

Gerald Rosenstein
January 13, 1995
RG-50.106*0012.01.02

Abstract

Gerald B. Rosenstein was born in Benshein, Germany on May 21, 1927 to Sophie and Max Rosenstein. He had a brother, Heinz who was two years older and a brother, Ernst, who was four years older. His father had a furniture and upholstery manufacturing factory in Benshein. Gerald entered public school at age six and completed two years and the family moved to Darmstadt for six months and then immigrated to Holland. His father established an office in Amsterdam. When his middle brother was 16, he was deported to Birkenau. Gerald's elder brother made aliyah in 1938 to Palestine where he enlisted in the Palestine Corps and was shot down and died in Albania in 1944. The Dutch police collaborators knocked on Gerald's door in the middle of the night and he and his parents were taken to Schouwburg theatre in East Amsterdam. From there they were sent to Westerbork in Northeastern Holland where Gerald worked as a messenger, typist and peeled potatoes. Soon his parents were transferred to Bergen-Belsen. About two or three months after his parents left, he was transferred to Theresienstadt. After he was there for about six weeks, his parents arrived from Bergen-Belsen. His mother worked in the [glemmer(?)] where they manufactured mica for submarines which saved her life and that of the 300 women workers. Gerald and his father were deported with 125 people in a cattle car to Auschwitz where he and his father stated that they are metal workers and placed on the left to work. Gerald's Capo picked him to be the room boy but he played dumb and someone else was picked.

Part 1 left off with Gerald's mother remaining in Theresienstadt and he and his father were deported by cattle car to Auschwitz. After about six or seven weeks in Birkenau, they were transferred to Gleiwitz labor camp. His camp went on a two day march to Blechhammer where they were liberated by the Red Cross and the Russians. Due to the rampant disease, he and his father decided to leave along with about ten other Dutchmen. Gerald reached Katowitz [Katowice] in Western Poland and the Red Cross there quartered them with Polish families and organized a train for his group to [Chenoweth(?)] in Bukovina, Byelorussia in the Carpathian Mountains. The Jewish population took care of them for four or five weeks. Then they took a train to Odessa where they were placed in a sanitarium in a resort on the Black Sea. The English Red Cross sent a ship and they were considered British POW and reached Constantinople on May 5, 1945. From there the ship took them to Marseille where they took a train to Paris where the Red Cross quartered them in a villa where they got sick. Upon recovery, Gerald went to Amsterdam where he contacted his mother. Friends drove his mother to Brussels and he met her by hitchhiking. In Brussels they obtained train passes to Paris where they lived for one and one-half years. They moved to NY where his parents remained but Gerald moved to San Francisco in 1949. He receives reparations for health benefits and surgery for an injury

he incurred in the camps and for missing education. In the 1980s Gerald started working part-time and became more involved in community activities including the Gay community. Next week, on January 17, the 50th anniversary of the Holocaust, Gerald expects to attend a reunion of survivors.

00:00 Gerald B. Rosenstein was born in Benshein, Germany, on May 21, 1927, to Sophie and Max Rosenstein. His brother, Heinz was two years older and his brother, Ernst was four years older. His father had a furniture and upholstery manufacturing factory in Benshein and his mother did not work. They lived in a large Edwardian style house with ample grounds. Now his property is subdivided into 15 to 20 fancy homes. The population was 30 to 40,000 when he lived there and about 60,000 now. There were about 100 to 150 Jewish families who lived in large houses interspersed among the gentiles. His family was one of the few orthodox families, and there was only one orthodox synagogue. His neighborhood was mostly gentile, and he had few opportunities to play with the neighbor children. This was partly due to Hitler coming to power and partly because each house had gardens and the children did not play on the street. Almost all the Jews were well-off, and he thought that all of them left and settled in the U.S. Recently he found out that about 30 to 40 had been deported to Auschwitz and other camps. Except for his father's father, his grandparents were deceased. His paternal grandfather was a retired teacher who lived in another town.

05:00 His aunts and uncles immigrated to the U.S., England and Berlin. His father was educated in the Gymnasium and his mother at a fancy Catholic girl's school and then attended a conservatory in Darmstadt where she studied music but did not make it her profession. Gerald entered the public grammar school at age six, completed two years, moved to Darmstadt for six months, and then emigrated. The public school teachers were not Jewish, and Gerald had the sense of being different, of being singled out. At age seven, he was beaten up by the drunken father of a schoolmate because of his Jewishness. This horrified him and made him cry. His father was traveling at the time, and his mother tried to console him. In 1935 gasoline soaked rags were thrown into his garage at the end of the property which caused no damage. After that they were not permitted maids and decided to sell their house and move to Darmstadt. All his friends were Jewish. They rented an apartment for five or six months. Then they moved to Amsterdam, along with their maid who did not like it so returned to Germany.

10:00 Gerald attended the Jewish grammar school for the six months that the family lived in Darmstadt. In Bensheim, all the Jewish children attended Hebrew School two or three afternoons a week after school. They did not like their teacher, Mr. Mueller. Gerald's father's father was not orthodox. His mother's family had lived in Benshein since 1757 and was more orthodox. The family mainly followed his mother's traditions of kashrus

(kosher), not traveling on Saturday and observing the holidays. The time in Darmstadt was the only time that Gerald held an interest in Hebrew school. Life was calm there, and his father established an office in Amsterdam, and they moved their furniture by car. They were happy to be in Holland. The three brothers were placed with a Dutch family until their furniture arrived, and the parents stayed elsewhere, probably at a hotel. They attended a special class for six weeks to learn Dutch. They spoke German at home and later in the camps spoke Dutch.

15:00 Although Gerald was afraid of the Nazi soldiers he saw on the streets, he did not discuss this with his parents as the family did not speak of such matters. They moved into a nice apartment in southern Amsterdam where other German Jews had settled. Each brother was placed in a different school. He was not very close to his brothers. He enjoyed skating and swimming but not competitively. He had lots of friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish as did his parents. His father maintained some business contacts back in Germany but had sold his business at a bad price to non-Jews. In addition to his upholstery business, his father also had an instrument and supply business in Amsterdam. Gerald entered high school in 1939. He was Bar Mitzvah just prior to May 1940, the German invasion. His Bar Mitzvah had a small reception and he was allowed to smoke his first cigarette which started him on the path to becoming a chain smoker. The family had a sense of foreboding and packed suitcases and went to the beach looking for fisherman to take them to London but was not successful. Gerald was prohibited from attending his non-Jewish high school and had to enter a Jewish high school far from home. He was not permitted to use a bike or take the streetcar so had to walk to school. Friends near the school gave him lunch so he did not have to go home. Within weeks of the German occupation, his father's car was confiscated and they had to turn in some valuables. They were able to save their grandparent's silver which they buried outside of Amsterdam and also save some carpets.

20:00 Since everyone else had to give up their bikes, Gerald accepted this prohibition. The family suppressed the drama that they were going through. He found it difficult to leave the academic environment of his high school but did well in his new school. The teachers were Jewish and spoke of what was happening in Europe. It was a co-ed school. There was no bombing but they were required to wear the yellow star on the upper left part of their garments. Gerald was neither proud nor embarrassed about wearing the star. In general, the Dutch population was sympathetic to the Jews. In 1942, when he was 14, he was caught in a street action. The Nazis suddenly closed off the street where Gerald was walking but, luckily, the man who delivered their ice saved him by pulling him off the street into his ice truck. There was a curfew from dusk to dawn. Deputations began in 1942. When his middle brother was 16, he was deported to Birkenau and sent the family one postcard. He had been given a 3-day notice to report to the railroad station.

- 25:00 The elder brother was a Zionist and prepared himself to go to Palestine by attending an agricultural college and made aliyah in '38 to a kibbutz in Palestine. He enlisted in the Palestine Corps and became a commander parachutist and was shot down and died in Albania in 1944. Gerald obtained this information when he reached Paris. It was very traumatic for the family when the middle brother left as they did not know exactly what happened in Birkenau. While living in Amsterdam, Gerald read a lot and learned to play bridge. They were not allowed to play sports in the street. By 1943 people kept disappearing and were deported so they expected the same and packed suitcases. They packed socks, shoes, sweaters, photographs (they disappeared), and some U.S. dollars. The Dutch police collaborators knocked on their door in the middle of the night and he and his parents were taken to Schouwburg theatre in East Amsterdam. They remained there for two days and were fed and slept on the carpeted floor or the seats.
- 30:00 The theatre was quite full. He was exposed to people of all types including those with epileptic fits. Everyone was very nervous. From there they were sent to Westerbork in Northeastern Holland. Each family member was placed in a different barrack. He worked as a messenger, typist and peeled potatoes. Gerald felt that it was good that he was kept busy. He slept in a double tiered bed in the barracks. He had to say goodbye to his parents when they were transferred to Bergen-Belsen. He had friends in Westerbork so did not feel alone. In Amsterdam, he used to walk a couple's boxer. The husband had already died from lung cancer when the wife, Mrs. Jacobi (ph) arrived in Westerbork in a pink nightgown. He offered to get her clothes but she just gave up and was deported wearing the nightgown.
- 35:00 About two or three months after his parents left, he was transferred to Theresienstadt. He was given rations for the train and was sent food by non-Jews who had been given money by his parents for this purpose. His health was good. Gerald went on a regular passenger, not a cattle, train with a large group of people. The trip took a couple of days and they unloaded and marched into a garrison town. The guards were local Germans. He was the youngest in the barracks of about 50 people. Everyone was friendly and helpful. It was not a concentration camp as had no deprivation or hard labor. This was the winter, early '44. He had bunk beds and blankets and wore his own clothes with the Jewish star; no uniforms.
- 40:00 There were schools and agricultural work. After about six weeks, his parents arrived from Bergen-Belsen and placed in different barracks. His mother worked in the [glemmer(?)] where they manufactured mica for submarines. This work saved her and the 300 women she worked with though most of the prisoners were deported to Birkenau/Auschwitz. His parents coped with their situation. Gerald's father was diabetic but the diet made him lose weight and he had no symptoms of diabetes. His parents were in the upper age limit. His mother was upbeat and still physically attractive. There was a lot of underground and officially sanctioned entertainment. People looked after him. He

was invited to see the “Three Penny Opera.” There were many Czech and German composers so the music survived. It was a positive influence. People died from starvation. You had to have the mindset that you will survive although others died. His parents were pretty strong, and they did not know about crematoriums. Gerald participated in a Red Cross film and was allowed in the swimming pool and given extra food but did not interact with Göring.

45:00 Gerald knew French and English and learned better German as in Holland he had to study four languages. There were other teenagers with him. He had a Czech friend whose mother was an opera singer so he knew Puccini operas. There were trains going every week to Auschwitz. He and his father were deported with 125 people in a cattle car with a bucket for the toilet. There were told they were being relocated to a camp in the East. He said good-bye to his mother. Women were also in his cattle car. The trip took 3 or 4 days. Some people died but the doors were not opened. He was used to seeing the dead being picked up and taken to the crematorium in Thereseinstadt where some died from illness, as there was no medication, and some died from starvation. They arrived in Auschwitz in the middle of the night and were greeted by the SS with their German shepherds.

50:00 Lights were shone on them and the SS hollered “raus, raus” [out, out]. He saw the selection table with Mengele and two officers saying, “right”, “left”. His father instructed him to say that he is a metal worker, and they went to the left. Others went to the right and you could smell the flesh burning from the six chimneys with flames. Within an hour of their arrival, they were aware of the reality of the place. He and his father marched with the men. Gerald was the youngest and small for his age, and his father at 51 had grey hair and looked old but managed to get through. There were 10 Dutchmen they knew. They had to disrobe but kept their own shoes, got deloused, hair was shaved and they were tattooed (Gerald’s number was B12773). On the second floor of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Gerald saw the number B12778 so it is someone who was in his transport. The tattoo was humiliating but not painful. It was the summer of ’44 so the inner arms were tattooed. His father’s tattoo was either 12772 or 12774 which he did not remove but Gerald had his removed. They were given a blue and white uniform and a cap with their number and the yellow star and wore their own shoes.

55:00 His father had hidden \$10 in the lining of his shoe. Their good leather shoes helped them survive. They were herded to the barracks where they slept on the cement floor next to each other under lights. On the second day, they saw a betrayer beaten to death. People committed suicide on the electrified barbed wire. Sometimes they were forced to stand on one foot for a long time. There was no work in Birkenau. After two or three weeks, there was a selection. They had to undress, jump and run to prove they were fit to work or go to the gas chamber. They succeeded. The food was terrible and one may get some

substance if given from the bottom of the container. He saw *Muselmänner*: people slated for death as they had no will to live. One avoided contact with them. His Capo was a criminal and picked him to be the room boy as he was young and cute. Gerald played dumb like he did not know what the Capo wanted as when the Capo tired of his room boy, he would send him to the gas chamber. Another kid was picked for the duty.

62:00

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00:00 Gerald felt that having the presence of his father in the camps was very helpful. He felt that his father survived by being cool and not emotional. He taught Gerald to survive by never making waves. Gerald felt that he was a young 17 but grew old quickly in that environment. It was helpful that he was with other teenagers and acquaintances from Amsterdam. After about six or seven weeks in Birkenau, they were transferred to Gleiwitz labor camp. Auschwitz was surrounded by labor camps and Eli Wiesel was placed in one of them. Gerald and his father were transferred by truck to Gleiwitz which took about two hours. Although Gleiwitz had a crematorium, it had no gas chamber so was not an extermination camp. In Birkenau, Gerald had lived near the experimentation block which was horrifying although some felt being in the experiments was a means of survival. Although he never felt safe, Gerald had to presume he would be safe.

05:00 His father worked in a factory that made railroad equipment and Gerald was placed in an ammunitions factory where he did welding. In Gleiwitz a *Wehrmacht* guard, not an SS, recognized his father as he had served under him in World War I. He was in his 50s or 60s and he had been drafted into guard duty. His father gave the guard the \$10, and the guard occasionally gave him bread or a newspaper. Gerald lived in a 3-tiered barracks with a straw mattress and a blanket which had to be made razor-sharp, or they would be punished by standing on one foot in the snow. They could be killed if they lost one piece of their uniform. They stood at *Appel* twice a day in Birkenau but it was autumn and not so cold. It was a very cold winter at *Appel* in Gleiwitz. There was no warm water to wash with. Rations were soup, coffee and dry bread. Gerald started developing sores on his feet and hands though his father did not. He weighed about 90 or 100 pounds and stayed healthy. Next week, on January 17, it will be 50 years since the camp and he will attend a reunion. Any bit of news they obtained gave them hope. They got some news from guards, some from the radio, and sometimes people drew maps in the snow to show the progress of the Russian Army. Gerald was in the third of three camps which was lucky as they marched out in order and his was the last to march to The East. Stragglers were shot including the guard they knew. Even *Wehrmacht* members who straggled were shot, not just prisoners.

- 10:00 It was January, and the snow was deep. One night they slept in a barn on their way to Blesheimer (ph) which was reached in two days. Many people died from typhoid. The guards were only in the towers and they shot anything moving on the ground. Suddenly it became quiet and they realized that the guards fled, the gates opened and the Red Cross arrived. Due to the rampant disease, he and his father decided to leave along with about ten other Dutchmen. They could not trust the drunken Russians who were undisciplined, shooting, and raping. The Russians gang-raped the nuns.
- 15:00 Gerald only spoke Dutch, not German. He and the group took blankets and went towards the East, to Poland. He was the youngest and his father was probably the oldest. They were mostly in their 20s. They found an abandoned POW camp for English prisoners. It was clean with bunk beds, blankets, dishes, and canisters of tea. They remained there for a week or two. One of their group was a butcher, and he slaughtered a pig from a nearby farm with an ax. Those that ate it got diarrhea but Gerald only ate the liver and was fine. Then the butcher slaughtered a heifer, and this was easier to digest. They also had potatoes. The Russians kept checking in on them. One was Jewish who spoke English. The Russians could not understand who they were and left them alone for 10 or 12 days. The Germans counterattacked and the Russians had Gerald and the other prisoners dig trenches. Then Gerald's group packed their belongings onto hand-held carts and marched towards the East. They stopped one night at a monastery. One of their members was a physician and asked the nuns who had been raped if they wanted to be examined. There was a large exodus of people including *Volksdeutsche* to Germany.
- 20:00 Gerald reached Katowitz [Katowice] in Western Poland and the Red Cross there quartered them with Polish families who fed them. Gerald and the others registered and got rid of their blue uniforms. They put on the English army uniforms that they had found earlier. At the camps they had undergone the demeaning but necessary experience of being deloused. By the time he arrived in Katowitz, Gerald's hair had grown back. There he saw Ruth Asher, a survivor from Amsterdam who had become insane and suicidal and required to be watched. On the train from Katowitz to [Chenoweth (?)], Romania, he saw gypsies and dwarfs who had been in the experiments. He spoke French to the Romanians. The Red Cross in Katowitz organized a train for the English officers and for Gerald's group. He met a Czech whose wife was in Thereisenstadt where Gerald's mother had remained.
- 25:00 He asked the Russian Army that was going to Thereisenstadt to tell his mother that he and his father were alive. Gerald was with about 150 people in a regular passenger train going to [Chenoweth (?)] in Bukovina, Belorussia in the Carpathian Mountains. It was a beautiful place with an intact rich Jewish population who took care of them. They had bathrooms with hot and cold water. The Russians were also quartered there. Gerald was placed with a family that included a teenager. Soon after this, the family moved to Palestine. A Russian agent lived with them so they had to be cautious about what they

said. He does not know how the Jews survived in that area. He stayed four to five weeks when it turned to Spring. His father was lodged with an orthodox Rabbi who would not sleep there when his father was at home. Then they took a train to Odessa where they were placed in a sanitarium in a resort on the Black Sea. An English-speaking Russian officer translated and did the administrative work. Since there was no running water, they were given salt water soap and washed in the Black Sea. As a treat, Gerald was taken to the ballet but was guarded by two Russian officers; perhaps due to their being paranoid under Stalin.

30:00 The English Red Cross sent a ship, and they were considered British POW and taken to Constantinople on May 5, 1945, where the British consul came aboard and gave Gerald messages from relatives in England, Egypt, and the US. His family thought they were dead. Then the ship took them to Marseille, and when they docked he was greeted by a school friend from Amsterdam. From there they took a train to Amsterdam but in the middle of the night they got off in Strasbourg and took an American Army train to Paris. They thought conditions in Amsterdam might be bad, and his father had accounts receivable in Paris. In Paris they were greeted by many Jewish women with pictures of their loved ones and were asked if they recognized them. Gerald said it was impossible to recognize anyone as he last saw people when they were like skeletons. The Red Cross quartered them in a villa where they got sick. His father had kidney and fluid problems from overeating and was hospitalized. Gerald got pneumonia. A son of a friend from Benshein found them. They found out that Gerald's mother had been repatriated to Amsterdam.

35:00 Gerald was given a clean uniform and took the train to Brussels and a streetcar and hitch hiked to Amsterdam. He called his mother who was staying with friends. She was physically well and he wanted to take her to Paris but she had no papers or passports. Gerald had French ID papers. Their friends who had a farm near the Belgium border drove his mother to Brussels, and he met her by hitchhiking. In Brussels they obtained train passes to Paris where they lived for one and one-half years. Gerald attended school and his father went into business. Gerald and his parents never talked about their camp experiences which he now feels was psychologically ill-advised. They moved to New York where his parents remained until 1959. His father died at age 65 of a stroke and uremia which was the result of diabetes. In 1949 Gerald moved to San Francisco as he was unhappy. He had eating problems and felt he had to separate from his parents.

40:00 He feels his experiences made him less Jewish though he started to attend a gay synagogue in 1980. In the early 50s he had his tattoo removed so he could wear a short-sleeved shirt. He went into analysis so he could talk about the Holocaust. Earlier funerals were the only time he went into a synagogue. He can't forget the Holocaust. In the 1980s he worked part-time and became more involved in community activities. He gets reparations as he feels it is owed to him. The reparations are for health benefits and

surgery and for missing education. He had a back injury when he was loading cement bags in Gleiwitz. At the time he had to continue working but the injury affected him five years later. Gerald feels that he survived the Holocaust due to luck at not being in the line of fire and also due to being with his father. He said that Eli Wiesel's story is identical to his as he also was with his father. Wiesel was in the camps for three more months than him as he left a day earlier for the march and was sent to German and Austrian camps.

- 45:00 Gerald believes that he was lucky to escape that as he could not have survived another three months. He has a friend, Ernie Lovett, in NY who has children in California and was with Eli Wiesel. He often sees his friend who survived Auschwitz for a year longer than him. Soon he will see his friend at their 50-year reunion. Gerald frequently goes to Germany where he has both Jewish and non-Jewish friends. The non-Jewish friends are younger than him so he can forgive them though he forgets nothing. He feels he is a survivor and should not carry negative baggage with him. He does not associate with Germans older than himself as he does not trust them politically. He is affected by his early childhood upbringing and taught by the camp experiences. Gerald is shocked by other survivor's intolerance and illiberal attitudes toward gays and minorities. He was not aware of gay persecution in the camp. In Auschwitz, he saw very few pink triangles (identifying homosexuals) worn by Auschwitz prisoners. Homosexuals were mostly sent to the camps in Germany.
- 50:00 There were only 8 to 9,000 gays identified in the Holocaust while in reality there were many more. Gerald was not in contact with gay prisoners. He feels fortunate that he did well and leads a productive life in San Francisco. He would tell the younger generation to be tolerant but he believes that he is not a good speaker.

52:00

Time-Coded Notes Version 2

ROSENSTEIN, Gerald

RG-50.106*0012

Interviewed on January 13, 1995

Two Audiotapes

Abstract

Gerald Rosenstein was born in Bensheim, Germany on May 21, 1927 to Max and Sophie Rosenstein, a well-off Orthodox family with two other sons, Ernst and Hans. Bensheim had 30,000 to 40,000 residents, including about 150 Jewish families, 30 to 40 percent of whom were deported to Auschwitz. When Gerald was aged seven and a half, the father of a classmate attacked him for being Jewish, and gasoline-soaked rags were thrown into their garage. So the family moved to Darmstadt, Germany, and then to Amsterdam.

When the Germans invaded the Netherlands, Gerald's family tried to escape to England, but they were too late. During a street raid, Gerald was saved by a man who delivered ice to the family. Deportations began in October 1942, and one of Gerald's brothers, aged 16, was sent to Birkenau. The other brother had made Aliyah in 1938. Gerald, his father and mother were sent eventually to Westerbork in eastern Holland, and his parents were sent on to Bergen-Belsen. In winter 1944, Gerald was sent to Theresienstadt. His parents arrived there six weeks later, and the three were reunited. Gerald said it was a privilege to be in Theresienstadt, which he termed a good camp. Soon, Gerald and his father were transported to Auschwitz. His mother stayed at Theresienstadt, where she was one of 300 women making mica for insulating submarines.

On arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Gerald and his father said they were metal workers, which saved them. When the kapo picked Gerald as his "room boy", Gerald saved himself by playing drunk. Gerald credits his survival to "99 percent luck", and to his "cool, calm father". They were relieved to be sent to Gleiwitz, a labor camp, where Gerald was a welder in a munitions factory.

On January 17, 1945 the inmates were marched to Blechhammer, and eventually liberated by the Russians. Gerald and his father made their way to Katowice, then to Chernivtsi, Ukraine, on to Odessa, and to a Black Sea sanatorium, and later sailed for Paris in May 1945. Gerald brought his mother from Amsterdam to Paris, where the three lived for a year and a half before emigrating to New York. Gerald says they could not bear to talk about the camps (he does not mention the fate of his brother deported to Birkenau.)

In 1949, Gerald moved to San Francisco, where he started a gay synagogue and joined the board of the Holocaust Research Center. He believes that some Holocaust survivors did not learn enough from their experience, and says that many survivors are very intolerant of gays and minorities. He returns often to Germany, and says he has forgiven a lot, but forgotten nothing.

Tape 1, Side A

- 00:00 Gerald B. Rosenstein was born in Bensheim, Germany on May 21, 1927 to Max and Sophie (Beudheim) Rosenstein. His two siblings were Ernst and Hans. The father was a furniture and upholstery materials manufacturer. The mother did not work. The family lived in a large house on large grounds. Bensheim's 30,000 to 40,000 inhabitants included about 150 Jewish families. The Rosensteins were Orthodox. Almost all of the Jewish families were well off. Thirty to 40 percent of the town's Jews were deported to Auschwitz. Gerald's father finished gymnasium, and his mother went to Catholic girls school, then to a music conservatory. Gerald went to public school at age six, and attended for almost two years. When he was seven and a half, a classmate's father, who was drunk, attacked Gerald for being Jewish. Around the same time, someone threw gasoline-soaked rags into the family's garage. Gerald's parents sold their house and moved the family to Darmstadt, Germany. The maid moved with the family, although Jews were not allowed to have maids in their homes.
- 01:40 In Darmstadt, Gerald went to a Jewish grammar school. All Jewish children went also to Hebrew school two to three times a week. Gerald took great interest in all things Jewish for a short time in Darmstadt. The family, including the maid, moved to Amsterdam with great joy. The family went to a special language school for six months, and then to regular Dutch school. Gerald played sports and was friendly with mixed groups of young people. His father had a surgical and drug supply business. Gerald's Bar Mitzvah was a sad affair. The family had a small party at their house after synagogue services. He was allowed to smoke his first cigarette, and still smokes.
- 02:58 During the invasion, the family drove to Zandvoort, a beach resort, where they hoped to find a fisherman to take them to England. However, they were too late; all the fishermen were gone. The sons had to change schools to a Jewish high school. Their bikes had been confiscated, so they had to walk to the other end of town. Gerald's father's car, like those of most people, Jews and non-Jews, was confiscated a week after the invasion.
- 03:48 Gerald had to wear a yellow star. The Germans began suddenly closing two streets at a time and picking up all the Jews they could find. Gerald was almost caught in a street that was being closed. The man who delivered ice for the Rosenstein's refrigerator noticed Gerald, grabbed him, shoved him in the back of the ice truck, and drove him home. A dusk to dawn curfew began. In October 1942, deportations began. The middle brother, who was 16, was sent to Birkenau. The older brother was Zionist and had made Aliyah in 1938. He enlisted in the Palestine corps, and was shot down in Albania in 1944.
- Jews in Amsterdam were disappearing from time to time. The family made preparations for things to come. When they heard a knock on the door overnight,

they took their packed suitcases, and Dutch collaborating policemen took them to a theater in eastern Amsterdam.

05:50 The family stayed there for two days. They were sent to Westerbork in eastern Holland. They were separated into different barracks. Gerald worked in an agriculture office, and sometimes worked as a bicycle messenger.

Tape 1, Side B

They slept in bunk beds in the men's barracks. Gerald's parents had been sent to Bergen-Belsen. He had the chance to say goodbye to them. Friends and other family stayed in the camp with him, so he felt he had a good support group. Gerald stayed there for two to three months and then was ordered to Theresienstadt.

07:06 Gerald went on a regular train car. Food packages were sent from Amsterdam to them at these camps. This was in the winter of 1944. They slept in bunk beds and wore yellow stars. There was some schooling. About six weeks into his stay at Theresienstadt, someone told him that his parents had just arrived. It was great to be reunited with them. His mother worked in the glimmer, where about 300 women worked manufacturing mica for insulating submarines. Those 300 women were the only survivors. They were not sent to Birkenau. Everyone else was sent there in the summer of 1944. Gerald's mother was a real survivor emotionally. His father was a diabetic but did well, having lost a lot of weight.

08:12 As a teenager, Gerald saw a lot of dead people. He had to be a positive thinker to survive. Thinking negative thoughts made him feel that death was right around the corner, and it always was. Gerald probably took part in a Red Cross film. Theresienstadt was a good place to be in camp. It was a privilege to be there. One day, Gerald and his father were told to report for a trip in a cattle car.

09:00 In the cattle car, there was one bucket to serve as a toilet for 150 people. No one knew where they were going. People died, but Gerald and his father managed somehow. The train arrived in Auschwitz. The first scene was the German shepherds with Mengele and the group. His father said, "Tell them you are a metal worker." That made them send Gerald and his father to the left. The kapos standing there told them that they were lucky to be sent to the left; otherwise they would be up in smoke soon. They saw six smoke stacks and fire burning on top, so they could understand what the kapos were talking about. Gerald and his father were told to disrobe and keep their shoes. Then they were showered, deloused, and tattooed.

10:26 Gerald removed his tattoo, which was on the inside of his arm. His number was B12773. The A numbers were on the top of the arm and they were large. His father's number was B12772 or B12774, but he did not have his number removed.

They kept their shoes and had striped clothing. In the barracks, they slept on cement floors, body to body.

10:55 Gerald saw a man being beaten to death by inmates, just after he arrived in Auschwitz. The man, when in another camp, had betrayed people in the underground. One of the betrayed men recognized him, and inmates beat the informer to death.

11:45 People who did not wish to live just walked into the barbed wire. That was the easiest way to commit suicide. The kapo, a criminal, picked Gerald to be his room boy. Gerald and his father knew what that meant. A kapo would pick a cute boy, then get tired of him, and send him to the gas chamber. So Gerald played things down, played drunk. The kapo picked one of the other young men.

Tape 2, Side A

00:00 Gerald's father was very cool and calm, which helped Gerald survive in Birkenau. It also helped his father to be with him. They were sent to Gleiwitz, a labor camp. Auschwitz was surrounded by factory-type camps like a rubber factory. Elie Wiesel was there. The Buna was another. Gleiwitz was about two hours away from Auschwitz. There was no gas chamber or crematoria there, so it was a great relief to Gerald and his father. There was no freedom of movement in Birkenau. They were very close to where the experiments on humans were taking place.

00:35 It was horrifying to them. Gerald could never feel safe in Birkenau. The only way to survive was to keep telling yourself that you would survive. In Gleiwitz, the dangers in were very different: it was very cold there and the work was very hard. Gerald did welding at an ammunitions factory. A Wehrmacht guard in Gleiwitz recognized Gerald's father as his officer in World War I. He was a decent person who was drafted into guard duty. Gerald's father gave him ten dollars and this guard supplied them with a newspaper or some bread at times.

00:51 They lived in three-level beds with straw mattresses. The beds had to be perfectly made or there would be harsh punishments. Gerald ate the same bread, coffee, and soup every day. He developed all kinds of sores from malnutrition. On January 17, the inmates were evacuated, marched out by the Wehrmacht guards. Anyone who was not able to continue marching was shot. After a few days, they ended up in Blechhammer. They slept in a barn one night. Gerald does not remember being fed at all. Typhoid fever was going around the camp. The guards were shooting at anything that moved. One day, it became very quiet, and there were no guards in the lookout towers.

01:46 Then, the Red Cross people came around. Gerald found out that the Germans had fled. Ten to 12 of the inmates from Holland organized to get out of the camp. The Russians mostly could not be trusted. They were drunk, gang-raped women in the Catholic orders, and shot people. Gerald left camp and headed East. He

found an abandoned prisoner of war camp, which housed British soldiers. They found beds, blankets, and dishes. Gerald found a pig, a cow, and some potatoes, which they ate. They got sick from the pig, but after they got better, they were more careful and did not get sick again.

- 02:50 The Russians came by, and told the inmates that they were needed to dig trenches because the Germans were counterattacking. After a few days, they picked up and left again for the East. They saw a lot of Germans going toward Germany. They were going back home. They finally got to Katowice in western Poland. They were sent to a Polish house, where they were fed and taken care of. They had changed their camp uniforms in the prisoner of war camp. Being shaved once a month was very dehumanizing. Gerald met a classmate from high school and a young woman who had dated his oldest brother in Amsterdam. Her name was Ruth Asher. After liberation, she became suicidal. Gerald watched her constantly.
- 04:00 He does not know what happened to her. The Red Cross organized a train to take them back to Holland after four or five weeks. A Czech man, whose wife was in Theresienstadt, waited to go there with the Russian Army. After he arrived, he told Gerald's mother that her husband and Gerald were alive.
- 05:03 They went to Chernivtsi, Ukraine (Czerniowce) from Katowice, with an intact Jewish population. This was Russian-occupied territory, with spies all over. These Jews were preparing to go to Palestine, and departed a few weeks after Gerald left. They stayed in Czernowice for four to five weeks and then went to Odessa. They stayed in a sanatorium on the Black Sea. Gerald was a translator from English to Dutch. They swam in the Black Sea. Gerald was taken to the ballet. From there, he left on a boat in May 1945.
- 06:15 Gerald and his father sent telegrams to family to let them know they were alive. They landed in France and went to Paris. They got off the train and saw a woman holding up pictures, and asking whether anyone knows whether the people shown were survivors. Gerald and his father stayed in Paris, and his mother had gone back to Amsterdam. Gerald went there to meet her and bring her to Paris. His father had been very sick in Paris, but his mother was in very good physical condition. His father started a business there. They never talked about the camp; they could not do it.
- 07:10 They stayed in Paris for a year and a half, and then moved to New York. Gerald's parents stayed there, but he moved to San Francisco in 1949. His war experience made him feel less Jewish. In 1980, he became involved in starting a gay synagogue. He started to feel more Jewish, but not religion-wise.
- 07:40 Since joining the board of the Holocaust Research Center, Gerald does think more about the Holocaust, and is more involved in the Jewish community. He receives reparations and feels good about it. Gerald feels they owe him. He feels that his survival is due to 99% luck and keeping out of the line of fire. He goes back to

Germany often and has forgiven a lot, but forgotten nothing. He does not associate with older Germans because he does not want to have to watch his words, and does not trust them.

09:00 Gerald believes that not everyone learned enough from their experience. Many survivors are very intolerant towards gays, minorities, etc. In camp, he did not come into contact with gay people.