?

Well, we tried to make some room in one of the back ends of the wagon, and started to pile up this body. Because we knew it wouldn't take long, and it didn't, until we had some more. And then, after a few hours, seriously, we had nearly a pile-- nearly reaching the ceiling. And it came to the point that we were always waiting for another body, so we could actually wedge the last body in under the ceiling.

So because, anytime the train shook, the pile that we had would fall on the other weak people. So finally, we had this row filled up. And after about two and a half days, we landed in a place which is called Auschwitz.

And by that time, we had between four and five rows of bodies there. About approximately, at least one third of the wagon load had died.

The scene that I'm going to describe to you very quickly now, took actually all day long. The train stopped. And after a long time, I don't know how long, the door was slid open, and we look out in a long line of SS guards standing there with their guns over their shoulder, dogs here and there. A big kettle of something hot brewing among them.

They would go there, dip their ladle in there, and drink, and having fun, smoking cigarettes, slapping each other on the shoulder. And we were there for this long time. Didn't have any food. We figured, maybe they are serving something out of that kettle.

Well, it never happened. Finally, one guy in the middle of it thought it was time to take the megaphone, and he hollers, now, we want you to know you're here in a work camp. And therefore, you're going to-- oh, first of all, he ordered everybody out of the train, of course. And we were lined up at the train. Then, after a long time, he took the megaphone to try to hold a speech.

You are here at the work camp, and therefore, you naturally-- you have to work very hard. And you will not have time to take care of the children, for you that have children with you. And so therefore, any child under 12 years old-- and understand, before it was under 14 years old, when I came it was 12. Any child under 12 years old will be please put over to the side.

They even were polite, they said, please. And we will take them to the children's facilities. We have children facilities. We have nurseries for the smaller ones. And so they will be taken care of, because you won't have any time, as he said.

So I don't know-- I could describe the scene in very, very detail, and I don't want to overdo it. But a little bit, you got to see the scene.

First of all, as I say, we had a lot of dead people there. And these other people were all weak, not having anything to eat or to drink. They were small children, there were teenagers, there were people anywhere like you. Some parents had a small child on their arms. Some teenage kid had a small child on his or her arm.

And these kids were ordered-- now, I don't know if you can imagine the scene of doom to begin with, and then, this in addition-- the hollering and the crying. It's just something unexplainable and indescribable.

I believe what I'm describing here, in this particular scene, is about the worst criminal thing that ever happened in human history. I believe-- not, I don't believe, I know that that is just-- well, let me go on.

So anyway, the kids that were-- the parents that were not willing to give up their kids, or the kids were they're clinging onto the parents, or sisters or brothers side, were then taken, grabbed by the guards. Kids, I saw, taking off of the arms of their people-- the guards came over, grabbed the kid by the arm, and actually flung it over to the other side.

And then, finally, when all these kids were together, then finally a few trucks showed up. All these kids were loaded into the trucks. And were then hauled away-- not to children's facilities, into the gas chambers.

No child survived in Auschwitz. When the Allies, at this case, at that time, the Russians came to Auschwitz, it's documented, there were piles and mountains of children's shoes and children toys that the Nazis hadn't been able to send away yet to their children, and to their homeland.

After a while, and this guy then thought there's something else to be said, he says, no, we told you have work to do. And some of you, of course, we understand had a long ride, are sick, and weak. And we have medical facilities. We would like to take care of you. We will take you to the medical facilities and check you over, and until you are being able to work, we will take care of you.

Now, my brother and I, we both had recognized by that time-- we have heard all kinds of things-- we had a tough time to believe what happened. But on the other hand, we by no means discarded what we heard, and we didn't want to take any chance. My brother and I by that time were convinced that the only chance of survival is to be able to work-- whether you're healthy or not-- be able to work.

And it turned out that was the right philosophy. We had a friend-- now, remember, I'm talking about 1944, I was 23 years old-- we had a friend of our age standing right next to us who was not in any worse shape. We all were terribly, terribly weak and tired. And he was not in any worse shape than we were, and everybody was in bad shape by that time.

And he said, you know something, I'm going to go over and see that I maybe can get into some kind of a sick barracks, and see that they will take care of us for a while. Maybe I can squeeze a few days more life out of this whole mess. And we told him, he said, listen, don't go. It can't be. It's impossible.

They don't feed you. They don't pamper you back to strength. Just stay here, and hopefully maybe by tomorrow when we're all settled, maybe we get our first bowl of soup or something, and everything will be a little bit better.

Well, we could not talk him into it. He went over to the side of the sick people. And these people also were loaded into the trucks when they came back, and we never saw any of these people again. The same thing happened to them.

Now, you see, by that time, the Nazis had created factories near the camps-- all kinds of them. And they needed the working power. And the theory was, while people are weak, they don't feed them any better, because they're working. But while they can work, let them work as much as they can.

And since small children, and sick people, cannot do that hard work, they are not entitled to the bowl of soup and a piece of dry bread that we received. Because that is too much. They have to deliver work.

And so that's the philosophy. And I understand, by the way, that about a week later, from eyewitnesses that survived it, and knew our mother, that a week later, our mother was brought to the same place. And our mother was a very, very ill person by that time. She was a diabetic, and had also had cancer surgery a year previous before she was incarcerated. And was extremely sick.

And she, also, by the way, was gullible. She-- and I mean this lovingly, I don't mean this criticizingly. And she also was taken to the side of the sick people, and was taken to the chambers.

Well, anyway, after this all was done. Then the guy with his megaphone came back again and said, now, we will separate men on this side, women on that side. And after another long wait, finally we were taken into the camp.

Into the camp one more important thing-- into the camp, we were told, after all, our hair was shaved all over the body--

we were told, from now on, you will not use your names anymore. And so, since you will not get any ID cards, and since you won't have any pockets in your uniforms, you will have a number assigned to you.

And since you will not be able to possibly remember that so easily, we will make sure that you remember it. And therefore, we will tattoo those numbers on your arms. And to my knowledge, Auschwitz was the only camp where numbers were put on the arms.

Let me interject a little bit about Auschwitz. There were literally dozens of concentration camps, most of which most of the people even haven't heard of. I was in some of those, myself.

Out of approximately 6 million Jews that have been killed, besides approximately another 5 million non-Jews, also, but in Auschwitz, specifically, out of the 6 million Jews that have been killed, in Auschwitz alone, 4 million were taken care of in that way. So it was the most notorious mass production camp there was.

And if we have time, probably later on, maybe I can go into the details of that mass production a little bit more.

Oh, yeah, of course. Yeah, my number is comparatively small. I have some-- my friends' numbers are slapped in big numbers, crooked, and all kinds of things all over the arm. And if you would see it close up-- later on, if you want to, I don't mind to show it to you and close up, too.

If you would see it close up, you would find right now that my number here is-- when you look at it that way, it's upside down. And the reason for this upside down is that when we had to stand in a headcount, we had to hold our arms like this-- at least in the place where I was-- and the guards standing there in front of you, looking at it this way, you can see it in a normal way. Not upside down, because we can't expect those guards to go through gyrations to read our number.

Now very, very briefly, guards played games. They had a terrible, terrible hard job, standing there with their guns all day long, and watching Jews and other people. And so they were bored, so they started to play games.

We had sometimes headcounts when we came back from work, sometimes we stood there for another two or three hours in groups for the headcount. And sometimes, the guard would come strolling towards you, and now what I'm talking was particularly frightening in the beginning-- it was always frightening, but particularly nervous time in the beginning-- guard came strolling towards you.

We have only already found out that when a guard came strolling towards you, it could mean that you were being picked out, because the barracks became overcrowded, and they were crowded always, as they overcrowded as they were. And so they had to make room for another transport coming in. And so therefore, sometimes they would just come towards you and single you out, and off you were with the other people that were singled out to the chambers. As simple as that.

Now, sometimes, they would do things like one, two, three, four, five, out, one, two, three, four, five, out. And you thought you had the system mastered, and tried to put yourself into a row. Then it would come one, two, three, four, out, one, two, three, four, out. So you learned that you cannot depend on anything.

Remember, I talked in the beginning, some of us that are back, it's sheer luck, fate, God, if you will, whatever you believe in. And so, but when the guard came towards you, you were nervous, anyway. And so he would come and poke you on your shoulder and say, your name. And in the beginning, as a beginner, you are so nervous, and you have forgotten that the order was not to use your name.

So you would spurt out, Henry Oertelt. And by that time, when you got off of the ground, because you had his boot somewhere in any part of your body, you would get up and you would say, oh, my God, that's right. We're not supposed to use our names. Number, number. Now what's the number?

So you look at your arm to get your number, because you hadn't memorized it yet. Or you were too nervous at the moment and forgot it.

And so by that time, when you got up from the ground, again, you remember, that's right. We have to memorize our number. And so that was it.

But you learned it very quick. It only happened once to me, and then I knew my number, and I didn't fall for this anymore.

Another little trick that the guards played-- for instance, in the stone quarries-- now, I was fortunate again. I had by that time found out-- I better let it be known that I am a skilled man, with a skilled profession, namely furniture making. And sure enough, lo and behold, there was one big wig again that wanted to have furniture made. And fortunately, so therefore, I was not put into the stone quarries that we were put in that camp next to Auschwitz, next to Birkenau.

And so I was again working in a little shop. Had my own machinery, and made furniture for somebody that I never knew who it was. I got the blueprints, and again, I got my own guard. And I worked away. And fortunately, this guy apparently never cared whether I worked hard or how fast I worked, I didn't work very fast. And I found out, as long as I don't stand still too much, this guy couldn't care less whether I create or don't create.

So I scraped and scratched around, and really did not work myself to death under those circumstances. And so that was what I did.

And anyway, oh, yeah, people that worked in the stone quarries, the following things happened there at times-- guards playing games, favorite games of the SS guards. They were usually encircling small groups that worked in the stone quarries. And again, remember, they have nothing else to do but standing there-- they never would put a hand on anything themselves, they just stand there and probably be bored, I don't know.

And so every once in a while, they would go to one of the prisoners that wore a cap, would take their caps off, and fling it outside of the guard circle, and would order them to get it, to retrieve it. Now, by that time, everybody knew already, number one, if you don't obey an order, you're beaten to a pulp.

But on the other hand, now, this was in order to step outside the guard circle. Anybody that tried to step outside the guard circle was considered on flight, to escape. And therefore, would be shot without any warning.

Now, you know, the gullibility and hope-- not gullibility, necessarily, in this case, I shouldn't say that-- no, the eternal hope in, or the eternal belief in somebody's humane feelings is always there. Now, just imagine yourself to be given that choice to say, well, I can't go outside the guard, because most likely this guy will-- we have heard about these stories before. We will shoot, and that's it.

So OK, so you try to stall, and then the guard comes menacingly closer towards you. And if you still don't go, well, maybe you wait till you get to see if he really beats you. And then, well, anyway, in these instances, every time, the prisoner went to retrieve the cap. And there is no case, of several cases that are reported, no case, that ever this prisoner was allowed to pick up the cap and come back into the line.

Remember, these were extermination camps. And these guards, in the worst case, had to report, they went out with 100 prisoners and come back with 90, big deal. Many died on the job, anyway. So it was nothing much to be concerned with.

In January of 1944, 1945, the Russians came close to Auschwitz. And so we were, then, put on what they call a death march. I'll come to explain the death march a little bit later, because I was on two of them. So I'll talk about it on the last one.

And so you see, the idea was not to be allowed to be liberated. The idea was still to exterminate as many people as possible. The idea was not also to kill them off-- oh, no, there were still thousands and thousands of prisoners in that camp-- not to kill them all in one spot. It would be a good idea to sort of like thin out the killing. So they are not all in one pile.

So again, people then, were taken away from these prison camps, from these concentration camps, and were put either on march, or marching to a train station, and then brought to another camp. That was where I went for short visits in various camps, within Germany. By that time, the Allies had squeezed from both sides-- actually, Germany fought at that time already on its own soil.

And so the only concentration camps that would be left would be within Germany. And so we were then divided up over these various camps in Germany. Finally, somewhere a month later, I landed in a concentration camp near the Czechoslovakian border, that was mentioned before, Flossenburg.

This was extremely overcrowded camp. By that time, the factories that were built around there had been destroyed by the Allied bombings. And so people, the prisoners, did not work anymore. They were just lounging in those camps-- lounging, I mean, of course. And actually, naturally, starving to death. There was no food-- or very little. The rations that were there did not come regularly.

And so of course, people next to you would die. You could see them die one by one. And so without the gas chambers, people were destroyed.

We then, on April 20th of 1945-- I'm jumping over these things quickly, there are all kinds of things that are happening, but again, I see time runs short-- on April 20th, 1935, we were-- all Jews were ordered specifically for Jews-- there were other prisoners, as I mentioned before-- were ordered to line up in marching position outside the barracks.

And so, we did line up, and we were taken again on another march. Now, let me explain to you why it's called a death march. We were then, in this particular case, the Americans started to try to encircle a large German contingent. And they had already succeeded in sort of like forming like a horseshoe, and didn't have closed it up yet.

There was from one end to the horseshoe to the other, one side-- I don't know what you really call the side, to the horseshoe-- was about a 3 or 4-mile stretch. So we would walk this way. And when we came near the one American fighting front, we would have to make-- we had to turn around and walk to the other side. And all along in a prescribed speed that the guards prescribed.

Now, again, you've got to visualize this wretched group of people, that by that time, were weak and sick. And I'm talking about April 20th-- let me point out to you, three days later, April 23rd, when I was liberated, I weighed 82 pounds, OK? And I didn't lose 50 pounds within three days, so what I mean to say is, I want you to imagine the group of people that were marching there-- really living skeletons.

And so, they were weak. And anybody that was too weak to walk in a prescribed speed for that length of time, or would stumble and fall, the guard was right there to shoot this person, right on the ground. And at the end of the column were trucks, they picked them up and throw them in trucks, and the truck was loaded up the truck would turn away and another empty truck came. This way these marches were called death marches.

After three days, on April 23-- which, by a strange coincidence, happened to be my mother's birthday-- all of a sudden, one guy in the column hollered, hey, you guys, look around. We looked around.

By the way, by that time I was full of hallucinations. I was seeing all kinds of beautiful things, and I noticed I was stumbling. And I was fully aware that maybe my time would come sooner or later, too. But at that moment, as I say, I heard this cry, and we turned around.

The most beautiful sight I ever had in my life was before my eyes-- American armored vehicles came running down the hillside. And our guards took off like flies. And this happened to be the fighting front-- they were chasing the Germans there. And so the commander's car stopped, while the other vehicles shot by, and some of them shooting out of their turrets over our heads into the area that they had to shoot.

The commander's car stopped, and directed us to go in such and such direction behind the lines. In fact, I remember very



vividly his words, don't you go any other way, because Germans all over the place. And they'd love to get a hold of you again. And we believed him.

So we were very careful-- the ones that could still move. Now, all along, where these vehicles shot by their hatches, and turrets opened and they threw out packages of food, their military rations. And regretfully, this was, of course, a wonderful thing that they did, but regretfully, many of the prisoners by that time had animalized so much that at the sight of food, they could not control themselves. They really literally with both hands shoved the stuff in.

I remember, I see the guy-- I saw the guys opening the cans of meat, which was military rations. Anybody that had somebody in the family that was in the military, you can ask them what these were. Beautiful stuff, but fat. I remember one guy opened a can of butter, and I see still the oil swimming on top. And these guys would just gut the stuff down.

And fortunately, as most during our time, I had still kept my senses, and I knew that that can't be any good for anybody. So I, fortunately, controlled it, and I just took what I-- didn't know what it was, looked kind of dry to me, I didn't know at that time that saltine crackers are existing. Nowadays, I don't care whether they exist or not.

But it was something dry, I thought. And the only thing-- and I ate a few of those. And then, the only thing I couldn't resist was a piece of chocolate that I had dreamed about for years. But the rest of it, I clamped under my arm, and I just carried myself back to where the commander had said to go.

And that was then, when we came back there, we were received by the American military medical team. And by the way, the military contingent that liberated us was an Armored Division of Patton's Third. Guess who is my hero?

I think-- I noticed I took more time than I intended to. And believe me, I didn't tell you an awful lot of things that I should have told you, and wanted to tell you, and maybe I have a chance to come back to some of it, prompted by your questions. But I'd like to invite you now to ask questions.

Don't be bashful. There's no such thing as an embarrassing question, or a dumb question. The only dumb question is the question that is not being asked. So please go ahead and anybody start.

[INAUDIBLE] until January 1945?

Yes, yes. My brother was-- no, my brother was in the stone quarries, that I talked about. And fortunately, I was able to help him a little bit. Because once in a while, it happened in this furniture shop that I had was built with another factory in Poland. There were Polish workers there.

And at first, I was always watching that the door is closed. I even asked the guard to close the door. And he did, for some reason. It's the only thing-- he never got involved in any conversation with me. I tried, but never did.

And so, then sometimes, when the guard had been, believe it or not, he is also a human being, when he had to disappear for some moment, he would call in one of his favorite Polish workers there and put him in to guard me. He didn't even give him a gun in his hand. That was amazing.

But because he apparently didn't trust anybody with his gun. But anyway, that's-- so and I-- the first time I directed this guy also to close the door, I was happy in my personal environment, away from the camp. And then, this guy tried to give me to understand at one time, he says, don't close that door, he sort of whispered to me. Leave that door open.

I said, what the heck, you know. I want that door closed. Apparently, I was very stupid at the time. And then he came back some other time again, he says, no, damn it, he says, leave that door open.

And so I left it open. And all of a sudden, I notice an apple comes rolling in. A piece of bread throwing in, when the guard was gone. And so I was eating some, and some of it I was taking back into the camp.

Now, we sometimes were frisked going into the camp. And we-- I hid, as other prisoners in Terezin, we did something

like that, too-- I had some of the things in the most impossible places that I knew rarely were frisked. And so wrapped it in a piece of paper, or little rag that I had, and actually strung it between the legs, with the pin in back and pin behind.

And so I brought this stuff in. When you had food, you really didn't care much, whatever-- and you know, I have seen people literally fighting, nearly a death fight, over a piece of green bread laying somewhere in the corner. Yes?

How were you organized as literally as far as prisoners, yourself?

How I was organizing what?

[INAUDIBLE] promote yourselves, and was there any ruling class?

There usually was a ruling class in some of the prisons. Usually, when you were not a member of that, you kept yourself away. Of course, sometimes, the ruling class were what they call the kapos-- and they were original prisoners. Now, the system was, at first, the original kapos were actual criminals. In almost all cases, in this particular-- my experience-- is they were not Jewish people. They were criminals, actually murderers or things.

They were put into concentration camp, given an assignment, to be the helpers of the SS guards. Even to be made the commanders of some of the barracks, block commanders, as we call them. And they were also original prisoners. Never Jews. I don't know of any Jewish kapo.

And these guys were at least as murderous, if not even, in some cases, more murderous, than the SS troops. In Flossenbug, we had a group of kapos that were Ukrainians. Now, regretfully, I have to say that Ukrainians are known to be very, very antisemitic-- always have been, the majority of them.

And so these guys were just as murderous as anybody else. They literally, at least in Flossenbug, in my experience, I saw them killing people just like nothing. So that was-- so as far as-- you tried-- well, my philosophy, and my brother's was, too, not to make any waves. We were not interested-- my highest assignment that I had at one time was in Flossenbug, I was asked if I knew how to shear somebody's hair.

I'd never had a clipper in my hand. But I smelled an extra bowl of soup, and I said, yes, of course. And then, these clippers were, as I found out, very, very dull. And any new transport that came in, as I mentioned earlier, the hair had to be shorn all over the body. And so when I used those clippers, and sometimes these things didn't-- they pulled more hair than they cut.

And I felt actually sorry, but I couldn't help it. I couldn't complain and get a sharp clipper. That's what we're given. Some of these poor devils, they would grimace, but they didn't-- they thought I was a big shot, and they didn't dare to say peep, you know. And so that was my highest assignment.

And other than that-- and that only lasted for a few days, for a few nights, when they came in usually at night. Other than that, I was not aware of any organization, although there were some. When we arrived in Auschwitz, there was some beating, killing perpetrated by a group of prisoners who recognized one of the prisoners as being a traitor.

A traitor, for instance, in Berlin, there were a few people, Jewish people, that were fingering people that lived underground to the Gestapo. They were promised not to be persecuted, themselves. Of course, that never worked. They all were taken.

I know of one of them that was also being brought to Auschwitz and killed there. But there were all kinds of assistants. But I guess I answered-- I hope I answered it satisfactorily. I was not aware-- there were some, as I said, but I was not-- I couldn't tell you too much about it, personally.

As far as you can determine, were there any ideas of escaping Germany and coming to America?

Well, did everybody hear that? If there was any idea of escaping Germany or come to this country. Well, yes, there is

one of the big tragedies. At that time-- first of all, people had some way, by either paying a lot of money, leaving their belongings behind, as I mentioned earlier, when they were wealthy. Until '39, people could do that.

After '39, Hitler did not allow to get anybody else anymore. Now, people applied to come to America, as we had, too, for years before, years before. America at that-- OK, at that time, Roosevelt, President Roosevelt, at that time was asked to have the immigration quota raised for the Jewish people in Germany, or make a special immigration quota.

He did not budge to make any immigration quota, more than the normal quota for Germans. He did not want to differentiate, he did not want to-- and that was a very, very low quota. And if you were lucky, some people had finally made it had waited maybe six or seven years, already.

So I was on that quota. And it was completely hopeless.

Then besides that, we had to have an affidavit set by somebody which would guarantee the American government that we would not be a burden to the American government until citizenship, which lasts five years. And so therefore, we tried to dig up very frantically some relative that we may find somewhere in America.

My mother found a distant cousin, third or fourth great distant cousin, in New York, who was very enthusiastic when we wrote him, and we finally dug him up. And he said, he will put up an affidavit for us. Has to be done through the American consulate, the American authorities.

He put it up, and it was rejected by the American authorities as not sufficient-- financially not sufficient enough. Then the man wrote back and said, well, don't despair, I'm going to get a bunch of friends together that will help me with the--

I want you to know, by the way, this man was a doctor, an established doctor in a New York hospital. So he was not one of the poor people. So I mentioned this to point out to you that the affidavit that was requested could not have been just peanuts. So but he said, he's going to get some help from some friends and colleagues that are willing to help. And by the time he got that together, the American consulate was closed in Berlin, and Hitler did not allow anybody to get out anymore, either.

By that time, people only could get out by paying a fortune and get wrong passports, false passports, and so on and so forth.

Besides that, it took a long time. Also, people made up their mind, in many cases, very, very late. Because as I said earlier, some people just refuse to believe that this can happen, that this will be possible.

Any addition to this? I'll be right back.

Yeah?

Was there a national register, that everybody had to register their faith?

Oh, yes, but remember, I talked earlier about the police precincts? Everybody had to be registered. By the way, that's today the same-- except today, they are not making anything about religion anymore. But still, when you move into some area, you have to be registered by the police.

And those days, the faith-- actually, practically, they had you register of what sicknesses you had and everything, the police precinct. And I said, this was every few blocks was a precinct. And there was a small police station with maybe three or four policemen, and one secretary. And so that was all listed.

And then, at the time when it came to the time to pick up the Jews, they made separate files-- they picked out the Jews, and then, this street and that street, and that street. And then they said, well, tonight we pick up street so and so, street so and so, and street so and so. So you had just the cards-- was very simple, very simple system.

Yes?

[INAUDIBLE] how long did it take before you were back to what we would call normal health [INAUDIBLE]?

Well, I was not hospitalized at all. I was laying on my back for about a week. When I said that the medical team of the American troops took over, they had ordered-- this was a farm town-- there they had ordered the German farmers to take care of us. In fact, literally ordered them, if need be, slaughter your last cow for these people. Which some of them had to do, and did.

And so, in my particular case, I was laying on my back probably for a week, and then, I was up. Remember, I said I was liberated on the 23rd of April, the war was not over till May 8th. And so I was eager to get back to Berlin in order to find out who is still surviving. Because when this whole thing started, we said to our family, all of us said, hey, when we are surviving, we go back-- come back to Berlin and meet there again.

Well, so the American authorities actually forbade us to leave this area because of the war yet. Until the war was over May 8th. And then I took off right away. I had to walk half of the stretch of a 700-mile stretch, because there were no traveling facilities. Once in a while, I got a ride from an army-- by an army Jeep for a few miles.

So it took me nearly a month to get back to Berlin. Other than that, I was fortunate. Other people were literally hospitalized for a long, long time. And as I said earlier, many of them died, yet, after that. And particularly died because of the food they ate. Some of them were too far gone already, anyway.

I-- regretfully, in order to demonstrate to you, remember I said I weighed 82 pounds when I was liberated? I was by no means the worst off yet. There were some guys that weighed a lot less than I did, were much worse off. I regretfully cannot pass those pictures around here.

I have some pictures here, which I just recently received from a GI that was one of the first American soldiers in Buchenwald, liberating that camp. He witnessed yet the wagons full of human skeletons that just had died shortly before, and maybe later on, when our session gets less formal, shouldn't be formal, maybe I can show you some of those, whoever wants to see them. And regretfully, they are small, yet, so I don't have them blown up yet.

This I got from an American soldier who confronted me a while ago and said if I would be interested in them. And he said, on the premises, do you ever-- I am quite busy with lecturing on this, and he found that out. And he said, are you ever being confronted by that that is impossible, that you are telling a lot of stories that have never happened? I said nobody ever faced me with it, but I'm sure that it's possible that somebody sits around somewhere and says, ah, nonsense.

But he says, first of all, I'd be glad to come along. And secondly, he says, I've got a bunch of pictures that I will allow you to copy, which I did. So did I answer your question? I sometimes ramble on and forget where I was. Please?

When it was all over with, how did you feel about German people? Not SS men, the German civilians, [INAUDIBLE]? Were you in Germany very long after, or was that feeling that you wanted to get out of it?

OK, I can answer your second question first-- my feeling was immediately to get out of Germany as fast as possible. I have to admit that at that time, I was full of blind hatred. First of all, I found out that of my entire family-- that includes uncles, and aunts, cousins-- my brother was the only survivor. So you kind of start to hate a little bit.

I nowadays hate, the word hate. I must say, my hate, yes, and anger is directed against that generation of Germany that allowed that to happen. And it was allowed to happen. The Germany of nowadays, yes, there's neo-Nazism, active, but I tell you something, there's more activity of this kind here in America than there is in Germany.

The Germans tried to control it. Maybe not enough, to my opinion, but they try-- they try to do more than America does. Of course, we claim that we have democracy, and correctly so, and God willing, it will always stay a democracy. And so therefore, we have to take some good with the bad in order to preserve democracy, I can see that.

So my personal feelings have not much to do with that. But as I say, first of all, while you're at this, what probably in this respect, maybe what was the role of the Christian community? First of all, let me be a little accusative. Don't forget that among the 400,000 guards all over the place, was not one Jew, they were all Christians.

And you know something? They were churchgoing Christians, many of them. They went to church. Some of the camp guards were not there Sunday morning because they were in church.

So what did the Christian community do as such in Germany? Really very, very little. I met several priests in the concentration camp. I met several ministers in the concentration camp. And please take it in the right vein, the way I mean it now-- far too few I met in there. Because the reason these people were in the concentration camp were because they spoke up.

The only religious group, as one organized group against this whole thing, were the Jehovah's Witnesses. And they were almost completely thrown into the concentration camp. They were separately numbered in the concentration camp in Auschwitz, specifically. All these groups, they had different colored triangles for Jews, for Gypsies, for Jehovah's Witnesses, for criminals, for homosexuals, everything was differently marked in a different color.

And the Jehovah's Witnesses were there, en masse. You could see them just everywhere around. As I say, the only group.

Now, other than that, some Christians who, on their own-- now, you have heard of the movie about the righteous Christians? For instance, when I went back to Germany, the first time-- first, I had sworn never to go back to Germany because of the thing.

Oh, by the way, first let me answer quickly your other question, really. In '49, I was able to leave Germany, to leave Berlin. The reason that I would come back to the Christian people in a moment, maybe before I forget it-- took me four years because I went back to Berlin and to the area that we lived, which was the French-controlled sector. You know, Berlin was divided in various sectors.

Now, while the American and the English allowed anybody to get out of there as soon as possible on a special quota, now that finally now was installed, the French did not allow. I would be allowed to go to France, which at that time just very literally wasn't far enough away from Germany for me.

So but now to come back to some of the German people. Regretfully, the very, very little minority-- when I went back to Germany for the first time four years ago, my main reason was number one to visit some of the family from my wife's side that is still in Berlin. And then also a Christian friend of mine, who lives in Cologne-- this man came during the night at the time-- remember, I told you before when we were to deliver radios and record players, and of course, never had enough to eat anymore, either.

This man came at night, on a one arm, a record player-- at those times, these wind-up record players-- with a bunch of records, because he knew I was a classical music buff. Carried that thing on his arm. And on the other hand, on the other arm, he had a bag of food.

Now, that sounds-- you might say, big deal, so he brought you a bag of food, brought you a record player. What you apparently are not aware of is that any Christian caught helping any Jew, these were war times with Germany, was considered a traitor. Not just like a traitor, was considered a traitor on the war time rules.

And many of these Christians that did stick their necks out, in the literary sense of it, were-- some of them were shot on the spot, others were taken into the Gestapo, were thrown into concentration camps, or were incarcerated in prisons for a long, long time. Even many of them, as I say, were executed.

So now, under those circumstances, look at it again, what these people did.

In Berlin, itself, were approximately-- this man, by the way, offered me-- offered to hide me in his apartment, which was, at that time, he was a single fellow. He had only a little-- one whole apartment. And I didn't want to leave my brother and my mother.

In fact, he said, hey, listen, you all come over, if you don't mind, I'll be glad to share my spot with you. Except for your mother and your brother, I'll help you find another spot. Somebody that will hide you.

Well, I didn't accept it at the time. I thought it was too much. And besides, I figured, if we are being separated, that would be terrible. It turns out that, although my brother and I were most of the time together, and we were of help to each other, but we were not of much help-- couldn't be of any help to our mother, as it turned out.

But so anyway, so I'm talking about the righteous Christians that-- under those circumstances, stuck out their neck, risked their lives. Many people-- not enough people that risked their lives that way. And I know you might say it sounds easy-- it's easy for me to say, and I know it's easy-- and it's a very difficult thing.

Anyway, did I answer your question? Good? Any other one? Please?

How did the news come were you just -- Were you aware of the Warsaw ghetto uprising? [INAUDIBLE]

No, no, we didn't hear any of it. The German press, first of all, would not report anything of it, because, of course, that was quite a slap for the German military mighty power, that they were held off by a bunch of Jews with inferior and few weapons. War fighting power was held off for more than four weeks-- so they couldn't very well admit that. So nobody ever thought--

Now, as far as news traveling is concerned, some of it we heard, and usually very much later-- very much later. And some of it we never heard. It's funny, when for instance, give you an example, for instance, in Berlin, I was still in Berlin when Pearl Harbor occurred.

I never knew it until I came to America. I never knew anything of Pearl Harbor. So naturally, news was withheld. So when the Germans reported that America declared the war, of course, well, we had a lot of guts to declare war on Japan. They never gave the reason.

But anyway, that's just to get the news. Yes?

[INAUDIBLE] did you hear any rumors about [INAUDIBLE]?

Did you know a [INAUDIBLE]?

Well, no, it was never advertised. Of course, the actual extermination idea-- the actual extermination announcement, within their own ranks, was decreed in 1941, in Wannsee by Berlin, they had a meeting there. Before that, there was no talk about extermination. So and we never knew anything about it.

In fact, I'll tell you what-- let me point out-- we were, at the time, though, by the way, when we were supposed to wear those stars, there was also at the same time a curfew. Jews were not allowed on the street in the summertime after 9:00, in the winter time, after 8:00. Now, on the other hand, though, we were young-- as I say in 1939, I was 18 years old-- we were not allowed to use public facilities like movie houses, theaters, concerts, restaurants, nothing.

So we had to entertain ourselves. Which we did. I belonged to a group of my peers, we were a musical group, we did a lot of music, had a lot of fun. But we went then over the weekend to somebody's house, and since there was a curfew, we didn't want to risk being caught, we stayed there overnight.

And one of these settings, that was back in 19-- must have been 1941-- 1940 or 1941-- '41, I guess, yeah, 1941-- all of a sudden, somebody knocks on the door, comes into the house, was a friend of mine, a person that I hadn't known personally-- I knew of this person-- whom we knew had been picked up on one of these transports during one night.

And we opened the door, and we thought the ghost is coming in.

And it turns out that he had escaped from one of those transports. And he says, I just want you to know, I'm not going to stay here long, because I've got to go I'm they're after me like in those movies when you see somebody opens the door comes in and looks around and runs out again. So it's like that.

And so he came in, and he says, I just want you to be aware of something. He says, I escaped from a transport, and I want you to know the scene that I saw. They were taken out of the train, and he saw people loaded into like a semi truck-- semi truck. And there was a diesel engine standing at the end of the truck.

And when these people were loaded into that truck, a hose from that diesel engine, from the running diesel engine was connected into a hole to that truck. And he says, and of course, obviously, these people were killed by carbon monoxide. And so he told us that.

Now, some of us believed it. Others didn't want to believe it. Most of them didn't want to believe it. And would you believe, that actually, in a way we were mad at this guy. Was for two reasons.

Number one, first of all, some of us really thought, that's impossible. How can human beings do that? That's just impossible. You wouldn't believe it-- you'd never heard of anything like that.

OK, but then also, we said, now if that is the truth, then we didn't like the idea that this guy comes to us and tells that to us, that have possibly that trip before us, know what I mean? Scaring us to death. And when we get on that trip, right away instilling the hopelessness of it all.

And so rather than being thankful to this fellow, to bother to stop, where he's having people on the stair, coming in and telling us that, we were actually mad at him. We were actually mad at him. We never heard of him again, by the way, so I don't know if he was caught, or made it, he was on his way to Switzerland, he said.

So but just to see, it is difficult to believe those things. Yes?

How do you feel [INAUDIBLE]?

Oh, I feel they shouldn't be allowed to exist. But in the realm of what I said before, if we want to preserve our democracy, we can't deny them their existence. I just hope that people are smart enough to recognize those things. Like the late upcoming of the Posse Comitatus, where this guy that's going to become absolutely a martyr and a hero-- this Carl.

And people are sitting back and listening to that, and people should get interested in finding out a little bit more. So all you hear, that these guys are complaining about paying taxes, yeah, yeah, he's right. You're paying too much tax-- too many taxes-- too much on taxes, anyway. That's about what it boils down to.

And many people from that point of view, give them their sympathy. They don't realize that these guys on the one hand, have their Bible, and say, yes, we got to kill if need be. Because the Bible prescribes that thing.

And then, the other people, like a year ago or so, was a report on WCCO, one of these survivor groups, that actually, I remember the scene that they showed, were filmed in that camp. These guys were there, and talking, and were questioning-- for instance, there was a nine-year-old kid-- throwing a knife, knife-throwing into the sand.

And he had a cardboard there with a Jewish star painted on there. And he threw it into that thing, and was happy that he caught it. And he says, another rabbi killed. Children of nine years. You remember? I talked about bringing up children with the idea of dehumanization of some other people? There it is, you have it around here.

In fact, I tell you what, it's stronger here in America than it is in Germany nowadays. And Germany-- in fact, recently, the German government complained that there's too much literature-- Nazi literature coming in from America. I don't

know if anything was done about it or not. Yes?

Excuse me, when you're out in public, surely people are going to notice your number, your tattoo. Do people approach you and ask you if you're a survivor of Auschwitz? Or do you have to prepare yourself to speak the truth, [INAUDIBLE] can handle a question spontaneously without [INAUDIBLE]?

Believe it or not, nobody has ever yet cornered me and asked me, what is this? No, nobody, nobody. And I understand this-- some people realize it, some people think, well, it's a number of a secret organization, or what have you. And don't want to ask. And some people probably realize it, and feel I'd like to ask, but maybe I shouldn't.

Of course, I can't go around-- now 10 years ago, if you would have been asking any questions, I would have been very evasive about it. I didn't want to talk about that. I couldn't talk about it.

And even certain scenes that I have to describe here, are always-- and I've talked about it now many, many dozens of times, always tough for me to talk about. When I talk about these children I talked earlier, I always have a tough time. I have to push myself over that. Even as much as I talk about it.

I'm fairly callous against most anything, but this is the one thing that I can't get over. So in answer to your question, nobody ever yet, in earlier years, or now, when they see me-- and I have no reason not to wear short-sleeved shirts, nobody ever asks. Yes, please?

Do you have children?

Yes, I have two children, both married. And in fact, each have two children of their own. So I have a collection of four grandchildren.

[INAUDIBLE]

Yeah--

How old were they when you--

Well, I'll tell you what-- my children complain-- complain now, it's an established fact, they complained a little bit earlier that I never spoke too much detail about that. When they were very small-- in fact, my grandchild sits on my lap, and comes, the one-year-old baby, comes and goes, da-da-da-da-- you know, already notices that.

But when the children were small, they knew that I was imprisoned in Germany. But they didn't know too much of any details. And I think I waited rather late. First of all, as I said, I couldn't talk about it at the time. And probably, I waited a little longer than necessary.

There were two reasons for it. Number one, as I said, one reason I said already, I couldn't talk about it. Number one, and a little later, if I may have pushed myself to talk about it-- I didn't want to talk to them about it too early. Because I did not want to instill any blind hatred against Germans, period.

Because if I tell them, look, your grandmother has been killed, you know, and cousins of mine, and so on and so forth. And naturally, the question, who did it? Well, the Germans. Or the Christians.

Well, again, I was talking about conditioning children's minds. And I didn't want to have any blind conditioning going on. I didn't want them to grow up to blindly hate Germans, as such. Which could be very easily done. Could have been very easily done. Or Christians, for that matter.

And so, I wanted to wait long enough until they can comprehend the whole thing from a very level standpoint. And so I think I waited too long. I waited too long.



But that's done. Now, of course, they know everything.

You mentioned where your daughter is now?

Oh, yeah, my daughter, after a long discussion with me-- not that I asked for it, she came and asked me what I think about it-- she is right now, she's just finishing her second year, for two years, in other words, she's in Berlin. She is in Berlin with her whole family-- husband, children, and the dog, in Berlin teaching at the American JF Kennedy School.

And so, of course, there are two things combined-- number one, she always wanted to teach someplace else. She is in special education. And of course, Germany had some appeal to her, because number one, she speaks pretty good-- she speaks a very good German. Number two, there are some family left from my wife's side of the family-- some cousins and her sister, and their children.

And so she was very much interested in going there. And so before she decided that, knowing of course that my reason-- one of the reasons for leaving Germany was I didn't want to have my children grow up in Germany at those days. She recognizes that, of course, was that she said-- she came and said, Daddy, I want you to know, if you feel uneasy about that, I'd rather not do it.

So I want your blessings, if I do that. And so my feelings were very simply, as I briefly stated, the Germany of today is trying to become-- or being a very good democracy. That there is neo-Nazism, and that there are still the old-- some of the very old Nazis are living, and not being brought to justice, can't be helped. As I say, we have a similar problem here, except-- well, nothing else to say.

But so something that brings me to that, too-- I said, my wife's family there. Now my wife is half Jewish. She had a Jewish mother, who was also in Terezin. She was fortunate enough to have survived Terezin-- she stayed in Terezin until the end. She is now deceased because of old age, as it is.

And now, my wife's father was a Christian. So she was what they call in German a mischling-- a half breed, if you want to. So but of course, that was enough that for her, that she had unclean blood. And she was, as such, marked as a member of the asocial elements-- the [GERMAN], as they called them in German. Anybody that was not clean Aryan.

That was almost like a criminal tag on it-- not just racial, almost had a criminal intonation. So she was also not allowed to work in her given job. And she was in-- when she was put to work in Berlin, at those days, you didn't see any women work on street work, or anything like that. It was an unseen sight by that time.

And when you saw a group of women working, cleaning up the streets after a bombing attack, or shoveling snow in the winter, the street shoveling the streets clean, well, then you knew there was something wrong with that person. Like in this case, my wife, there was some mistake-- she made a mistake. She wasn't very careful when she chose her mother when she was born.

So second time around, she will be more careful, I guess. But it's funny, It's a little crack, but that's really what it boils down to. I had an experience in high school that I talked-- in senior high school, that was at this point, like I'm here with you. And one of the seniors, very fine young fellow, stands up, after I'm done with this, like this here, talking.

He stands up and says, now, Mr. Oertelt, now, tell me really, why were you incarcerated? Now that was in my early experiences, some years ago. And I, not physically, but inside, I went like this, huh? You know, what's the matter? I didn't have a chip on my shoulder-- I didn't think I did such a lousy job to make this clear.

Or I said, the guy was asleep all the time, or something like that. But then when he asked the question, and really, that's how it came to my mind. I formulated at that moment-- and I answered very cocky like, as I thought, I didn't want to say, I said, you know, something the reason that I was incarcerated was I was very careless when I was a baby when it came to choosing my parents. And there was a moment's silence, and the class giggled.

And this guy came afterwards, when everything was done, and most people ran out, he says, you know, Mr. Oertelt, it

seems that I offended you, and I didn't mean to. And I felt a little little. And he said, you know something, I still can't quite understand-- I can't see how anybody is supposed to be incarcerated because of religion, or race, if you will. He just couldn't understand. He couldn't get--

In fact, I came to the conclusion that this guy, or the whole class, was the only guy who really comprehended the whole thing. Because that's all it is. That's all it is. You are you, by the grace of God, or whatever you believe in, who you are. You could have just as well been one of those poor starving Vietnamese kids, or something like that.

Do you have any control over it? Do we have a right to be cocky over what we are? And that's exactly what it boils down to. That's what the whole thing.

This is why I'm very often engaged talking in human relation classes. Any questions? Please.

Could you give us an update on your brother? What's happening now? And also, when you were in the camps, did you get any news as to how the war was going, later on, that would have provided some hope, [INAUDIBLE]?

Yeah, well, I start again with your last part of the question. Because I might forget it by the time-- it's the other way, no, no, no. But as far as news in camps, it came somehow, and not always exactly, but always late. For instance, the invasion of Italy, we found out two months after it had been done.

Of course, when the Russians came near Auschwitz, we heard the shooting and the banging, and we knew what was up. So that's that. So the news came, some news came, not all of it. But always belated.

And naturally, we didn't have any radio, or newspapers, or anything like that. But other than that, your first question was-- oh, my brother, yeah. Yeah, my brother, fortunately, is still alive. And as I probably mentioned earlier, he and I are the only survivors of our side of the family.

And so my brother lives in Portland, Maine, which is nice, because it always gives me a good excuse to go up to this beautiful state. But other than that, my brother actually has his own story to tell. But you see, he's one of those people that people that can't go around and talk about it.

And he is a survivor-- about a month before I was liberated in Flossenburg, my last camp, they had picked out of the prisoners 1,000 men, which, as I say, that was about a month and a half before the end of the war. They wanted still to build an airport not too far away from Flossenburg. They had, in the meantime, lost a lot of airfields, and stuff like that, of course. But they were still hoping they can make it.

And they were looking for some prisoners that were in comparatively good shape to build a new airport. And by that time, I was gravely ill, by the way, and I didn't refer to that because it all takes too much time. I was gravely ill in such a way that my brother actually had to help me literally to go to the bathroom. And I couldn't do anything by myself.

I had a swollen thing under the arm that was as big as a tennis ball, and my whole body hurt, and I couldn't move and nothing. So anyway, so my brother actually, in his own frail condition, took care of me as much as he could, in many ways.

And so a month before my liberation, he was picked out to-- with another 999 men-- to go to some site to build an airport. These people were put on a march to go to that site, it was several miles away. And were not put in any kind of housing, or something. They had a blanket with them, and when they were done-- and this was in March, which is still kind of cool in Germany, too.

And so they were-- when they were done working, they plunked down wherever they were, with the one blanket that everybody had assigned to. And as I said, people were weak anyway, even though they were supposed to be in the better conditions compared to everyone else.

And so these people worked there for about something like a total of four, four and a half weeks. One died after the

other. And then the Allies came close to it.

And by the time, then, they had to pack up-- the airfield, of course, was not finished-- they had to pack up, also were put on a death march. There were about-- of the 1,000 men, they were about 300 left. And so they were marching for about three or four days, it was, I don't know exactly anymore. Were marching.

And by the time-- what I'm going to tell you now-- they were down to 52 or 53 people, the others were already all shot on the march. And they were put into some kind of a shed overnight, and my brother heard the shooting of the war, the fighting front, very close by. And there were about half a dozen guards guarding that little group.

And whenever anybody wanted to step out that shed to go to the bathroom, they had to call on the guard for permission. And so my brother got up during the night, and called on the guard, and he didn't get any answer. And he saw that all six of those guards were laying down, snoring away, sleeping. They were also exhausted by that time, from all that marching and walking, and shooting, I guess.

But and so, my brother felt that was his last chance. He noticed that his strength was also giving away very, very rapidly. And he heard the shooting of the front not too far away. So he set out to sneak away-- these guards were asleep-- and try to make it to what he hoped were the American troops.

And he comes just-- he said it, like a half a mile away, and it starts to get bright already. And he figured, because he had a striped uniform, naturally, everybody could see from a mile away that he was a prisoner and could run into any German Nazi's hand. So he recognized that he doesn't have much of a chance.

So in his-- and he noticed that he is very, very faint-- feels very, very weak, as if he will faint any moment. And so he knocks just on the little village there on one of the door-- on one of the doors. And just taking his chance. He also figured briefly, well, now, everybody knows that at the end of the war is near, and maybe that somebody-- even if he was a Nazi before-- might would like to help him, or something.

Anyway, he knocked on this door. And that's all he knows. Because he collapsed in front of the door, right there. And didn't know what was going on anymore.

He woke up the next day, down in some cellar, in some basement, completely covered with straw. And the farmer that had taken him in recognized right away who he had, and he knew that he had to hide him. So he hid him down in the basement, among a lot of straw.

And so he came down, and told him that he found him, and so on and so forth. And went out and fed him, and so and so forth. And my brother couldn't walk at that moment. He laid there.

And he said, well, the Germans are still around, and you've got to lay down here, I can't take you up. There were a couple of hours he came down to him and said, say, tell me something-- were you with a group of some 50 prisoners not far from here? And my brother said, yes, yes.

He said, well, he says, we just found a group of 51 or 52 prisoners, all shot by machine gun fire on the spot, together. So the guards gave up at that moment, didn't want to become prisoners themselves. So they want to get rid of that group of Jews, and just shot them, 52 people on the spot. My brother is the only survivor of that camp, by this kind of a coincidence.

That's for my brother. Please?

I just wanted to comment on what you're doing. [INAUDIBLE] I'm from Germany.

Oh.

And the things that are happening here scare me. And I also-- I'm really grateful for hearing what you're doing.

Thank you.

How many people have you reached?

Well, I'm requested for more appearances than I can handle. And so, how many people-- I really don't make any count of it. But a good amount. Yeah, and I--

In spite of what [INAUDIBLE] still people around who

Yes, there are people that do that. And--

I think it could happen anywhere.

It can happen anywhere, you're absolutely correct. Given the same circumstances as we had in Germany, and they're by no means impossible anywhere else. Can happen here, yes. Can happen anywhere. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

I was wondering if you could comment on the-- I have talked to-- have talked to other Germans from the older generation, and what is your opinion of the remark that you very often hear, people didn't know. And I heard from people whom I believe who really didn't know what was going on.

I believe that some of them really didn't know. A good number of them didn't want to know. And a good number of them knew. Based on the fact, again, that we had nearly a half a million of guards in all those camps, 400,000-- half a million is overdoing it. I'm sorry.

But I'm sure that their families knew what they were doing. Probably they didn't come home and didn't exactly tell them, well, I shot during last week, two dozen Jews. Probably didn't report it that way.

But the family must know, because everybody else that was in uniform was otherwise at the fighting front at those days. So as I say, probably a good number really and honestly didn't know.

Flossenburg, the camp that I was liberated from, was right in the middle of the populated area. By the way, I just was there last October. We visited it, and went to Flossenburg, and to Terezin in Czechoslovakia.

And I now more than ever realized that was right smack in the city, right surrounded were houses that were there then. And probably were occupied by Nazi guards, I presume, immediately around there. But they were there, they were there.

So in Berlin, as I grew up, there was a camp, Oranienburg-- and when I was in Berlin, yet, before the incarceration, a long time, some people that would voice some opinion somewhat, or smacking of derogatory against the Nazi regime, they would say, well, I better not say too much or else I land in Oranienburg. So nobody wanted to land in Oranienburg.

Now, I grant you that it had just a bad connotation. They knew that's no fun place to be. And probably, they didn't know exactly what was going on, specifically, not at that time. And I suspect that maybe a lot of-- maybe really most of the people did not know about the exact extermination procedures of an Auschwitz, for instance.

And of course, again, the most notorious concentration camps, extermination, were located outside of Germany. Actually, Buchenwald, and even Teresienstadt, towards the end, only became extermination camps. They were not in the beginning. Because by that time, as I said earlier, Hitler lost all the outlying areas. And so he still wanted to exterminate Jews.

And so he created those in those camps, too. It's a difficult thing.

And to you, some of you, I don't know if anyone here has been in Dachau, you see also Dachau is right, right smack at

the edge of the town. It's not far away from town. It could not have been a complete secret.

And rumors always come out of places. And I think, many of these people that say, I didn't know of anything-- I'm sure that many of them said, I didn't want to know of anything. And so therefore, closed their eyes and ears, in order not to witness it. Please?

[INAUDIBLE] both your statement and what [INAUDIBLE] statement a few minutes when she said that what she sees here in America is frightening. Could you speak more to what you see as frightening?

Well, additionally to what I referred to earlier, I think, in both ways, I think progress is made, as well as some losing sight of that, too. If you list all the groups that are sworn to antisemitism and racial laws, I just mentioned a few of them, the Posse Comitatus, which now have become so popular, I knew of them a long time ago-- and of course, the neo-Nazi group, itself, is certainly alive and well, the Nazi group.

And all the other religious groups. I can't think of that group that I mentioned earlier, that was on WCCO last year. They're right there, they don't make-- beg your pardon?

In Arkansas-- in Arkansas?

In Arkansas, I don't know the name of it right now. They actually-- they came on there-- in one hand, the Bible, and the other hand, the flag. And they were not so hard against Blacks because they proved that one of the Black people is in their group, that is allowed to do media-- not the word I'm looking for. But ordinary work, like shoe shining, or something like that.

But he is also-- but he is one of us, he says. And he trains with his gun, again, and so on and so forth. There are a lot of groups.

In fact, there are more groups here than there are in Germany. Germany is, to my knowledge, really the only group is the neo-Nazi group. And of course, the old Nazis that still march around, and are allowed to have those meetings as recently was reported.

Although, the population has risen against those characters at the time. I don't know, somewhere in Southern Germany, it was a little town where the old Nazi buddies, the old SS buddies, met recently for an anniversary. But the population was up against them and was there to make a lot of stink about it.

I realize some of you have other classes. I'd like-- while we still have an audience left, I want to thank Henry for coming and speaking to us.