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I'm Randolph Braham, Professor of Political Science and Director of the [? Changar ?] Institute for Holocaust Studies at the Graduate School of the City University of New York. This interview with Jack Rosenthal, a survivor of the Holocaust in Hungary, is videotaped on Wednesday, April 10, 1991.

Jack, tell me where do you live now?

Now, I live in Roslyn, Long Island. As a matter of fact, I just moved in there only a few months ago.

Yeah.

What's the address there?

The address is 212 Augusta Court in Roslyn.

And your name is now Rosenthal.

Rosenthal.

What was your name before?

Well, my name was Rosenthal, but it wasn't spelled like this. It was spelled R-O-Z-E-N-T-A-L.

And your first name was?

Yakob. Yakob in Romanian and in Hungarian or Yankel in Yiddish. But most everybody called me Yankel.

Yeah, tell me something about your personal background. Where were you born?

Well, I was born in a small village in northern Romania in the District of Satu Mare. My village was called Comlausa.

In Romania?

In Romania. As I say, it was a small village. And it was on the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains in northern Romania.

What was the total population of that village, and how many of that population was Jewish?

Well, I would have to guess how many people the total population I would say maybe were 250 families, maybe, out of which 26 were Jewish families.

Oh, OK. Tell me something about your own family.

Well, my family consisted of my mother my father. And I had four brothers and a sister. My sister's name was Baile, and my brothers was Mordcha, Dovid, [? Labi ?] and Avrum. And your mother's and father's names?

My mother's name was Rivka. And my father's name was Chaim.

I want you to know that this whole village were, I would say maybe 20, 22 families out of the 26 were related, because they all come back. They were all the Zelig family. It was called Zelig. This was going back, I think it was in the mid 18th century around 1840 where [? Meir ?] Zelig came to Comlausa. And he had a son, [NON-ENGLISH]. And [NON-ENGLISH], again I'm just going through faster. [NON-ENGLISH] had a daughter by the name of Leah.

Leah was my grandmother. And Leah had my mother, Rivka. So I would say that we go back to our village I don't

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know maybe about six, seven generations who were born in that village.

Yeah. What about the community? What kind of community did you have in Comlausa?

Well, most of the people were farmers. They were very, very religious people. There wasn't any learned people in a sense they were very educated, and not even in Jewish, they weren't too learned. But they knew how to daven, and they got up early in the morning like 5 o'clock in the morning. They would recite the Tehillim and then go to shul and pray, and then go on the farm and work.

And some of the people were sharecroppers. In other words, they would work the fields for some other people for a certain cut of the produce. We had a lot of land in Comlausa. We had about 18 or 20 acres, which is like 12 [NON-ENGLISH].

But most of our land was very poor land. It had a drainage problem. But so we ourselves hardly grew enough bread to feed us for the whole year.

And the community was mostly Orthodox?

Orthodox, yes.

Orthodox. There were no assimilated--

No, no, no?

--Neolog Reformed Jews in that village?

No, no, no.

Exclusively Orthodox?

Yeah. I want you to know that we were-- it was isolated. Because there were no trains coming that way. There was no highways leading to it. I'll tell you something else. The first time I rode a train was when the Nazis took me to Auschwitz.

Electricity, they brought in electricity there, I think it was in the mid '70s. So you could imagine it a very isolated place.

It's a very backward village in other words. At any rate, what year were you born? What was the date of your birth?

March 26, 1928.

1928. Now what kind of education did you have? Did you go to Jewish schools primarily?

Yeah, most of my education was in cheder. We had a cheder. We had a cheder consisting of all the boys from the village. And by the time I was already 11, 12 years old, the cheder in Comlausa couldn't hold me, because I was like advanced like two or three years advanced. So they sent me to the next village in [? Bartoch. ?] As far as a secular education, we had a school there.

And I went to school maybe three, four years. The first class I went to, about two, three years, I always failed. Because I never went to school. But I think I made about two or three grades, two or three grades I made in public school.

As a child in the 1930s, were you aware of any antisemitism in that village or area?

Well, I remember in the late '30s in Romania, they had the Iron Guard, [NON-ENGLISH]. They had Cuza, Vaida, Octavian Goga, Zelea Codreanu. I remember the parties. There was the [? Rotar. ?] I even remember their slogans in

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Romania. This goes back to many, many, many years ago. And I remember that they started to create in my village, they started to create hatred against the Jewish people. Because most of the people in my village were farmers. And they really, they weren't anti-Semitic. Because we were all farmers. We were all in this. Except when outsiders came in to instigate it.

So what impact did this anti-Semitic policy of Romania have on your family? I don't think it had any physical or monetary impact, except because I remember distinctly there was one day when the King-- took all-- Zelea Codreanu and his whole gang, and they had him shot. But there was talk. There was talk that they are going to burn down all the shuls, all the synagogues.

And I remember as a child every Monday and Thursday we used to go to shul in first, and recite a special prayer, so that the government of the Iron Guard should fall, and it did. It did. I think it was in 1938 when they finally--

Yeah, did you personally suffered any?

No, no. I wouldn't say, from antisemitism, I don't think I-- I mean they call me Jew or something. But no. I can't say.

You weren't beaten up, in other words?

No, no. No, as a matter of fact, I beat up a few Gentiles. There's no problem.

In 1939, '40, how old were you then? Let me see. You were born in '28.

I was 11, 12 years old.

So it was in that time, in 1940, that your little village, and the entire area of Northern Transylvania were occupied by the Hungarians.

Well, let me say this. You see my parents, my mother and my father, they were arrested by the Romanians. Supposedly they were accused of being Hungarian spies. So they were locked up in Cluj.

And my mother got five years in jail, my father one year.

When was that?

That was in 1939. So what happened is in 1940, when the Vienna Diktat of Romania and Hungary where Ribbentrop and Ciano in Italy, they forced Romania to cede northern Transylvania to Hungary. I was kind of happy because my parents were released from jail. So when they came back and I remember, I think it was in August of 1940 when the Hungarian army marched in. And we were on the border, by the way. We were on the border. So we were the first village where the armies came through.

Was there any basis to the accusation against your parents?

Well, let me say this to you. In an American court of law, there would be no basis. But over there, they were accused. They were accused because my mother, somebody came from the other side, from the Hungarian side. And they brought a Hungarian newspaper. And they gave it to my mother. And my mother read it, and somebody saw her. So how did she get the paper? So I think this is how it started. But I really don't know the complete details.

But I do remember when they were locked up, they were in jail because. We were six children, and all of us were given to various families they should take care on us, because we were small and we couldn't take care on ourselves.

Yeah. What was your first impression about the Hungarian occupation of your village?

Well, I remember when the Hungarians came in, there was like three days and three nights, the armies kept on

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marching, and marching, and marching. I didn't know where they took so many troops. They were well fed, the Hungarian army. They were pretty well mechanized. Even so, they had horses, and they drew the artillery pieces on horses. But I was very impressed as a child to see such a mighty army come through our village. Yes.

Tell me something about the first two years of life under the Hungarian rule in Comlausa. That is between 1940 and '42.

Well, let me say this. First, I remember as a child going to school. I'm talking about in secular school. And the teacher asked us a question who were our ancestors. And of course, being I've gone to a Romanian school, so I said [NON-ENGLISH]. So he beat me up, because it was [NON-ENGLISH]. I had different ancestry already, because I knew which system came in.

We went to school. And again, I don't remember any overt antisemitism, even in the '40s or '41, no. No.

But you probably are aware of the fact that the Hungarians passed anti-Jewish laws in 1938 in Hungary, then in 1939. And these Hungarian laws were applied to the Jews in northern Transylvania. So did your parents feel the consequences of these anti-Jewish laws?

No, we didn't, for a simple reason because most of those laws had to do about the Jews not allowed to go to college, or they couldn't have stores, so they couldn't be in certain commerce. And the people in my village were not involved. They didn't go to schools, or to higher education, or they didn't have fancy stores. So we were not involved.

But in 1942, in the beginning of 1942, that was a different story. Because what happened is my father served in the Romanian army, and he was in the artillery. And he was very good as an artillery man. But the Hungarians, when they came in, they didn't allow Jews to carry arms. They took my father into a work battalion, which was called munkaszolgalat. And they was taken away from us. We were small children. And he was about three, four months in Hungary.

And I think in the middle of 1942, he was sent up to the Ukrainian front. I want you to know one thing. Once he left us, I never heard from him again. I never know where he is, what happened to him. I heard stories. I heard a story about he was in a hospital when the Hungarian army burned down the hospital with everybody in it. But I never, never heard from him again, never.

He was, as I said, he was in the work battalions. And also myself, being already 12 years old, I was in the Levente. Levente were like the Nazi youth. I don't know how to describe them. It's a combination of Boy Scouts and everything. And I had to serve in the Levente once a week, one day a week. And there they trained us, by the way, with rifles and so on. I could still recite to you every part of an Hungarian rifle. I could take it apart and put it together.

Also what happened is they passed a law that any Gentile, if he wants to claim land, the only thing he had to do, it was called [NON-ENGLISH], I think the word was called [NON-ENGLISH]. He had to apply with a paper to the government stating that this Jew is not working his own land. And based on that statement, he could take away the land from the Jew without any compensation.

My grandfather, he must have been maybe 92, 93 years old. And they were farmers. And I told you before, he was born in my village, and his father was born in my village. The land went down from parents to son, and so on, for generations. We were attached to the land very much. The land was part of us, because that's all we had. We worked the land and we grew food.

And good enough, they took away his land. And I remember one day me and him, we went down to see. He had about eight acres of land there, where the Gentile who claimed the land, he was already making hay on the land. And my grandfather told him, get off my land. And he said, no. This is already my land. This is not your land no more. And he was so heartbroken that when we came back, he told me, go to the shochet next village and call him over, he said, because I'm going to die. I don't want to live.

I don't want to live in a place where they could take my land away. So I went for the shochet. He came over. And he

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said [NON-ENGLISH] with him. And by the way, that night he died. He died from heartbreak. He was heartbroken.

Yeah, let's go back to your father. He was mobilized into labor services, you said, sometime in '42.

In the beginning of '42.

Early in '42.

Yeah.

And he was sent to the Ukraine, where he was--

He was sent to the Ukraine. And the only thing I remember is a telegram came to us in 1943. And I told you before, I never heard from him again. I could even quote to you in Hungarian the telegram exactly, if you want to hear it. But the telegram said, [HUNGARIAN] It's called the town of [PLACE NAME] in the Ukraine, there where he disappeared.

And this is the only thing we heard about it.

In other words, they inform you, we are sorry to inform you that your father, or Mr. Rozental disappeared somewhere in [PLACE NAME]

In [PLACE NAME]

Without any trace.

Without any trace.

So you assume that he was either killed or--

I assumed all along that he must have been taken prisoner by the Russians, on the Russian front. I was hoping. I was always hoping that he was taken prisoner. But that wasn't the case.

So, the last time you met him was in '42?

The last time I saw him is when he left us in 1942. I tell you it was in February of 1942.

And who provided for your family in the absence of your father?

Well, I was the oldest.

At 12?

Yeah. Yeah. All my-- I was the oldest. That's by the way why I'm alive, because I was the oldest in my family. And I did a little business here and there.

At that young age?

That's right. Yeah. As a matter of fact, I had a trade. I could take whiskey. I could distill whiskey. So that was my trade. And we did pretty-- I mean under the circumstances.

Americans call it moonshining.

Moonshining, exactly. OK.

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So, tell me something about the life of your family between 1942 when your father was taken away until March 19, 1944, when the Germans occupied Hungary. What was life in the village like?

'42 was a big famine in our village. I think the reason being because most of the food was taken out from our village, and shipped to the front. I remember the cows, the cattle, everything was taken out. And I tell you it was a famine. It was a famine that I'll never forget. People would die on the street. They didn't have what to eat.

My mother, I remember she used to make, what they call in America, they call it kasha. She used to rub the kasha against the stone and make flour out of it, and she baked some cakes, flour, whatever it is.

A famine is a terrible thing, because the only thing you think about is food. Day and night, you only think about food. So it was terrible. 1942 was terrible. 1943 surprisingly was a good year. 1943, for some reason, there was a lot of fruits growing in our village. And there was a lot of the fields, they yielded a nice crop. And I'll tell you something. Nobody bothered us in 1943. It was like the quiet before the storm. 1943 was OK. It was OK.

In 1944, in the beginning of 1944, was quiet too. But my mother decided that I should go into Satu Mare, and I should learn a trade. And I learned a trade to be a locksmith, [NON-ENGLISH]. And I worked for a Hungarian in Satu Mare. And he was, by the way, the head of the Nyilas, which is the Hungarian Nazi Party. But he was very nice to me.

I worked. I worked hard. And all of a sudden, in March 19, 1944, I went to work. And the whole town of Satu Mare was full of German soldiers. They came in, and they occupied Hungary. And when they occupied the Satu Mare, they came in with trucks, and with tanks, and with Jeeps, and they parked all over the sidewalk and all over the street. And I walked in, and I went to work.

And there was one German who had a car broken. His car was broken. So he came into my boss to have the car fixed. And since I spoke a little Yiddish, I understood German. And he explained me what has to be done. And then he asked me where there is a restaurant. I took him to the [? Panoni ?] in Satu Mare, and I was sitting on the fender of the car. And we didn't know what's going to happen. We didn't know what's going to happen.

But then a law came out maybe a few days later that no Jew is allowed to travel on a bus, and no Jew was allowed to leave from one place to another place. And at that time, I took the bus. I wanted to go back to Comlausa. But they wouldn't allow me on the bus anymore. So I walked back. I walked back, and that was exactly before Passover of 1944.

How long a distance between Satu Mare and Comlausa?

I would say it's about 18 miles or 30 kilometers.

Of course, at that time, it was known as SzatmÃ¡rnÃ©meti, no longer Satu Mare.

Satu Mare, then it was known as SzatmÃ¡rnÃ©meti

SzatmÃ¡rnÃ©meti. In Yiddish, Satmar, I believe. And the famous rabbi comes from Satmar.

Satmar Hasidim, yeah.

At any rate, tell me something about the first few weeks of the German occupation.

OK.

So how did that affect your village?

Well, so now I went back. And it was Passover. And we heard stories that the Germans are trying to arrest Jews. By the way, a few Jews were arrested in my village too, and they were taken away. They were called the communists. They were called the political leaders or something. And they were taken away. And we heard stories that as a matter of fact,

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we were afraid to have this-- we didn't even have a Seder, because we were afraid to stay in the home.

So at night we went out to sleep by the Gentiles, with our neighbors, with our non-Jewish neighbors. And we knew there is problems. But we still didn't to what extent. So right after Passover, the next morning, there was what they call in America the town crier. This guy, he was the Sheriff like in Comlausa. And he had a big drum. And whenever there was an announcement, he would hit the drums. So everybody would come out from the house to listen to the announcement.

And he announced that all Jews over 16 years old should go to the synagogue. Then about half an hour later, he came back and he said the first announcement is not valid, because he didn't say it right. He said that everybody-- men, women, and children, should go to the synagogue immediately. Within a half an hour, they should go to the synagogue.

So we all went to the synagogue. As soon as we went to the synagogue, the police came. And they locked the synagogue. They locked it. Now, I want you to know that we had a cow. And we had some chickens and stuff like this. They had to be fed. The cow had to be milked. And here you are in the synagogue. I mean somebody is supposed to take care of things.

So my mother told me, better go sneak out and see what's happening there. But as I went out from the synagogue, I saw a Romanian taking the cow, my cow, and he was leading it out from my stable. He was taking it away. So I didn't look for trouble. So I thought to myself, since everybody, at least the police may think that I'm still in Satu Mare. So I ran away. I ran into the hills. I ran into the hills.

And I was staying in the hills for a couple of days and nights. But I couldn't take it, because the pressure was too much. I was all alone in the hills. I was during the day I was staying under a shrub. And at night, I came down to the village. People would give me some bread, the Romanian people there. And the pressure was unbearable.

I thought that everybody is looking for me. I had a feeling like I'm a fugitive. Everybody is looking for me. So then one morning, I seen a lot of cars and horses, and people on the horses, Jewish people, going through my village. So I decided to follow those people to see where they are being taken. And I was following alongside the road. And they were taken to Nagyszolos Nagyszolos was called Sevlus in Czechoslovakia, and today it's part of Russia, which is called Vynohradiv.

They were taken there. There was a ghetto. And when I saw, so I knew that the Jews are being taken to this place. And so I started to come back to Comlausa. But I had a problem, because you weren't allowed to go from village to village. In addition, every Jew was supposed to carry a star. He was supposed to have a star here, a yellow star, a yellow badge.

Here, I'm outside my village. I haven't got a badge. I have the badge. But if they would see me walking around like this, they would take me. They would do something to me. And I want you to know that the streets were by the Hungarian police, and also by the Levente, which is the Boy Scouts. They were 16, 17, 20, 19 years old. And they were very rough. They were thugs because they were inflamed against the Jew.

So what I did I took my jacket with a yellow star, and I folded it up, and I carried it on my hand. And I didn't go on the main road. But I came to the side of the road. And little by little, I worked myself back, back to my village.

When I came back, I went up to the hills again. But again, the pressure was too much. So I decided to go and give myself up. And I'll never forget when I came down from the hills, there was a gypsy boy who was living in my village. And he begged me. He said to me, listen, don't go there. He said, you better come and stay with us. And I could have stayed there. But I missed very much my family. So I went back.

And I came back. By this time the people weren't locked up in the synagogue anymore. They were locked up in the school, in the schoolhouse. When I came back, I gave myself up. They threw me in with the rest of the people there. I felt very good because it was like a relief to be back.

In other words, before they were sent to Nagyszolos or Sevlus, they were first transferred from the synagogue to the

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local school.

The local school, yeah.

Yeah. That was I believe the village ghetto, the first step.

Yeah, that was the first. There they were concentrated. There they were concentrated. Outside the police were watching the school outside. But the local people would come to us, and they would give us food.

Yeah.

You know?

Do you remember what agency of the Hungarian government did the rounding up of the Jews?

No.

Was it the gendarmerie?

The gendarmerie, yeah, the csendors.

Yeah.

Now, they were the ones with the feathers. They had the black hats with the feathers.

The gendarmes.

The gendarmes.

Yeah. Do you have an idea as to what was one of the objectives of rounding up the Jews in the school and the synagogue? What happened to the valuables of the Jews-- money, jewelry at that time?

Now, at this point, by the way, I know what you're asking me. Because what happened now, before we were taken to the ghetto, they were kept on asking us, who has money, jewelry, worthwhile articles, or whatever, they should give it up under the pain of death. They were threatening everybody to give up everything. But this didn't happen yet in my village.

This happened when he took us into the main ghetto. As a matter of fact, before they let us into the main ghetto, there was like a building where the men were staying in one line and the women in another line. And they were being searched, body searched, each and every body, each and every one. I remember my mother had a golden ring like. And she buried it in there. It was a little thing. She buried it.

As a matter fact, after the war I went to look for it. I couldn't find it no more. But anybody that had any valuables had to give it up. And this, by the way, was a constant cry by the police. Every day, maybe two or three times a day, they would go through the ghetto and say anybody that has money, jewelry, valuables should give it up. Give it up, just constantly.

When you say ghetto, you mean the ghetto of Sevlus now, of Nagyszolos.

Yeah, now what happened is this. When we were in the school, we were all gathered in the school. Now one day, they told all the Gentile people, the Romanians from my village, that whoever has horses and carts to come to the school. And they lined up the horses and carts. This was a means of transportation to the ghetto. And when we came out from the schoolhouse, and we were ready to mount the horses and the carts, there was another transport coming from [? Tutz. ?] There was a village called [? Tutz ?] near Comlausa.

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And there was a big line of cars and people sitting there. In the first car was the [NON-ENGLISH], the rabbi of [? Tutz. ?] And he was carrying a Torah, and he was sitting there. And when he saw us, we were about to be loaded onto the carts and everything. So he said to us, [NON-ENGLISH]. Jews, we are going to meet the Messiah. The messianic age has arrived.

Because the mashiach is going to come. The whole world is supposed to be turned upside down. And I'll tell you. If ever the world was turned upside down, that was the time.

What was the distance between Comlausa and Nagyszolos?

I would say about 12 miles.

Was it closer than Satmar?

It was closer, yeah. See what happened is even so we were belonged to the district of Satu Mare or Satmar, when the Hungarians came in, they redistricted that area. And instead of belonging to Satu Mare, we were belonging to Ugocsa. Ugocsa [NON-ENGLISH] which is Sevlus was the capital of the Ugocsa district.

All right, in other words, the Jews of Comlausa were transferred to the larger concentration entrainment area of Nagyszolos.

Nagyszolos, right.

Nagyszolos. And how long were you in that ghetto in Nagyszolos approximately?

In Sevlus, they took a part of the city where there was a big synagogue there in a cemetery and they barricaded it around. And all the non-Jews moved out. And the ones that came in, we were all put into that spot, to that which was the ghetto, the ghetto was of Sevlus. I'll tell you when the Nazis came in, it was March 19. On April 15, we were taken to the synagogue, as I told you.

And about a week later, we were already in the ghetto of Sevlus. And May 15, I'll tell you exactly it. Was May 19, May 19, the first transport from Sevlus left for Auschwitz already. So it was very fast. In other words, about a month.

About a month, right. We were in ghetto about a month, about a month.

Yeah. Just very briefly, what was life like in the ghetto of Nagyszolos?

First of all, there was a lot of overcrowding. We were put into one room. I can't even imagine there was hardly any room to sleep there. And the families were just put together. And for latrines, we had to dig like trenches for latrines.

But I remember distinctly what bothers me to this day, whenever I think about it, is the children. There was no food. And I remember the children crying. And this bothers me. Because what happened is when we grew up, we were taught when we get up in the morning. We had to recite a prayer which is called Modeh Ani. If you don't recite the prayer, you cannot eat. So automatically, when we got up, we would recite the prayer of Modeh Ani.

So the children didn't eat. And there was a woman. And she said, all right, did you say the Modeh Ani? So she would recite with them the prayer of Modeh Ani. But she made it a very long prayer. She dragged it out like for a half an hour or 40 minutes. Thinking by the time she'll be finished with the prayer for the children, the children will forget that they are hungry. And this is something which I remember very distinctly, and it's a very painful thing to remember.

You were an adolescent of 16, I believe, at the time.

Pardon?

You were an adolescent of 16.

At that time, I was about 16, yeah.

What do you remember about the administration of the ghetto, for example, Jewish leaders.

Yeah, OK. The ghetto, they were taken out, the men, and we were sweeping the floors of Sevlus and we were doing some work outside, and all kinds of work outside. And the police, the Hungarian police, were very, very rough. They were like sadists. There was maybe two or three German officers in uniform that he stood at the administration building in the ghetto.

And that's it. That's it. Then there was talk. There was one guy who was like-- he was the head of the Jewish--

The Jewish Council?

The Jewish Council, yeah. And then one day, he told us that we are going to be taken to Madagascar, which is in Africa. And then there was rumors that we are going to be taken to [? Dunantul. ?] Then there were rumors that we are going to be exchanged for German prisoners of war in the next day. So what they did, they took the ghetto and they divided it into three sections.

The first section, in the back, the first, they took out the first day, the first Friday.

Before we go on to the deportation, what about the soup kitchens? Were there any organized feeding?

No. No, no. There was no feeding. No.

The only thing, no, we didn't have absolutely no organization as far as feeding. What we had, what people brought with them, and something like this.

Yeah. Were there any casualties, deaths, suicides that you--

Not that I remember, no.

You don't remember?

No.

All right so Nagyszolos was, in other words, the concentration entrtainment center for the Ugocsa county communities.

You call it an entrainment center because you know what happened. But we didn't know. When we got there, the reason they took us to Nagyszolos because it was near the railroad station, so we should be-- but there we were gathered into the ghetto of Nagyszolos Now, as I said to you before, the ghetto was liquidated in three parts.

The first went on May 19, 1944. May 19, it was the first section. And I'll tell you I looked out in the morning and I saw a mass of people moving, maybe I don't know, 2,000 or 3,000. And that's a lot of people. Men, women, and children-- women, they were carrying, everybody was carrying the pillowcases. For some reason in Europe, the people always took along their pillowcases and the covers, the nightly covers.

It reminds me, my grandchildren always walk around with a blanket that's a security blanket. So because they knew no matter where they go, they will have to have bedding, someplace to sleep and to keep warm. So they took along all the bedding. And people were loaded with bedding-- women and small children.

It was a sight. It's very hard to describe it, because it was a mass of misery, a mass of misery, just moving, just walking.

Nobody was talking. They were just walking, surrounded by police, and they were going.

Was the gendarmerie involved at the?

Yeah, the gendarmes, they were on the side, alongside every 100, 200 feet was a gendarme. And he urged them on, on, on. But the people didn't talk. Everybody was doubled over. The women, they were carrying with children, with beddings, and they were moving, and moving, raggedy. They were just moving. And they were taken to the main synagogue there. And from the main synagogue, they were led out through the town.

I mean I could just tell you, I don't know what happened to them. But I tell you what happened now after May 19, that was the first transport. A week later, exactly was on a Friday, May 26, the ghetto was liquidated on a Friday. The first it was May 19. The second was May 26. That was my turn, my family's turn. And we were taken out to the synagogue. Also the same, of course, I didn't see my column because I was part of the column already.

We were taken out of the main synagogue. And from there through the town, nobody said nothing. We were just walking, walking to the railroad station. We went to the main railroad station there.

And train, into what kind of cars?

When we got to the railroad station, by the way, when we were going out to the train already, we were sprinkled with German soldiers already, here and there, a few maybe, a few German soldiers there. There were cars, they were like box cars. In the car, in one end above there was a little slit of a window, a window I would say about 10 inches high, and about 20 inches long, 2 feet long, you know?

And there were barbed wires over there. That was the only opening there in the car.

In other words, they were freight cars?

Freight cars. And they had two doors, sliding doors. And everybody, as a matter of fact, the police helped us into the car because it was a very high platform. In the car, there was a few loaves of bread. There was two pails of water. And there were some pails for sanitary reasons there.

And they start packing in the cars. There was no chairs or anything like that. They just pushed us into the cars.

About how many in a car?

The car was packed tight. Nobody, as a matter of fact, people were fighting there because they were like pushed together, like sardines, crammed together. We were all standing, you know. Some of them were sitting down.

I want you to know something that in my village, my grandmother's mother was still alive. My great grandmother, because I told you, my grandfather died. So she was alive. She must have been about 95 years old. But she prepared her [NON-ENGLISH], her death shrouds. She sewed by herself by hand. And the only thing she took along with her is the death shrouds. And she was part of this train.

And I remember all the kids there, we were all, everybody, everybody from my village was in that car, and more.

OK. And that freight car was directed towards Auschwitz. How long did it--

All right. The freight car, I don't know where it was directed. The freight car was packed in the freight, and it was like, I would say around maybe 11:00, 12 o'clock, the train pulled out. And we kept on going. We went through barracks. And we went through, or we went to barracks. And we kept on going. We didn't know where we were going. We kept on going.

But all of a sudden, that night, we came to a town called Kosice, Kaschau. And somebody in the car made a remark. He

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said, you know something? I think we are going towards Poland. And if we go towards Poland, then our fate is not going to be very good. Because we heard rumors what they did to the Jews in Poland. But of course, we didn't know. We didn't know where we were going.

But all along, in every stop where the train stopped, the police would pass by outside, and they would say anyone that has jewelry, valuables, kept on saying this over, and over, and over, and over again. And then it was around 12 o'clock at night, the first day. They said, again, this whole business. And the very next few minutes, or maybe half an hour later, we heard the same story now in German. Anybody with valuables, that night we were taken over strictly by the German army, strictly.

There were no more Hungarians. Because this was on the old Slovakian Hungarian border, Kosice. And they took us out, and they took over. And you see what happened. Between the trains, between the boxcars, there was like a little boot, like a little booth. In the booth, was a soldier. Every boxcar at the end of the boxcar was a booth. There was a soldier. And they were watching the trains.

And of course, the boxcars, they were closed and sealed and locked.

So from Kassa, or Kosice, as it's known in Slovakian, how long did it take for you to go to Auschwitz?

Well, from Kosice, the next day, we were going. I don't know where we were. I didn't know where we were. But I was-- we were in Slovakia. I remember pulling myself up as a kid, and looking out through that barbed wire, little slit in the car. And the fields were green, beautiful. The sun was outside beautiful, very nice day. The countryside was very nice. But I didn't know where I was.

And we kept on going all day long that day, and all night that night. The second day in the morning, we came. I looked out. And I saw there was a big station. And that was Krakow. It was already Poland. That was Krakow.

And about that afternoon, we arrived in Auschwitz.

All right. In Auschwitz, you arrived some time early in June, I believe, or late May.

No, no, no. No, I arrived in May. May 28. May 28. We left May 26, and May 28 we arrived. As the matter of fact, it was the first day Shavuot. The first day Shavuot in 1944, we arrived in Auschwitz. So all right, so we're there now.

As soon as we arrived there, the train stopped. And we stopped there for about an hour or two hours, and nothing. And all of a sudden, they opened up the doors. It was a fresh air came in. It was nice. And I saw people walking around in striped uniform, like prisoners. They were Jewish people. They were the ones who unloaded the trains.

And everybody was saying, get out of the trains fast, fast, fast. And everybody was going out of the trains. And we all had our bundles there. And everybody was busy riding up on the bundles, riding on the bundles. The addresses, because they told us we are going to go. They're going to take us away, so we thought that the bundles are going to wait for us over there. So we should all identify our bundles. We all put on our name and address where we came from, and everything, and everybody was busy writing on the bundles.

And then we got out of the train. There was an announcement. As a matter of fact, those prisoners who unloaded us, they said, listen, men over 16, between 16 I think and 50, 55 or something, 16 to 55, should stop in one side. Women between 16 and 55 in another side. Any woman with children below 16 should keep on going left, right?

And the columns were moving, like we were going into our columns. And I saw my mother for the last time. And she was like crying. I think she sense something is not right here. And my sister-- and yeah, I had my brother with me, Mordcha. But they kept on saying under 16 should go with the mothers.

So I told my brother to go to my mother. And he went to my mother. And now I remained alone. And of course, that was the last thing I ever saw of them.

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What was the fate of those who were under 16 and above 55?

All right. All right, now between 16 and 55, my column, we were moving, moving, and there was a line of officers, Mengele and his gang. And there was one guy there. And he had a baton. And he looked at you. And he went like this, so you went this way. If he went like this, you went this way. He just kept on going like this, like this. Now, the line was moving up fast.

And by the way, when he made that decision, to the left meant death. This way meant work. You know what I mean? We didn't know, this way, this way, you know. And I was shown to the right. I went to the right.

And I kept on going.

About what percentage of the people were selected to live, that is to work?

To work?

Approximately.

I can't tell you. I never thought about it, but I would say from the 126 people that we came in there, I wouldn't say that 126, because some of our people were already in the munkaszolgalat. I would say roughly maybe 15%. I would guess, I'm not too sure. I would guess.

50% survived?

15%, 15%.

Survived?

No, no, no, that were sent to work. Because I remember everybody that was sent from my transport.

And the remainder were sent--

The remainder, they went to the left. And those who went to the left, I didn't know then but I was to find out that they were all gassed. And my Yahrzeit-- by the way, I keep Yahrzeit the second day Shavuos, because the first day I saw I'm alive. But from what I know and you know that, because you're a professor of history and the Holocaust. You are world renowned. You know that most of those people who arrived were killed the same day.

All right, say, how long did you personally stay in Auschwitz?

OK. Now I was driven to a place. And they put us into a barrack, which was called a block. And that was in the gypsy camp, because the Gypsies were in Auschwitz, Zigeunerlager. And the Gypsies, we were packed into that thing over there, packed in. You couldn't breathe. You couldn't breathe. There was hardly any room. Because people, they dropped dead, because they couldn't breathe. I as a youngster, I was young. I even had a rough time just breathing there.

In the middle of the night, they opened up the barracks and they came in with sticks and stones. And they were beating the people. They were-- not the Germans. They were criminals in the camps, the kapos. And they were beating the people, beating them. And a lot of them were killed. They were killed physically killed in there. And they kept on pushing, pushing, pushing. And they pushed me all the way back. That was that night.

The following day, people-- we didn't have no water. We didn't have no bread. And people were starting to get haggard and drawn. Because the ordeal was already rough, going through the transport and everything. And I saw my mother's brother, [PERSONAL NAME] and another brother, my mother's brother, Yankl. They were there. And they looked to me very haggard.

As a matter of fact, that night, [PERSONAL NAME] he picked me up in the barrack, and he told me to look out, because the windows were on the roof. And I looked out the window. He asked me, what do you see? And I saw the whole sky was aflame. The whole sky was-- you couldn't see, just flames.

What happened in Birkenau, because this was in Birkenau, they were burning people, not only in the crematorium. They were burning them in pits, because the crematorium couldn't handle all of it. I didn't know that. But I saw the flames. I said [PERSONAL NAME] the flames are leaping into the sky. The sky is aflame.

And he told me. He said, those are people. They are being burned. Of course, I couldn't believe it. And by the way, [NON-ENGLISH] went crazy. He went off his mind the next day. He was crazy. Because he went into his mind. And I never seen him again, neither did I see my other brother.

But one thing I'll tell you. In Birkenau, while I was there, the stench of flesh, burning flesh, was constantly with you. Because that's all you smelled is flesh-- burning, burning flesh.

So when were you taken away from Auschwitz?

I was in Birkenau a couple of days. And then we were marched to Auschwitz, which is the concentration camp of Auschwitz. And I came into Auschwitz, and I never forget, as I made a right turn to the gate, I saw a sign Arbeit macht frei. And I was kind of content, because I wasn't afraid to work. I was working. And I thought, if I'm going to work, I'm going to be free.

But that was the sign there. And they put me in Auschwitz. And I was in Auschwitz a couple of days. I don't know, maybe a week or so in Auschwitz, in the camp of Auschwitz. And even there they were looking for money. Because we had already new clothes. You see, in Birkenau they gave us clothes, the striped clothes, the prisoners clothes. And in Auschwitz, what they did they took off the shoes. We still had our original shoes. And they ripped off the sole, to see whether we have money in the sole.

But that night in Birkenau, by the way, before I forget, that night they told us to stay in line on alphabetical order. So my name is Rosenthal, so my number was pretty far up. And I stayed in line maybe a couple of hours. It was maybe around 2 o'clock in the morning by the time I went up. And there were guy, and they had ink, and like a pin or something. And everybody, they all told us to go like this here, to hold our hands like this.

What's the number that you have there? What's the number.

The number is, yeah, so what they did they went ahead, and they tattooed in a number. And my number was A11832. And by the way, I said, I stayed in line, R, Rosenthal. My name wasn't Rosenthal no more. This was my number.

That was your new identity.

My new identity, yeah.

Nobody ever called me by my name again. That was my number. So from there, I went to Auschwitz. And there in the camp in Auschwitz, I stayed there. I don't remember exactly how long. And then they took us. And they formed a big column from Auschwitz. And they chased us, and we were going until we reached a place not far from Auschwitz, maybe about 2 or 3 kilometers, maybe 2 miles, a place called Buna, Buna-Monowitz.

And Buna was, it was a work camp which was part of the industrial complex of the Auschwitz camp. See Auschwitz, is three camps Birkenau, Auschwitz, and Buna. So I was in Buna. There in Buna, they put us into a zelt because they didn't have housing. So they pitched a tent, a zelt. They put us into that zelt. And they asked me, what was my trade, if I have a trade.

So I said yes, I'm a Schlosser which is I am a locksmith. So they put me into the Schlosser Kommando, a locksmith. I

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was in Kommando 90, the Schlosser Kommando. My kapo was kapo Karl. We had a kommando of 400. My kommando was one of the largest kommandos in Buna. So I was in that commando.

And from there, you eventually transferred to Buchenwald. Yeah. Well, in Auschwitz, I was in Auschwitz. I'll go through first to Auschwitz. Because I was there till January 18, 1945. And on January 18, 1945, the Russian armies, they approached Auschwitz. They approached Auschwitz. And they took us out from there. And we were forced marched from Auschwitz to Gleiwitz. And from Gleiwitz, they put us on trains to Buchenwald. We went out there maybe from Auschwitz that night, I don't know maybe about, 18,000. We arrived to Buchenwald maybe 2,200, 2,500.

Most of them died on the road. It was one of the most horrible transports there is, because we were going in the snow. From Auschwitz to Gleiwitz, and our shoes were made out of wood. And when you go with wooden shoes in the snow, the snow sticks to the sole.

It was heavy.

It was very heavy to go. And as soon as you fell down, the soldiers in the back, they shoot you. Because if you weren't able to walk, they shoot you. And this is how it was a miserable thing until-- then they put us on railroad, open railroad flats in Gleiwitz. And we left, as I said Auschwitz, January 18. By February 2, we arrived to Buchenwald. And it was a very-- the transport was a horrible transport. Very few people arrived to Buchenwald.

And by the time we got to Buchenwald, we couldn't even walk anymore. We were supporting each other. And it was only a question. By the way, let me say this to you. It was question of giving up, if I wanted to give up, I had a good friend of mine, Sam. And he kept on asking me. Jack, how long do you want to live? I said, let's live until tomorrow morning. And if you gave up, you were dead.

The only thing that kept you going is the hope that some-- hope. In better time, whenever you saw death, you always wanted to live longer.

Yeah. We don't have too much time left, unfortunately. So I'd like to ask you. You were eventually liberated by the American troops.

Yeah.

Sometime in April.

April 11, April 11, 1945. 3 o'clock in the afternoon the first American troops entered Buchenwald.

And eventually, you came to America, and became a very successful businessman.

If you say so.

Yeah.

That's what everybody says, I don't know.

In the last few minutes now, do you have any ideas about the Holocaust in retrospect?

I mean, when I look back?

Yes. Let me say this to you. Today, I viewed the Holocaust from a father's grandfather's view. In those things which were important to me at one time, in that it happened to me, it's not important to me today. And those that weren't important those days, became very important. I'll give you an example.

When I was taken out from the ghetto and they were pushing us out in that transport, and they were hurrying us up, and

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there was a soldier, a Hungarian soldier, he hit. He beat us with sticks. And he hit me so hard in my shoulder blade that I lost my breath. And my mother behind me, she pushed me out. And I never forget when I look back and I saw her eyes. And I saw the pain in her eyes. That she couldn't do nothing about it. And this bothers me to this day.

Of course, also when I saw my first granddaughter being born and I looked at her, the Holocaust came back to me. Because I said to myself, I hope that her life is going to be she wouldn't suffer. So in other words, today things come back. You look at it from a different prospectus, and you're more protected. Because you know.

Sure. We live in a different world. Well Jack, I want to thank you very much for coming and giving us this interview. It will be, I'm sure, a very valuable contribution to history. And let's hope that the world will learn from your lesson and our collective lesson.

Well, I would like to thank you, professor, for inviting me. And I would like to thank the City College, and whatever. I hope of course, that there is so much more to the story, but sometimes, maybe there is a time limit for everything.

Maybe we'll have a sequel sometime.

Yeah, maybe. OK, thank you very much.

Thank you. Bye-bye.

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