

Stand by. Five, four--

I'm Sally Weinberg, and I'm here as a narrator for the Holocaust Archives Project. I'm going to be interviewing Alfred Spitz, who I am very happy to introduce right now. Alfred, could you tell us how old you are, where you live, and what work you do?

All right. I am 79 years old, I live in Mayfield Heights, and I work for Cook United, for division of Cook United. I was warehouse manager for close to 25 years. And I'm retired since 1972. Yeah.

And do you have children, Alfred?

I have one son. He lives in Philadelphia. My son is 41 years old.

What is his occupation?

He owns a computer firm. He sells computer, recently AT&T's computers, and works with customers, corrects their-- the various mistakes, what happens in the computer.

Do you have grandchildren?

I have two grandchildren.

Their age?

Two son-- Eric and Daniel.

How old are they?

Eric has his bar mitzvah last year, and Daniel had his bar mitzvah two weeks or three weeks ago.

So that means they are 13 and 14.

Yeah, 14 and 13 years old.

All right. And they live in Philadelphia.

They live in Philadelphia, yeah, in a suburb of Philadelphia, in Wynnewood.

And your wife lives here with you?

My wife lives with me, thanks God, for the last 45 years. We had a few days ago our 45th anniversary.

Albert, I know before you came to the United States you were in Europe. Can you tell me where you lived in Europe, where you were born?

I was born and lived in Vienna, Austria for 34 or 35 years until Hitler came. Then Hitler put me in a concentration camp.

What year was that?

It was in '39. I guess it was in April, April '39. I went to Dachau first. And after six months or so, I was transferred to Buchenwald.

In Vienna, can you tell me a little bit about your life, about your family? How many brothers and sisters you had? And your mother and your father? And what happened also to your family in Vienna in 1939?

Yeah. My mother tried to flee Hitler, yeah, with my sister-in-law and her son, to Hungary. And this was about 1940, I guess. But I never heard from them again.

Prior to that, when you were younger, when you were in your 20s, what was your life like in Vienna?

Well, I had always clerical work, yeah? I worked always by the desk, yeah. And I worked for a firm what makes cigarettes. Cigarettes, yeah.

And I had a normal life, yeah. I was happy there. I never thought about going away from Vienna. I felt at home there. It was, after all, where I was born, yeah. Unfortunately, my father died in 1925. And we lived there, happy until Hitler came.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had two brothers only, yeah? We were three in the family. I was the-- I was the eldest. And when Hitler came, the youngest went to Belgium to avoid Hitler's and his cohorts. And from there he went to Palestine or Israel, yeah?

The other brother was not so lucky. Hitler sent him to Poland, and he fled to-- from Poland to Russia. And from Russia, I got one letter from him, and this what all.

What year was that?

This was in 1940. Yeah, 1940, I had the one letter. And this was the only letter, what I had from him.

What did your brothers do in Vienna when you-- before the war?

They worked in men's clothing, yeah, both by the same company, also for a long time, as long as we-- they were after school and-- yeah, after school they went there, and growth, had growth with the company. So they had a good position both too.

Both were married. The one in Palestine, or in Israel, went with his-- met his wife after he fled from England-- from Belgium to Palestine. They say always Palestine. This is Israel, yeah? And there he met his wife until he-- lived with her until he-- I don't know. He died of some unknown-- I don't know what.

This was during the war. I got only through the Vatican, I got a letter where they say cessato. It means he died.

In Vienna, when you were with your brothers and your mother, were you religious family?

No. We were not very religious, but we were always Jews, Jews in the heart, yeah, with-- full aware we are Jewish, yeah.

Did you belong to a synagogue?

Yes. Yeah. In Vienna, it was different than it is here, yeah? There were the Kultusgemeinde. It was from the one congregation for the whole city, yeah? And each city has then-- in every part of the city were synagogues, yeah. There were about 30 or 40 or 50. I don't know. But they belonged to-- one was closer to my--

Did you have a bar mitzvah along with your brothers?

Yeah, we had all bar mitzvahs, yeah. Everyone had bar mitzvahs, yeah.

Were your family interested in politics at all? Yes, they were interested in politics, yeah. We had the democratic party, like we have here, and we all belonged to them. And I wouldn't say were too active, but we were interested in the whole thing, yeah.

Did socialism or Zionism play a part in your life in Vienna?

Yes, in my mind-- I played-- my wife and me. My wife belonged to a Zionist party. And I was only coming with her to that, but I was interested. And my first project when Hitler came was to go to Israel. Yeah. But I couldn't make it because Hitler came first and put me in a concentration camp, as you know.

What other community organizations did your family belong to in Vienna, your mother or your brothers?

No, none.

What language did you speak in your home?

German.

Any other language at all?

As long as I was in Vienna, no. I only-- yeah, I learned a little bit English, yeah, but it was only for the house.

Were there any other kinds of activities? Was there music? Were there special books that you read?

Oh, yes, yeah. I went to theaters, to opera, to concerts. Yeah. I was with my brothers. And yeah, we had a-- had a club, a private club, where we bowled together. Yeah.

Did you go on family vacations anywhere in Austria?

Oh, yes, yeah. Not with the family. Yeah, with my wife I went, as with my-- at this time my bride, yeah. I went on vacation, yeah we. Went all over.

But you and your mother and your brothers, did you ever go on vacations?

Together, no. No. My mother had a store, a liquor store.

A liquor store.

Yes. And she couldn't go away until-- she didn't want to go away. When my father died, yeah, she felt very lonesome. But still, she wanted to stay in the store and not go anywhere.

Before then, yeah, she went with my father on vacation somewhere.

When your brothers and you were younger, did you help her in the liquor store?

I helped her, yes. I have one of my own also in a different part of the city. Yeah. Only when my father died I gave it up and went to help my mother. But then I saw my mother can manage it, so I took a job and worked on my own.

What did you-- do you remember what you looked like living in Vienna as a young boy? How would you describe yourself, as far as your health and your looks and your outlook on life?

I was very healthy and I had a good looks, yeah. Only I had more hair than I have now, yeah. Unfortunately, I could bring you a picture from my-- but anyhow.

Did you have any special hobbies as a youngster in Vienna?

No, it was skiing. Yeah? This was one hobby. In Vienna, it is very easy. You took the streetcar to the outskirts and could ski there, yeah? So I was, every Saturday and Sunday, I was on my skis.

And in summer, we went bathing, swimming, in the Danubia.

The Danubia? Is that a river?

A river, yes.

Danubia.

Danubia, yeah.

The Danube.

Oh, Danube, I'm sorry, yeah.

All right. The Danube River, yes.

Yes, yeah.

What other memories do you have of your childhood in Vienna?

Besides going to theaters and to concerts--

School? How about school? You haven't told me about school in Vienna.

No, I had after the-- what is the-- [NON-ENGLISH]-- grade school and then it's the high school. I went to-- how should I-- as a Handelsacademie-- I don't know how to--

A higher academy.

A higher learning, yeah. For two years I went there, and I had my degrees.

In what?

In commercial.

Commercial.

Yes.

What does that mean, in commercial?

It was preparing me for management of the company what I later belonged to.

Among your friends, as a youngster in Vienna, did you have only Jewish friends, or did you have non-Jewish also?

No, I had only Jewish friends. Yeah.

Your circle of friends were only in the Jewish community, then.

Mm-hmm.

Was that the same with your mother and your brothers? Oh, yes. Yeah.

You didn't mingle.

My mother had all her [NON-ENGLISH]. Can I say that?

Yes.

Yeah, yeah? And she, with them-- they met them on Sunday or whatever. There was a holiday or something. They were together. She had six sisters and five brothers, I guess, was it.

Your mother did.

Yeah. And so as for my father's side, there were also many.

So you came from a very large family.

Yes, yeah.

So you had a lot of family gatherings then, that you spent a lot of time together.

Yeah, on Sunday mostly. We went into Prater. Maybe you heard about that. This is a little-- how should I say this?

A park?

Yeah, a big park. Yeah.

In Vienna.

In Vienna, where were coffee houses and restaurants. And there we met. And there was the gathering.

So you spent a lot of time with your family and Jewish friends--

Yeah.

--and didn't associate much with the non-Jewish community.

No, no.

Were the customers in your mother's store non-Jewish as well as Jewish?

Non-Jewish, mostly. Non-Jewish. Because we lived in the outskirts, and there weren't many Jews. Besides, Jews didn't frequent the liquor store.

Why is that?

I don't know. Maybe at this time, Jews didn't drink so much, yeah? And so we had--

And you lived on-- tell me a little bit more about where you lived on the outskirts of Vienna. Can you describe it to me? Was it in the country? Was it a farm.

No, not in the country. No, no, no. Like here, Lyndhurst from Cleveland, yeah? This was part of Vienna, but it were the

outskirts, yeah. It affected us.

Did you have a car? Did you have to come in by car or public transportation?

Streetcars, yes, yeah.

Streetcars.

My first car, I bought here in America.

What plans did you have after you attended school in Vienna, for yourself?

Looking for a job what was fit for my education. Yeah? And I found the job. I worked, like I told you before, I worked in a factory, what manufactures-- not cigarette. Only the hull-- no, not the hull. Where you put in the-- you make your own cigarettes, yeah. You put the tobacco in there, in the--

A wrapper.

Yeah. Yeah. I worked there as first as manager in the manufacturing, and then I worked in the dispatch, yeah. And the last what I did, it was I worked in the general office where I oversaw everything what was going on.

Did you experience much antisemitism in Vienna--

Oh, yes.

--during your growing-up years--

Oh, yes.

--even before Hitler came on the scene?

Yes, very much so. This was one of the reasons we didn't associate us with other people than Jews, yeah, to not have contact with them. Because we knew.

Some were not so antisemitic, yeah. But we didn't trust them. We didn't want them. We had enough Jewish friends to go along.

So you enjoyed your life in Vienna.

Oh, yes.

Very much, even though there were antisemitic feelings.

Yeah, because I didn't need them. I had enough friends to go along, yeah. When you go to a concert or to a theater, you don't need anybody, yeah?

Were there any Jewish organizations in Vienna, like we have here, like the federation, or groups--

Yeah, there was a-- I think there was a B'nai B'rith there, yeah. But I didn't belong to them. I belong now to a B'nai B'rith, yeah, but at this time I didn't.

Did the Jewish organizations try to do anything to dispel the antisemitism at that time? Were they successful?

I don't know. I don't think so. Don't forget, the Jews had not the power what they have now or they have here, yeah?

Every congressman, and every president, and every senator tries to get the Jews in there to--

To vote for them?

To vote for them, yeah.

The same was true in Vienna?

No.

No.

No, no, no. And also, I think in Vienna, Jews were more in the minority than here, yeah? At least not visible so much than they are here visible, yeah? And they had maybe also not the same rights, not officially, but they were very much in the background.

Getting back to the war years, you mentioned to us that Hitler came in power, and that was when you entered a concentration camp. Tell me how old you were and how did it come about. What happened? Where were you when all of this took place? Just give us a full description, if you can remember.

I was in Vienna and lived with my mother. Like I told you, I wanted to marry this girl, what I planned to. And before that, I lived with my mother.

And a detective came in April or so, came to my house, to my apartment, and said, please, come with me to the station. I didn't know what to do, what all about, because I was one of the first what was-- what came-- what was sent to the concentration camps.

So under the station, they treated me like every other prisoner. They took away my belt, and my watch, and my ring, yeah, and I had to wait. And after a short while, they gave me everything back and brought me to another station, a bigger station. It was a former school. And there were maybe 500 or 600 people already congregated. And there we have to wait. We got a little-- a little bit to eat, yeah, because we was-- it was hours what I was there.

And then they shipped us, with little trucks, to the train station. And when we opened the door from the truck to go in the train itself, there were SA and SS mens. You know what this is, SA and SS?

You want to explain that to me?

SA, this Sturmabteilung. How should I say? They were the foot soldier. Put it this way.

And the SS, they were the higher ups, yeah? But still, in various, should I say-- they were also regular soldier and higher ups.

German or Austrian?

I couldn't extinguish. Austrian, were mostly Austrians, yeah, mixed--

Austrian soldiers.

Not soldiers. SS. Yeah? This a distinction. I don't know if the soldier had the same feeling or the same thinking what the SS had there. But they weren't-- not the highest class from people, yeah? But still, they were-- yeah I have to say soldier, but they were not of the--

More like police?

--wanted for the army. And no one wanted police. These were in between. This is the SS. Were actually more than a police, or more than the army, because they were directly commanded from Hitler or his people.

But they were Austrian, not German.

They were mixed.

Mixed?

They were both. Yeah, they were both Austrian.

Were you able to distinguish who was German and who was Austrian?

Only in the language, yeah? Because the Austrian language is softer. Yeah?

You mean the--

The German--

--the German pronunciation of the Austrian language is a little different from the German pronunciation.

Yeah, it's different. Yes, yeah. So I could distinguish who is Austrian and who is from Germany, yeah? But in cruelty, there were no difference. They were all the same, yeah?

Before we could reach the train wagon, yeah, to go into the train, they had whips and all kinds of sticks and so on where they hit us till we were inside, and inside were [NON-ENGLISH], where we could sit 10 people, five across, in each compartment, yeah. And they started right away picking on each one, yeah, hitting him, yeah.

And we had to sit straight on the bench, the hands on the knees and looking straight in the light, except when you are talking to, when they ask you something, or told you something, Yeah? And the one man on the end, on the corner, had always to-- how should I say?

When a soldier came through-- Wachtmeister was his name. And we didn't know what a Wachtmeister is. But they told us that he's an over Wachtmeister, and another Wachtmeister, and we had to give him the correct title when he came by, yeah, stand up and say so many-- schweine Juden. How should I say? So many porkish Jews are in the compartment, yeah? And when you didn't give him the right title, then he hit you with a whip.

Were you hit?

Yes.

You did not come up with the right title. Did you--

Nobody could-- no, it's so short a time. The right title from them, I don't know how many stars or stripes he had, yeah. He had no chance to see it, yeah.

Did you understand why you were taken away? Did they say because you were a Jew?

Because I'm a Jew, yes. Because I'm a Jew. That's what the only reason I was taken away.

They told you this.

Oh, yes, yeah. Not right away, but was no doubt in my mind why. But later on, they told me, yeah. They gave me all kinds of bad names, yeah. And like I told you, for a pork Jew. I don't know if this is the right connection.



Spell that for me?

Yeah.

Pork Jew?

Yeah. Jews are like porks, like swine.

Like swine.

Yeah, this is the right correct.

I see.

Swine. Swine Jews.

The lowest. The lowest of people.

Yeah. Yeah.

Were you frightened on the train?

Yes, I was frightened.

Were they only men on the train?

Only men, yeah.

And about-- and how old were you?

I think about 34 or 35. I don't know. Yeah.

What was the general age of the people with you on the train?

All ages. All ages.

Were there children?

No. At this time there were only men taken. Yeah. And they took the men even from the street, yeah. As long as they saw there's a man, they took him and put him in this of the precinct, and from there they went to the station like I did before.

How did they know a man on the street was a Jew?

In Austria, you know who is a Jew and he is not a Jew.

How did they know?

I don't know. Maybe the physics were different. I recognized right away who is a Jew and who is not. And so did the people, yeah?

Did you wear special clothing? Did you have to wear an armband? no

No, no, not yet. Later on, yes, but not at this time.

But yet they could know who was a Jew and who was not?

Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Because if you-- even if this was not a Jew, he protested straight away and said, what you want from me? I'm not a Jew. Yeah? But the Jew couldn't tell this, yeah?

Did you have identification papers on you?

No, no, no. This all came later.

So describe the trip on the train to me.

Oh, the trip was horrible. I never thought I will survive it, yeah? We had to make-- they picked out-- one, me or the others, to make knee bends, yeah? Now you can imagine, to make, I don't know, 50 or 100 you had to make. And the train was not still.

It was moving.

Yeah. So we fell down, yeah, because we didn't have the balance, yeah, and so on. And was a reason right away to hit again. And naturally, they used their hand to give you-- to hit you.

And there were many people what died on a heart attack there.

On that train?

On the train. Elderly people, yeah. I mean, "elderly," over 40, over 50, yeah? They died. And they had always four people who had to take them to the last wagon from the train, and they put him there.

And so I think there were-- I don't know how many people were on the train. Maybe 800 or 900. But I heard 60 or 70 were what had a heart attack and died, yeah?

How long a ride was it?

There was a ride for about-- now wait a second. It was about 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening when we left. And we came there, we came in Dachau, oh, I guess it was about, oh, 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock in the morning.

Did you have a place to sleep during the night?

No.

You just sat up-

You couldn't think of sleeping. You were hit constantly, yeah? We are constantly in fear, yeah? So we did not sleep, naturally. And we didn't even think about sleeping. No.

Were people crying? Were people screaming? Were there--

Yeah, they were screaming, yeah? When they were hit, naturally they were screaming, yeah, because they hit hard. And yeah. No, they were not--

Yeah, then we had to we had to sing songs what the German know, what the German military know, what we don't know, because in Vienna we didn't know anything about it, yeah? But so they had-- they teach us how to sing, and then they sang it once, and we had to repeat it right away. You can imagine, it was impossible. And when you didn't do it,

then they hit you again.

Were these songs to do with Hitler? What were the songs?

Partly, yeah. Yeah. Mostly about with Hitler, yeah. There was one song, the "Horst Wessel." "Horst Wessel" was a famous Nazi. And when he died, they made a song from his life. And this we had to sing. Can you imagine, with enthusiasms we sang it, yeah?

Then we came to Dachau. We were-- no, wait a second. Oh, yes. Yeah. When we came in in Dachau, they put the wagon so there were no stairs on the wagon to get out.

From the train from to the wagon.

From the train to the floor, to the-- yeah, to the--

Wagon top. Is that what you mean?

Not wagon top. No, down, down, on the--

On the ground.

On the ground, yeah. So we had to jump out, yeah. But they had, right before you-- where to jump, they had was a hole filled with water, yeah. So when you jumped, you were in the water till over the knees, yeah, and maybe you fell down and fell in the water. This was a special--

Divertissement.

Divertissement, yeah.

And from there we came in the Kaserne. Kaserne. Is this right? That's a barracks, what is-- what the prisoners, and what the soldiers--

How did you get from the train to the barracks? Did you walk?

Yeah. We had to run, not to walk.

You were running?

Running, yes.

Were they whipping? Were you--

Yeah, steady whipping us, yeah. And there we were. They took the shirt. They had the hair off. How you--

Shaved?

Yeah. Shaved the head. And we had to take a shower, and take new clothes on. These were clothes, a uniform what has the stripes blue and were gray or brown, and blue and white stripes on the pants and on the jacket. And on the left side on the jacket there was a Zion star.

Star of David?

Star of David, yeah, I'm sorry.

That's all right.

Yeah. And it was yellow. That one triangle was yellow, and one over there was red. It means a politic Jew, because there was also other Jews.

What kind of Jew?

Political.

Political Jew.

Yeah. There were Jews who had the yellow stripe, yellow triangle, and a black triangle over it. They were Rassenschande. How should I say? Race shame? Race-- and they were either married or going with a non-Jewish girl.

A German who was interracial. Interracial.

Yeah, interracial, yeah.

They were non-Jews going with Jews.

Yeah, the man was a Jew and the girl was non-Jew. And when they find out for some reason, they came, they put them in a concentration camp. And this was the sign, yellow the Jew, and black, they're the racist. Not the--

Non-Jew.

Non-Jew, yeah.

Combined.

And then were--

Interracial.

Then were Jews with red triangle and green. These were criminals, yeah?

What was your sign?

Red.

What?

Red. Red and yellow.

Red and yellow.

Yeah.

You were a political.

Yeah. They couldn't tell me anything, didn't say me anything else. So I was political, yeah? And there are all kinds of-- Jehovah's Witnesses were there. They had violet-- also a violet, only one triangle, a violet. Or the non-Jews had a green, the criminals, a green triangle.

When you got your badge, did they tell you what the colors meant, or did-- how did you find out what--

We found out by ourself, and from people what were there before us. Besides, we had a number there too, yeah? A number-- yeah, a number per--

On your uniform.

On the left side of the other-- under the Star of David, and on the right pants side, yeah? All a Star of David with the-- then we had a cap the same way. And we had the cap to-- had to wear the cap all the time. I don't know what is, because to-- to what, to terrorize us. Because it was hot, yeah. And you had the cap off.

This was in April of 1939.

Yeah, this was in May and so on. I don't talking for months per months, yeah. And even when we worked, we had to have-- to have the cap on. It was terribly hot.

It could also be they wanted to protect us from the sun, yeah. I don't know. But it was terrible for us. We had to work with a pick, pick and shovel. Shovel earth, and construction for their project for the SS. Barracks.

Before getting to your project, tell me, you got your uniform. Then were you taken to a place to eat, to sleep?

Yeah, in a barrack, yeah. We were in a barracks, about 80 people to one barracks, yeah, where we had tables for where you can eat. And we had bunk beds to sleep.

One person to a bunk?

One, yeah. One-- not one person. Yeah, they were bunks, three, one above the others.

Three levels.

Three levels, yes.

One person on each level.

One person on each level, yeah.

The same barrack.

This was later on. In the beginning, we slept on the floor because the beds was not ready. We came too fast to Dachau to have it ready, yeah? And later on then, we slept not directly on the floor. We had mattresses filled with straw, yeah. Then we left in the morning. Morning, we had to put them away, that the room could be cleaned. In the evening, we had to put it on the floor again for sleep.

And they inspected very, very thoroughly. Our toothbrush, for instance, yeah. So we had always two toothbrushes-- one I didn't use, was always laying there clean, and one what I have in my pocket. With this toothbrush I cleaned my teeth, yeah, because after a while a toothbrush gets frayed and dirty and so on. So there was a very, very hard punishment if you were not right.

The same was with a towel. The towel has always to be cleaned. I don't know how you keep a towel clean when you come home from work and they are dirty, even if you take a shower. But so we had always two, one with you and one leg there what is untouched, and it looks right.

Why do you think they gave you two?

They didn't gave me. You could buy it, yeah. You could buy it in a Kantine. Is this the right? Yeah?

You had money?

Yeah, my wife or my mother sent me money.

And they gave you the money.

Yeah, you could have so much a month, yeah.

So you were able to write to your family to tell them where you were.

Once a month, yes, we could write. And if the letter did contain some words what they didn't like, so the letter was censored, and you didn't-- had only the chance to write a postcard instead. Yeah. So how much can you write on a post card?

But anyhow, and I received once a month also a letter from home. Yeah. This we could.

So they found out very soon where I am, because in Vienna, one Jew told the other, I saw this, I saw that, yeah. They were sure where I am, only they didn't know if I am alive or not.

Were any of your friends in this group?

Oh yes, yeah.

Any of your friends from Vienna were in your group?

From the part of Vienna where I lived there were many friends there, yeah.

Did you help one another--

They're not together, because they put us in this barracks according to the alphabet, yeah? Yeah? So the S's were all together, yeah, for instance, and the A and B's and so on. But we met. We could.

How many were in your barracks?

There were about 80, I guess. Yeah? They were barracks, were two parts. On the left side were 80 and off the right sides were 80. Only connected with a small hall. Yeah?

You had to take the shoe offs before you came. In the hall you have to take the shoe offs because you were not allowed to go in the room with your shoes on. The shoes were naturally dirty, so we went only in their socks or even without socks. So the room was clean. It was not to save us work. It was only that-- I don't know. Some kind of a punishment. Because we were tired when we came home from work, but had asked first put the shoes away, and then you could enter the room.

What kind of work did they give you to do?

I say, we worked on foundation for a barracks, for Kasernes. Kasernes? Is this the right way to pronounce? Where soldiers sleep. Where is this? Not only barracks. Barracks are from wood. But this was made from stone.

Bricks?

Bricks.

Bricks. Stone.

Yeah, because if we made the-- took the foundation out for this.

You were building more barracks for Dachau, in other words.

No, not for more barracks for the SS or for SA.

For the soldiers.

For the soldiers, yeah. I wouldn't call them soldiers, but I don't know any other name, because it has nothing to do with the army. Yeah, this is different. And some people were trained to be masons, yeah. They put up the building then, yeah.

Then we worked not only Jews. In Dachau then at this time there maybe 10,000 or 20,000 people there, yeah? The majority was non-Jews, yeah?

In Dachau, the majority were non-Jews.

Yeah, at this time when I was there, yeah. I couldn't tell exactly, but I think it was-- maybe it was half and half, yeah? Because in Dachau we were only Jews from Austria. But the non-Jews were from all over Germany, yeah?

Dachau is near Munich. Yeah? So this was close to the Austrian border, but still this was Germany, so it one more, or there was all different kind, like I told you, Jehovah's Witnesses, criminals, homosexuals, and whatever you want. For each category, they had a separate star.

How many hours a day did you work?

We worked from 7:00 in the morning till 7:00 on the night for 12 hours. We had a half-hour lunch, yeah.

And did you eat? Did they give you food on the job?

No, no, no. We took it-- we got in the evening, we got from a little more bread and a little more other things. I don't remember anymore. But so we could take this to the job. But we're not allowed to eat except in the lunch hour, yeah?

In the morning, we had mostly soup and a piece of bread. And then, to the lunchtime, we had-- I don't know. Yeah, don't forget-- no. Yeah, right. I don't know. We had some kind of a salami, and I don't know, and cheese. Yeah.

Were you ever hungry? Did you ever feel hungry?

We had this Kantine where you could buy even to eat everything, only you could buy it only in the evening when you came home after work, yeah? But sometimes you can-- you could also take this with you to the work and eat it during your lunch hour, half-hour lunch hour, yeah?

How long were you in Dachau?

Close to a year. I went here from April until-- yeah, about a year. 12 months. Yeah.

And then what happened to you?

Then, to come out of Dachau, or Buchenwald-- no, in Dachau I was six months and six months I was in Buchenwald, yeah?

When were you changed to Buchenwald and why? Do you know why you were changed?

Yeah, because after the Crystal Night happens in November, yeah? And preparing for the Crystal Night, they put us

already to work to-- put up barracks in Buchenwald, yeah? So Dachau were a few hundred barracks were free for people what they bring in. And besides, we builded some in Buchenwald for other people to come in, yeah? And this was the whole reason.

You see how prepared it was, the Crystal Night, yeah? They said, because I think at this time, they said a Jew murdered an ambassador from Germany. I don't know. I think it was. This was the reason, yeah, that the Crystal Night started, when they destroyed all the synagogues.

And this was well prepared, because we had to work on this to prepare the people, the Jews what they bring in. So it was not all of a sudden. It was well thought about.

Later on, they burned the people too, yeah, as you know in Bergen-Belsen and in many other things. Thanks God I came out before the war started, so I came out in April 1940.

In Buchenwald, did you also do the same work that you did in Dachau?

Yeah, the same work, yeah.

And were you treated any better or any worse?

No, it was the same SS. I mean, the same people was work.

I will tell you a story. We had a roll call in the morning, when we were counted, and in the evening again when we came back from work, again the roll call. And one day, for some reason, they found stale bread in the-- I say in the garbage. And now they wanted to know who this-- who did this? Naturally, nobody answered.

So at this day, we didn't go out for work. We were standing on the roll call, on this place where the roll call was, for eight hours in the sun. Many people fainted and fell down, yeah. But till somebody had to say where it was, or who it was, yeah? And nobody said anything. So they gave up after them.

But for eight hours we were standing in the very hot sun, this was. I think it was June or July. It was terrible, yeah? I myself fainted half, yeah. I fell on my-- on the man behind me, yeah. But he--

Caught you?

Caught me, yeah. And so I could stand. But it was terribly. Yeah. Hungry, tired, and hot.

At that point, you were about 37 years old?

No, 35 I was already.

35.

Yeah, it was a year. I don't know. 35 or-- no, it was 36. Maybe 36. I don't know.

Were you able to write to your family and let them know when you were changed to Buchenwald? Did they know?

No, they found out when they got-- yeah, I wrote them, yeah, when this was my turn to write, yeah. So I could write on the letter, I am now there and there, because they had to have my address to write me, and so on.

Were there signs as you entered Buchenwald to tell you this was Buchenwald.

No.



Is there a sign? Were there flowers? Were there-- what did it look like as you came, as you came there?

There were maybe 80 or 100 barracks. In the middle was a street, yeah. So left and right were the barracks. And in front were these other buildings where they watched us, the-- yeah--

The guards?

The Kaserne, yeah, where the SS was, and they had the door-- I think it was in Dachau. There was the door, and there was the name on there. Name is not a writer-- inscript? No.

Inscription?

Inscription, yeah. Where they say, "Work makes free." Yeah? It was only-- I don't know. Maybe for somebody else to admire. But for us, it was really work. We worked every day except Sunday. Yeah.

So you did have one day off.

You had one day off, yeah. This was the day to write the letters.

Sunday was your day to write letters.

And to go in the Kantine and buy something, yeah. For instance, we bought-- each one could buy-- we had always-- the beard couldn't be longer than 2 millimeter, yeah. Or should I say an eighth of an inch? Yeah? You have to be shaved.

And you had a chance to were barbers, Jews and non-Jews, where you could go, and you could get a haircut and a shave. But they had-- they had the little Gillette razor blade, razor, to sell. They sold all their razors, yeah.

And after they were sold, they didn't have any plates for that, any razor. We had only the, how you say this--

The empty razor?

The empty razor. You couldn't shave. But they sold already the razor, so they made their business, yeah? Only we couldn't do. So we went to the barber. But this was another way to take the money out of you, yeah?

And we were happy. We could also buy cigarettes, yeah. Not the finest cigarettes, but cigarettes. When we didn't have, we made our own cigarettes. From the leafs from the trees, yeah, we dried and then put them in newspaper and smoked it, yeah. And it was not the best smoke. You can imagine.

Did you ever get sick in either place?

I was, yeah, I had a cold once or so. But only I didn't have to go, and I wouldn't have gone to the infirmaria. So no, at this time I remember go-- I put my straw sack-- how you-- straw sack, yeah, or whatever? The mattress with straw filled. How is the right name?

Fine. That's good.

Yeah? I put it in there somewhere and laid down. And the next morning it was better, and so on. Thanks God, it was in there.

But they had--

But I had-- what I had very much were the hand where the skin was broken all over. So I bought me Nivea cream and could cure myself. I didn't eat, I didn't buy. I didn't have enough money to eat, but I have enough money to put the Nivea cream on my hands. So when I came home, my hands were like they look now. I healed them completely out,

yeah? If the other hand was ready or not, I didn't care. As long as I put the Nivea cream on, and I didn't have any pains.

Yeah, and--

Were any of the SS men nicer to you than others, or were they all the same?

No, they were all the same. First of all, I don't know. Maybe even one SS man was afraid of the other if he saw he treats to you like a human being. But in general, no. There were no-- there were no human beings. They were worse than animals.

They had around the camp, the concentration camp, were wires loaded with electricity. Yeah? And behinds the wires were the watch--

Tower?

--towers where the SS were standing. And many people run into the-- run in the fence, not to flee, but to get killed.

Purposely.

Purposely, because they didn't-- couldn't stand it anymore. Some people, maybe they went crazy. They couldn't stand.

How did you, yourself, manage to stay sane and live through all this?

I don't know. Maybe I had had more will, more willpower to go through this whole thing. Yeah? It was always thinking on my wife, or my bride, and on my mother and my family, yeah. But mostly of my wife, yeah. I wanted to go--

She wasn't your wife yet. She was your future wife.

Yeah, future wife, yeah. And so I managed it, yeah? And she encouraged me with letters, where she said that we will come out, and all kinds of words to keep me up.

Were there any women in Dachau--

No.

--or in Buchenwald?

No.

All men.

All men. All men. And no children either, yeah. Only men, grown men.

Did you make any friends? Did you become friends with any of the people there?

Yeah, I became one friend with one, yeah. Yeah. I became friend with one. In the barracks, when you sleep next to another one, you sit on the table with somebody. And as you start, you start to talk and talk about the past, and talk about the future. And so, like making a normal life, yeah. You make an acquaintance and so on, and, yeah.

What were your feelings then about the future? Did you feel that you would be able to--

Black. I didn't know what, yeah. Because you couldn't make any plans, yeah? Yeah? I didn't know how long I will stay, yeah.

My wife couldn't write me, you will stay only so long, yeah. No, I could not make plans, yeah. No, nothing. I don't know. Only the desire to get out, and to be together with my family was what keep me alive, yeah.

But many people died. Many people died even of broken heart, because a man, 45 or 50 years old, he looked different to the life ahead of him than I did, or we did. We were younger.

All right. And one day, I-- it was in April, yeah. I was called to the front desk, so to speak, and I was told I can go home. I went home with another 40 or 50 people.

I could go out. My wife bought me a ticket, a shift's ticket-- ship's ticket-- to Shanghai. And this was the reason. Because these Jews what were-- what came in the concentration camp before the war-- like I was in April, April, March or April when I came. We had to have an oversea exit. We couldn't go to another country. We had to have oversea.

The Jews was what were detained, after the Crystal Night, there was enough if they could go have a visa for Italy, for France, or for England, or somehow. We had to have an oversea ticket.

So she bought me a ticket for over for Shanghai. And when I came then to Vienna, she said, I didn't have one. I have only one for you. I don't have any money. All what we had was this, yeah, because we lost a lot, yeah? So she want only to take me out. My mother and she put together the money for the tickets.

So I said no, I don't go alone. Then I stay here with you. And so it was.

I gave this ticket, or sold this ticket, to a friend of mine what was still in Buchenwald. And he came out with this ticket. As long as I was in Vienna already, I had to go to the offices of the SS, or whatever the Nazi had there, and I could stay a little longer until I could arrange to go otherwise, go.

I went into Italy. And as I told you before, I was on the last train what could go to Italy, because after then the war broke out. So there was no more traveling from Vienna, from Austria to Italy. But anyhow, I was out, and I was finally free.

Did your future wife, who bought you the ticket to Shanghai, did she send you this ticket, or did she notify--

No, she went to the Gestapo in Vienna and showed them I have a ticket for oversea. And this was enough to get me free.

How did you return? Did you return by train?

Yeah.

She didn't come to get you.

Oh, no, no, no. She couldn't go there. Nobody could go there.

They put you on a train and sent you back. Did they give you back your clothing?

Yeah. Yeah. Gave me back my clothing.

When--

They shaved me again before I left. Yeah.

When she saw you, when your future wife and your mother saw you after not seeing you for a year, did they think you had changed in your looks?

No, except that I had no hair, about like I am now, yeah? But no. Otherwise, no. This was only one year, in one year, you don't change so much. And yeah, I didn't-- no, I didn't change.

You kept your weight on, and you were healthy, pretty healthy.

Yeah, I don't even keep my weight on. Yeah, I lost, but not as much that you could-- I had to eat all the time, so I wasn't-- I wasn't too much hungry, yeah?

No, I didn't. Maybe I lost a few pounds. But I was about like I am now, since then, yeah.

And I'm sure they were-- welcomed you with open arms?

Oh, yes, yeah.

It must have been a wonderful--

I was sitting with them for hours, and tell them-- told them all the things that I told you, and more, all in details, yeah? My memory was still fresh. Oh, yes, we were there.

For hours we were sitting. I didn't eat. I did nothing. I had only my mother and my wife around. And we were talking, and talking, and talking on end.

Alfred, I think we'll take a break right now and continue later.

Very well.