

Interview with Felix Nicinski
March 6, 2007

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Felix Nicinski**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz**, on March 6, 2007, in **Silver Spring, Maryland**. This is tape number one, side **A**. What is your full name?

Answer: **Felix Nicinski**.

Q: That is the name you were born with?

A: No. In **Poland** I called **Fievish Nicinski**.

Q: Did you have a middle name?

A: A middle? No.

Q: And where were you born and when were you born?

A: I was born in **Poland**, the city name's **Łochów**, December 7, 1925.

Q: And that is n-near what large city?

A: Near **Kalisz, Sieradz, Wieluń**, little larger cities.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And I understand it's 69 kilometers southwest of **Łódź**?

A: Yeah, something like that, yes, mm-hm.

Q: Let's talk about your family. How long had your father's -- well, t-tell me about your father's family.

A: My father, well, he had the family too, but they were far away from us. My mother had a lot of families, brothers, and they're all married and have a lot of children too. But they're all, they're all grown, you know.

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Q: What was your father's name?

A: My father's name was **Lipman Noah**.

Q: And where was he born?

A: He was born in **Łochów**, too, yes.

Q: Did he had a large extended family, brothers and sisters?

A: Not a lot, but he have some, yes.

Q: And what kind of work did your father do?

A: He was a furrier, not to make coats, but th-th-the fur came da -- came off on the -- from the animals, he stretched it and dried it and sold it to -- to the -- to the ti -- tailors, and the one who made those coats.

Q: And your mother's name?

A: **Pessar**.

Q: And her maiden name?

A: **Kluger**.

Q: And what -- tell me about her family.

A: Her family, she had brothers, and they all married, they have a lot of chi -- **[indecipherable]** children, I say one of them have about seven, seven children, all girls. They live in **Poland**, another one lived in -- in **Belgium**. **[indecipherable]** also married, but he had children, I don't know how many he had. They both a large family, yes.

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Q: And did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I had one brother, older brother. Older brother.

Q: And what is his name?

A: His name is **Zisha. Zisha.**

Q: Okay. And where -- can you describe the town to me, and the neighborhood that you lived in when you were a small child?

A: It was a small town, and the Jew wasn't welcome very much there, the anti-Semitism was great. You went to show, they throw at you rocks, you know, then it was -- it was very, very unpleasant, the last years in **Poland**.

Q: Well, but let's talk about the earlier years, your earlier childhood. What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a Jewish neighborhood, or was it --

A: It was mixed. It was a mixed neighborhood, Jewish and -- and -- and Poles.

Q: And did you have non-Jewish friends as a young child?

A: We have some who went to public school. We'd be **[indecipherable]** together. Then I went to **cheder**, to the Jewish school, you know, I learn Hebrew and Yiddish, writing, reading.

Q: So, was your family religious? It sounded like they wanted you to have a good religious education.

A: They were religious, yes. No -- not -- not really ha-ha-Hasidim, no, but they were religious, went to **shul**, and we did what is supposed -- a Jew is supposed to do, sure.

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Q: And what languages did you speak?

A: We speak Yiddish all the time, even now with my wife, we speak only Yiddish home. Only we go out to buy things, then we talk English.

Q: But when you were growing up you spoke Yiddish to your brother and to your parents?

A: Yes, Yiddish only.

Q: Yeah. And what about in school?

A: In public school, at the -- at -- with the -- on-only Polish, of course. But I went to **cheder**, that was Yiddish, and reading and writing, we did all that.

Q: Did you have any favorite holidays as a young child?

A: Every holiday was a good holiday when you don't have to go to school.

Q: Can you describe one of the hol -- the holidays that you remember?

A: Na -- **Purim** was nice. **Hanukkah** was nice, we -- you get gifts, that was always nice.

Q: Did y -- a-and you had mentioned something about anti-Semitic experiences you had. Any other ones that you can talk about -- when you -- this was when you were a child, when you were a child.

A: I don't know what you mean by that.

Q: Any other ti -- kinds of anti-Semitic incidents that you remember when you were a child? Anything that people said or did.

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A: The Poles didn't like the Jews. Tha-That's for sure, they didn't like us.

Q: How did you know that, as a child?

A: Because they -- they -- they throw rocks as they went to **shul**, they spit on us and all kind of things. And th-they had the expression they use [**speaks Polish here**]. And what does that mean? The Jews to **Palestine**, then.

Q: And did you talk this over with your parents?

A: Well, they know it. Th-They knew -- th-they knew better than I did. Sure.

Q: Did they say anything special to comfort you as a young boy?

A: Not really. We didn't talk too much about it, we have to be careful. If you see them, don't -- avoid them, you know. Avoid them. Don't -- do-don't face them. Something like that.

Q: Were your parents Zionists?

A: Yes, they were Zionists, yes.

Q: Did they belong to any organizations, and if so, which ones?

A: Can't recall now, ut -- but it -- they were -- I was young then. No, I don't recall that, where -- where they belonged or not.

Q: And tell me about your brother. Were you close to your brother while you both were young?

A: Yes. He was a little bit older. We were close, sure, absolutely.

Q: And did you do -- what -- what kind of sports -- were you interested in sports?

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A: Well, like kids we just kicked the ball. I was young, there was nothing -- nothing else. Not any particular sport, no.

Q: Tell me, did your family and you do any traveling before conditions got bad?

A: No, not too much, I don't recall that, no. We only went to our uncle, it wasn't too far, on the holiday or so, and that's about it.

Q: And what kind of activities did you do in your free time? What -- did you have any hobbies?

A: Just lay around with the -- with the friends I had, and that's all. Nothing special.

Q: Would -- would you describe your family as middle class? Ho-How would you describe them, economically?

A: Middle class, yes.

Q: And tell me about your home. Was it an apartment or a house?

A: A house, it was a house, yes.

Q: Can you describe it to me?

A: It was a small house, enough for us. We were comfortable living in it. That was nice.

Q: Did you and your brother have your own bedrooms?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Tell me about your **Bar Mitzvah**.

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A: The **Bar Mitzvah**, yes, I went to -- went to **shul**, had my **Bar Mitzvah**. You know, have a -- all the goodies after, you know, and it w -- it was nice, very nice. I enjoyed it.

Q: Now -- well now, let's start talking about when conditions started to change. You said you were born in 1925, so when were you aware that problems were beginning?

A: Oh, soon after the Germans -- the **Germany** occupied **Poland**, beginning in 1940 --

Q: O-Okay, so up to that time, up to that time, had you heard of a man named **Hitler**, who came into power in 1933? As a child, did you hear anything about him?

A: We heard about **Hitler**, yes.

Q: And what did your parents say about him?

A: They couldn't say very well, maybe it -- maybe it going to be all right, maybe he'll -- he'll die or something, something like that, but nothing we can do. We were -- we -- we born there and we made the living there, and we can't run just like that.

Q: Was your mother working?

A: No, she was home now, homemaker.

Q: So up to 1939, when the war started, you just had a regular childhood, and playing with friends and so forth?

A: Regular childhood, yes, playing with friends. It was nice, yes.

Q: All right, and then comes September 1939, what are your first memories of that, when the Germans invaded **Poland**?

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A: '39 wasn't too bad yet, but beginning of -- of 1940, they gather all the Jews, you know, and they kicked the Poles out and they give them better homes, where the Jews were living, and they created what you call a ghetto. And that was it. Lived all -- all the Jews there in the ghetto.

Q: Was there any bombing that you were aware of beforehand?

A: Bombing, yes, it was, before the-they enter our little city there, they bombed it. They destroyed it, very little was left after.

Q: And at that time you were still living in your home?

A: Living in the home yes, but it was -- it wasn't -- this wasn't the same any more, everything was broken up. And then they -- they took us out in -- in different section and was not -- no home any more. Was in the ghetto.

Q: Now you're 14 years old --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and you had been going to school, and you had had your **Bar Mitzvah**. What thoughts went through your mind as a 14 year old boy that when -- when this happens, that you have to leave your home and move into a ghetto?

A: Just didn't look good. We were hoping today is bad, maybe tomorrow will be better and that's about it.

Q: Were you especially frightened?

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A: We were frightened, all of us were frightened. Took us away from the home and put us in the section there where we can't move. They brought in food, we had to work there, inside. And then -- it wasn't pleasant at all.

Q: Was there a wall around the ghetto? How was it enclosed?

A: The beginning no, but then they put a fence up all around us. We couldn't get out no more. Not in, not out. They brought the food, and th -- and that's about it.

Q: So the people in the ghetto were the town Jews. Were there any other Jews from other cities or towns that were brought there?

A: No, from the city only.

Q: And were people helpful to each other? The Jews to each other?

A: As much as they could. They couldn't -- they couldn't do it very much, because they didn't have very much to start with.

Q: What did your parents bring from home with them to the ghetto?

A: What they have -- whatever we had, you know, where we could take with us.

Clothes, some [indecipherable] some -- some gold, what -- what we have in [indecipherable] took with us.

Q: And you and your brother, did you take anything special?

A: Only the clothes what we have, that's all. The toys, stuff like that.

Q: You did take toys and --

A: Yeah, yeah.

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Q: -- did -- did you take books? Did you take any books?

A: Yeah, we take the books we had, the ones we went to school and read it, we took them with us, yes.

Q: Did you have books that you liked to read just on your own, I mean, children's books?

A: At that time? Very little. No, not -- not much, no.

Q: And -- and how many people would you say were in the ghetto? Do you know?

A: There were several hundred. I can't exactly -- tell you exactly what. In there were several hundred, yes.

Q: And what were the living arrangements in the ghetto? Where -- where was your family living?

A: It wasn't too bad, they supply you the food, and we were -- and the work inside the ghetto, they have to work in the different things to put up factories and stuff, you have to work there too, you know. And -- but you couldn't get in and you couldn't get out. That's one thing, you stay put.

Q: And what kind of work did you do?

A: And -- I helped a little bit something, but not very much. But they put all factories there, tailors, shoemakers, all kind of things like that.

Q: When did you go into the ghetto, do you remember exactly when that was?

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A: It was in the 40's, beginning of 40's. I cannot tell you exact months, but in the 40's it was.

Q: In -- in the early part of 1940?

A: 1940, right, early part 1940, right.

Q: When you were in the ghetto, were you in a house or an apartment?

A: It was a house. In a house.

Q: And did you have the whole house to yourself?

A: Yes, yes. It was small house.

Q: You didn't have to share it with anybody else?

A: No. Not in the ghetto, no.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do?

A: He was a furrier, not -- not to make coats, but he stretched th-the fur and sold it to tailors, the one that make the coats.

Q: I'm talking about the work he did when he was in the ghetto. Is that was he also did?

A: N-No, he couldn't do that.

Q: S-So did he do -- have to work?

A: He had to work, he did something else [indecipherable] help, help at carpentry, whatever it is, something like that.

Q: And what about your brother, what did your brother do?

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A: He did the same thing, he didn't do very much. Whatever he -- was a helper. If anybody need something, he helped.

Q: And did you see other children there, other boys and girls your age?

A: Yes, I did, sure.

Q: Did you all talk about life in the ghetto?

A: We talked. We talked. We didn't get anywhere, but we talked.

Q: What were some of the things you -- you talked about?

A: Well, we were talking about let's hope that we go back to our homes and we have the life we used to have.

Q: So how optimistic were you at that time, in 1940?

A: Well, I wasn't sure whether it's going to happen or not. Didn't look good, got worse by the day.

Q: How did you know that?

A: Because the -- the food that came in wasn't as much, and everything was less and less and less. We felt it.

Q: Who brought you the food?

A: The Germans brought it in.

Q: What was it like for you as a teen -- a young teenager, to see a German soldier?

A: Well, had to put up whatever, you know, whatever they brought in, we shared, and that's how it went, you know, from day to day.

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Q: And did you speak German? Did you d -- do you under -- did you understand German then?

A: I didn't understand then. I understood a little bit, but later on I-I knew -- I knew German very well.

Q: Well, what I was asking before was, what were your thoughts when you looked at a German in a German military uniform? What thoughts went through your young head?

A: It was terrifying. They were very mean. Th-They looked like they were going to kill you any minute. Very mean, nasty.

Q: What would you do if you saw them on the street when you were out walking?

A: I didn't face him. I didn't face, I looked that -- that -- the other way.

Q: How did you know to do that?

A: Well, hey, if you got fear, yo-you f -- you figure out. It's not hard to do.

Q: And again, is this something you talked about with your parents? Did they give you any advice?

A: To be careful. You see them, walk away, don't -- do not face him. And we knew to do it anyway. We knew that.

Q: Did you feel Polish, or Jewish, or both?

A: Well, I felt Jewish, because we were brought up that way.

Q: Not Polish?

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A: No, no, not Polish, Jewish. We spoke Jewish, we wrote Jew-Jewish, Yiddish, you know, and that's how it went.

Q: And so what did you do during the day? Did you say you did go to work?

A: We helped out different things there what we could, a-as kids, you know, you couldn't do very much.

Q: What -- what was being built in the ghetto?

A: Like I told you, shoe stores. Shoe store and tailors, stuff like that. Carpentry.

Whatever they needed, you know? Particularly for the Germans, with the army, the uniform, stuff like that.

Q: And how long did you stay in the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto I stayed al-almost a year.

Q: So that it's winter, the late part of 1940, you were still in the ghetto, and then -- and then what happened aft --

A: And tha-that's a story I can tell you, yes. They took us all, from that age to that age, we have to report there, in a certain place and they took us for the first -- the first camp. It was called **Lienzingen**. It's a -- the **Auschwitz** of **Poznan**, it's a well-known city.

Q: H-How did you know that you had to leave the ghetto?

A: Well, they announced kids from 14 to 18 have to -- have to assemble in a certain place. We have to go to work, and that's it. They have to do what they tell you to do.

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Q: Boys and girls?

A: No, boys, boys. This time was boys only.

Q: And when you say they announced, how did they announce? Were there posters, or was it --

A: Loudspeakers.

Q: -- in this --

A: Loudspeakers.

Q: And what was your parents reaction?

A: What can they do? What kind of reaction would they have? They ha -- they have to do what they tell them to do, you know? They went there and they took us to this camp, and that's where I was, in **Lienzingen**.

Q: So this is you and your brother?

A: No, I was separate. I was going -- I was go different times, different age.

Q: How old was your bro -- na -- 1940 sa --

A: He was about three years older than I was, four years older.

Q: Yeah. Had he left already, or was he still in the ghetto with your parents?

A: He was still there. He was still there when I left.

Q: So you left your brother and your parents --

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: -- and you assembled at this place.

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A: Yeah.

Q: With the other 14 to 18 year old boys.

A: Yeah.

Q: And what was the feeling then, when you were all together in that gathering place?

What were the boys saying?

A: It wasn't very pleasant, we knew something bad is going to happen, but what can you do?

Q: What did you bring with you then?

A: Nothing very much, just a little -- little bag with some clothes, that's about all.

Q: What did your parents say to you when you said goodbye?

A: Oh, we'll see you soon back. Don't worry, and stuff like that.

Q: Were you -- do you remember being particularly frightened?

A: Well, frightened, yeah, I was frightened because I thought never return again home.

Q: How did you know that at a young age?

A: Well, I could see what's -- what's developing, you know, is get worse by the day, so I knew that something bad is going to happen.

Q: So then you -- they gathered you and they took you to this other place. How did you get to the next -- to the work camp?

A: They took us with the --

Q: In trucks, or how?

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A: No, military truck, they got benches on both sides and [indecipherable] out the -- make the [indecipherable] of it, and they -- they took us to that place, **Lienzingen**.

Q: And please describe **Lienzingen** to me.

A: **Lienzingen** was the first camp, and we worked, they took us several kil-kilometers, we had to walk to a place, a zoological garden. There was no animals, we were the animals actually, and we dug ditches. They measured up so many -- so many feet the lengths, so many feet the widths, and so many feet the depth. And you have to do it through -- through the day. Day in and day out, the same thing, may -- we dug those di-ditches. And it was terrible, very, very bad. And they told us, this is the last week, and we going to go to another place, going to be much nicer, the food will be better, everything will be better, and the -- we're going to go -- they're going to ship us to **Germany**. And I didn't like it, to go **Germany**, I didn't like it at all. So I didn't tell anybody in the camp, my friends, that I made up my mind I'm not going to go, I going to escape. Well, I mean -- and so --

Q: Um, before we get to that, let's talk a little bit more about the conditions in -- in **Lienzingen**. Did you sleep in a barracks?

A: Yeah, there was -- there wasn't a barracks yet, and it was like a -- like a -- like herrings, one on top, next to each other, th-the bunks, like, you know? And the -- and I mean, it was -- was very bad. And that's frightened, more than anything else, to go to **Germany**. I figure, well I was born in **Poland**, I might as well die there, I don't want

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to go to **Germany**. And th-they told us, this is the last week, and we're going to go away to **Germany**. I did make up my mind, I'm not going to go. And I did escape from the -- from the place I was working, and they knew right away that I escape, because you have to line up for a roll call, and they were looking for me, I no -- I knew that. And I took a chance, a big chance. I think my mind didn't work right, if anybody with -- with the right mind, will not do what I did to escape. And the reason for that is, some of them did escape, but they caught them in no time. And th -- when they caught them in a Mo-Monday or Tuesday, or a Thursday, or whatever day was, they put them -- th-they brought them back to their camp to wh-where he escaped, and Sunday they brought them out on roll call, everybody was there lined up. They brought them up, they brought a portable gallow, and he was hanged. So I knew what's going to happen when -- when they catch me. But I made up my mind, I -- I blanked out, you know, I didn't think about that, and I was lucky, very extremely lucky they didn't catch me. So I went from pillar to post, like the saying goes, knock on the door, beg for a piece of bread. Some -- some women, some people offered to give me a piece of bread, others slammed the door in my face. Get -- get the hell out of here, dirty Jew. They knew right -- right away I was Jewish. So after awhile, if I had somebody with me, I would probably wind out in the -- in the forest, but by myself didn't know where to go, how to go. So, I was -- and I knew at the college, there was -- there were Jews there, and there was a ghetto there, I knew that. So took me days, weeks, maybe several months,

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little by little I got into the city, to college, and little kids were playing [indecipherable] ball there, and I went and talked to them, and I said, I understand the Jews live here, they call it the ghetto or something, can you show me where it is? So one boy is pulling on the other, don't talk to him, th-the -- it's prohibit and you can't go there. You cannot go there, and the only -- the one of them said come, I'll show you. He went with me and from a distance I saw already th-th-the fence, you know. And -- and I went there, and -- and I was walking close by. And there was a gate there, the gate was open, the chain was hanging down, and the Germans, the Nazis were going back and forth. One was going this way, the other one was going this way, and they meet. And the -- and the gate was open [indecipherable] down, when there's s -- when they start talking, I crossed over and I smuggle myself in. They luckily didn't notice me. But who noticed me? The Jewish police. Wh-What th -- they have a black uniform with the nightstick, and armband, **dai politsi**, police, and that's all they had. So they grabbed me, and they start talking in Polish to me, what right do you have to -- to smuggle yourself into the ghetto, in Polish. I says -- and I talk back in Yiddish. And they couldn't believe, because oh, the kid was born probably amongst the Jews there, th-the -- ye -- you know, with Jew -- where a lot of Jewish live, and he picked up some Jewish, he is not Jewish. And I tried to talk to him, I'm Jewish, I'm Jewish, no, no. They took me in a room there and I said, I can tell you I'm Jewish because there come a transport from **Kalish** and there were some -- a couple of doctors there. Dr. **Cohen**

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was one of them. Then another one, but I couldn't -- I couldn't remember the other one, and they said to me [indecipherable] saying the other, well the kid is talking sense because they shipped out some people with the Dr. **Cohen**, somebody else, anyway. So they said, okay, what is your name? They wrote down the letters **Fievish Nicinski** and then they wrote in big letters too, your name is **Bahardian Elias**, born [indecipherable]. And I was the age -- they make the age like 27 years old. So -- so we g -- we going to check with you. We not tell you when, tomorrow, next day, whatever it is. You're not going to take out a piece of paper, you have to memorize the name in where was you -- where was you born. So I recognized that [indecipherable] that I had tried to memorize all this, and they took me in next day, what is your name? So I have to tell them **Bahardian** [indecipherable] this and that. And then I learned from the others, that the guy like this escaped. They didn't notify the -- the German authority, so they got a special ration of whatever the -- you know, bread and milk, whatever it was. They didn't -- they didn't tell the German that he escaped. So I took his name. And so from there, one fine night they circled the ghetto, **raus, raus, raus**, out, out, out. And they took us to another ghetto, **Lódz. Lithmanstadt**. They call it **Lódz, Lódz** ghetto. There I was, and I worked there, I worked there hard. There was a -- a press, I was ironing, ironing uniforms, **SS**, Gestapo uniforms. And they told me, you have to be extremely, extremely careful. Don't let any spot come out and make holes in it, because that's very dangerous. You -- you pay a big penalty for that. The

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irons weren't like it is here, electric. They were born -- burn -- burn wood, like, used to be, you know? And heated up the irons. And that's how it was. And from there they took me to a camp near **Skarzysko-Kamienna**. That was the biggest Polish ammunition factory.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Felix Nicinski**. This is tape number one, side **B**. Let's go back a little bit in time, back to **Lienzingen**, I'd like to get a little more information about that work camp. What was the place before it became a work camp?

A: I can't tell you, I don't know, it was empty when we got there.

Q: Were there men and women there?

A: I can't recall, it was just men, I remember that.

Q: And you said it was the ages of 14 to 18 that --

A: Something like that, yes, yes.

Q: And what other towns were the young men from, besides yours?

A: They were from different cities. I don't know what you -- but they all kind cities, you know, different cities. I don't know what -- a lot of them, you know, all around. They brought them to this camp. They moved you around continuously for some reason.

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Q: And how healthy were you at that time?

A: I was healthy, pretty healthy, yes.

Q: W-Were you a healthy child? Did you have any health problems growing up, before the war?

A: No, not really.

Q: So you were sturdy, a sturdy young man?

A: Yes, I would say that.

Q: Okay. And did you have any communication with your parents at that time, while you were in **Lienzingen**?

A: Never did.

Q: Wa -- once you said goodbye to them in the ghetto, you did not have any more communication?

A: No, that was it, never no -- not no more, no.

Q: Mm-hm. And did you have to wear a yellow star? Did you wear any kind of yellow badge, yellow star?

A: No. Not in camp.

Q: What -- did they give you a uniform?

A: Not in the beginning. It was still regular clothes.

Q: So you just had the clothes that you wore on your back, and had you brought other things to the camp?

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A: Yeah, I brought it tha -- but they took it away. I didn't have anything. Just wa-wh-
what you wore.

Q: And were -- were your barracks in a big building, or -- what was the set-up of it?

A: It was a big building, yes, yes.

Q: Now -- and you also said you were -- you were digging ditches?

A: Yeah, they we -- they took us -- th-th-they took us to -- to a zo-zo-zo -- zoological
garden. There was no animals there, but we dug ditches there. I don't know what for.
And when they told us that we going to leave, they going to sh-ship us to **Germany**,
that was it, I didn't want to go.

Q: Yeah, yeah. What was a typical day like there, at **Lienzingen**? When did you have
to get up, and so forth?

A: We have to get up early, five o'clock in the morning for roll call, then they took us
to work and we worked teen hours -- 18 hours or so, and that was it.

Q: What food did they give you before you left for work?

A: They gave you one slice of bread and coffee, they call it **ersatz** coffee, which mean
artificial coffee. It was black, but we -- we don't know what it -- what it was in it
anyway.

Q: And what about lunch?

A: Lunch they give you soup. That was it.

Q: And then you would -- did you march to the place of work?

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A: Yes, we walked there, yes. It was quite a dis -- a distance, yes.

Q: Were you allowed to talk to the other young men while you were marching?

A: No, no, no. We didn't talk to each other, no.

Q: And the guards were German guards?

A: All German guards, yes.

Q: A-Any Polish guards?

A: No, that was Germans at that time, yeah.

Q: And then, what about di -- and then you -- you finished work and came back, and did you have supper?

A: Yeah, we have supper. Another bi -- little bit of soup, and that's about it, not much.

Q: So what did the young mens -- your -- the people your age, what did you all talk about? Did you -- what kinds of things did you communicate with each other?

A: There was nothing to talk about, we were all hungry, starved to death almost, you know. In the beginning wasn't too bad, but after awhile yo-you felt it, and it was very, very bad.

Q: And did people talk about resistance there? Did the young men speak about acts of resistance?

A: No, not at that time, no. Not that I know of.

Q: Mm-hm. Besides that one young man who was caught, how many others tried to escape before you did?

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A: Well, this is a story that -- some of them did escape, but they didn't go too far. They caught them [indecipherable] th-they looked obvious, with the dogs, they had the -- they sniffed them out. I was just extremely lucky. And then, what's happened is that when they brought them in, like I told you, they -- they -- they -- on Sunday they brought them up and they -- they hanged them -- not only this, we were watching it, standing there in the roll call, you have to watch exactly, not look away one way or the other, left or right. They point out, if you look away, you'll be next. If you look one way or the other way, left or right. You had to look straight ahead, and they have a speech there. This is -- this is the -- th-the verdict for -- for e-escaping. That's how far you can go. This is it. You try to escape and that's what -- that what's going to happen to you. Then they put the fear o-over you, you know. But I did it, I -- I don't know, it - - it was difficult, but I da -- I didn't know what to do. Once I did I regret anyway because -- because I -- I -- I was talking to myself I shou -- maybe I should go back. And if I do go back, I'll be lucky enough to get in, they know I -- they knew already I was missing, so this certain death, that's for sure. So I couldn't go back in.

Q: No. What was the name of the young man they hung, do you know? The name of the young man that they brought to the gallows, do you know?

A: I don't know, I don't know his name, I don't know.

Q: How --

A: [indecipherable]

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Q: How soon after that did you decide to leave?

A: A few months after, I just didn't want to go to **Germany**, that's all. That upset me a lot. I didn't want to go.

Q: What do you attribute your strength to, to deciding to take this incredible chance? I mean, that took a lot of inner strength. H-Ho -- wh-what do you attribute that to?

A: I can't exactly explain that. I don't think I had a brain, if I did have, it's all blocked. I bra -- I didn't -- I didn't see the danger, somehow. I just was thinking I didn't want to go to **Germany**, and that was it. I didn't see the danger.

Q: Did you tell anybody you were going to do it?

A: Never said a word to anybody because I'm afraid if they opened their mouth, where are you going and this and that, somebody will listen to it. I -- it's going to be very bad for me. No, I didn't tell anybody, no.

Q: What were you wearing when you -- and what time of day was it when you left?

A: It was a -- in the beginning we start working, they measure out how many feet, how ma -- this and that, so I didn't do anything, I had mo-moved r-right away, in the morning.

Q: And you were just wearing regular clothes?

A: I ga -- at that time, regular clothes, yes.

Q: Yeah. And how long did it take for you til you -- til you came up to meeting that farm woman? How long did it take before you met the next person? How long were

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you by yourself in the escape?

A: I was by myself all the time. I didn't meet anybody. I was all by myself, then I decide to -- to smuggle myself in -- into -- into the ghetto, **Kalisz** ghetto.

Q: So, you -- you did not meet a Polish woman who gave you breakfast and clothes before that?

A: Yes, yes, I met some of -- they gave me clothes, they gave me food. But most often swing the door at my face. They wouldn't let me in, they wouldn't let me -- give anything.

Q: And then, did you get any rides with farmers, at all?

A: Yeah, I did, I get rides from farmers, yes. Yes, I did.

Q: What did you tell them, what was your story?

A: The story was I wanted to go to college, I don't have no money, could you please help me out, give me a ride, little bit. I'm only going so and so far. I say, oh that's good, I appreciate it anyway. So I went with him.

Q: So they thought you were a Polish --

A: Yes.

Q: -- teenager?

A: Yes, they did, yes.

Q: Now, when exactly was this, this was in 1941?

A: In '41 I was a -- yes, yes.

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Q: And -- and what -- approximately what month?

A: I don't know what month it was.

Q: What -- what was the weather like?

A: It wa -- it wasn't too bad. I-I don't know, it could be -- it could be summer, I don't know. Yes.

Q: So you were 16 years old?

A: About that, 15, ini -- yeah.

Q: Were you still strong? Was your body still strong?

A: Not as strong, no, I got weaker after awhile. Yo-You sleeping in -- in the outside, and -- and they didn't have where -- where to go, and -- no, it wasn't -- it wasn't pleasant at all, no.

Q: Did you eat any of the plants, or -- or -- what -- what were you eating to keep yourself going?

A: Well, I was begging and knocking doors, you know, and the Polish people give me some. Some of them didn't.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Then you talked about getting to **Kalisz**. Y-You've already talked about getting to **Kalisz** and proving that you were Jewish, and how you got that false identification.

A: Yeah, I told you that it -- I went already to **Skarzysko-Kamienna**, I told you that.

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Q: Right, right. But let's talk a little more about **Kalisz** before we do the next -- next location, about the conditions there, and where you were living, and so forth.

A: It wasn't bad at all, I got my room. The food wasn't too bad. It's a ghetto, it was nice, it wasn't too bad.

Q: And there was a fence around the ghetto?

A: Oh, it was a fence around the ghetto, yes, absolutely.

Q: Did you have your own room?

A: I had my own room, yes. But, with a family.

Q: You stayed with a family?

A: Yes.

Q: Who was the family?

A: A family I don't know, just -- just a family, you know, not my family, but was a family, you know? Yeah.

Q: And were they welcoming to you, or did they resent you?

A: They had no choice. They had no choice. They were asked to do it, and they had to do it.

Q: What were -- what was the state of mind of people in the ghetto at that time? What -- what did you sense? Do you remember what their thoughts were?

A: They were hoping that it'll change for the better, that's all. What can you do? You can do nothing. You cannot go in, you cannot go out. You have to stay there put.

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Q: And did you see a lot of children in the ghetto?

A: Yeah, there were some children there too, yes.

Q: And were they in good health?

A: Apparently they were in good health, the way it looked to me. I don't know.

Q: And again, the food situation?

A: The food wasn't too bad. It was okay.

Q: Th-They brought you fo -- you go -- got the food when you were living in your room in the -- in the house?

A: Yes, I did. Yes.

Q: Did you talk to a lot of different people?

A: I talked to people, and nobody knew what -- what tomorrow will bring.

Q: But people you said were still optimistic?

A: Yes, yes, they were, but always hope. Where life is, hope.

Q: Right. And how aware were you about what was happening in the rest of **Europe** at that time? Did you know anything that was going on in other places, or you only knew what was happening to you in where you were?

A: Only what's happen to me. I didn't know, th -- we didn't have no contact, nowhere.

Q: Any radios?

A: Oh no, radios? No, no.

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Q: And no newspapers?

A: No newspapers, no.

Q: So you had no idea?

A: No.

Q: Yeah. Did you try to get into communication with your parents at all?

A: Nothing can di -- di -- th-th-there's no place you can -- no, you couldn't do it. It's impossible. You had nowhere to write, how to write, where to write. Y-You couldn't do it. You have no paper, you had no pencil, nothing.

Q: Di-Did you miss them terribly? Did you miss them terribly?

A: Very much so. Always miss them, yeah.

Q: Were you able to -- di-did you say you had no pencil or paper? Were you able to write anything down?

A: Even if you do have, that wouldn't make any sense. They wouldn't let it -- they wouldn't let it -- mail you anything, nowhere.

Q: Well now, I meant writing down some of your thoughts, did -- were you aware of people doing that?

A: No, no, I don't remember that.

Q: Were there any deportations going on while you were there? Taking people away?

A: From where?

Q: From -- from **Kalisz**, from the ghetto where they --

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A: **Kalisz?**

Q: **Kalisz.**

A: Oh yes, well one -- like al -- one night th-they -- they took all of us to -- to **Lódz**,
Lódz ghetto.

Q: Yeah, but before that, while you were still in the ghetto, were there previous deportations, previous taking people away?

A: Oh sure, a lot of them, sure.

Q: And how did you know about that?

A: Because I a -- I ask him, is that all the ghetto here? No, they moved a lot of them, they shipped them someplace, they didn't know where. Moved them away from there.

Q: So you just knew that people left, you didn't know where -- where they were going.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. And there, in that particular ghetto, di-did young people talk to you about any forms of resistance?

A: No, not at that time, no.

Q: And -- and by that time you weren't thinking of resisting at all?

A: No.

Q: Were you there when some of -- they took some of the sick people to the forest and killed them? Wha -- that was in October 1940. Were you there at that time?

A: No, no.

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Q: And I also read that some of the Jews were forced to dismantle tombstones to make roads, and there th -- were you aware of that, either?

A: No, not while I was in camp, I didn't know that, no.

Q: Okay, so you were there in **Kalisz** and then you said you went to --

A: **Lódz**.

Q: -- **L-Lódz**. And how many people left with you?

A: The whole ghetto, everybody. They surround the whole ghetto, everybody went. They closed the ghetto up completely.

Q: So now the town was **Judenrein**?

A: Yes, absolutely. Nobody was there no more.

Q: And how did you get to the ghetto, **Lódz** ghetto.

A: By those military vehicles.

Q: And what were people saying? Do you remember, or -- or your other, you know, 16 - 17 year old boys, what were they saying about what was happening to you all, that you're forced to move?

A: Didn't say too much, we didn't know what to say. We were confused. They didn't tell us where we going, they didn't have to. Who are we?

Q: You were only 16 - 17 years old at the time. Did you feel much older than a typical 16 year old would feel?

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A: I don't remember. I don't know. I can't say anything, I don't know. I don't remember that, what I feel -- what I felt.

Q: All right. So then you get to the ghetto -- **Lódz** -- the **Lódz** ghetto, and let's talk like again a little bit more specifically about that, where -- where you lived.

A: Yeah, I lived in the ghetto, and I worked and I was ironing uniforms, like I mentioned earlier.

Q: Yeah.

A: And -- and from there they moved us to --

Q: Well, how long were you in the **Lódz** ghetto?

A: I don't know, about -- close to year maybe, something like that.

Q: And again your health, the condition of your health, how was that?

A: It wasn't too bad, it wasn't too bad.

Q: And -- and you -- you got enough food?

A: Well, about -- I don't know about enough, that was rationed, you know. But you survived. It wasn't too bad.

Q: Did you ever meet **Haim Rumkowski**?

A: I saw him many a times. Didn't talk to him, but I saw him many a times.

Q: And what was your impression of him?

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A: What was the impression? He was the -- the -- th-the -- the head of the Jewish ghetto. Nothing you can say [indecipherable] right, he was right there with the coach, with the horses, you know, like -- like he would be king. Nothing -- nothing to say.

Q: Di -- how did you know what work you were going to be -- what work you were assigned to do? Who told you?

A: Oh, they told us.

Q: Wh-Who is they?

A: Well, th-the -- th-they were -- I don't know who -- who they were, but that -- but that was from the high authority, you know, we need so many for this, so many people for that work, for that work, and I was assigned to -- to iron those -- those uniforms. Had to learn how to do that.

Q: Did you go -- ever go to the labor offices, or did they come to you? How did you know what you had to -- that you had to iron uniforms?

A: They notify you.

Q: How?

A: How? They -- they -- th-they come to -- to your door, sort of, you know, and they say you have to go so and so, took your name down. That what you had to do.

Q: These are other Jews coming to tell you this?

A: Yes, Jews, yeah, yes. Not Germans, Jews. Yeah.

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Q: And again, what was the overall feeling of the people you were with, was it optimism or pessimism?

A: The feeling wasn't good at all. We couldn't get in, we couldn't get out, the same st -- the same story, you know? And we hoped, you know, tomorrow will be better, we'll be liberated, we'll be free again, but it -- it didn't come, didn't happen.

Q: And what kind of work did other 16 year old boys do, besides what you did?

A: All kind of work, because **Lódz** was an industrial city, all kind of work, metalwork, carpentry. Mostly there was ammunition factories they put in there, and they work with ammunition like bullets, they make bullets for guns, o-or a-all kind of things like that for the war, war material.

Q: And -- and -- but you said you were pressing uniforms?

A: Yes. I was pressing uniforms, yes.

Q: Ho-How did that make you fe -- uniforms for the Germans? How did that make you feel, as a Jewish young man?

A: Didn't make me feel good, but y-yo-you don't look that way. You do what you have to do, what they ask you to do, you have no choice.

Q: And what was the talk there, in the -- in -- in the **Lódz** ghetto about resistance?

A: I didn't hear too much about that, I don't know. I didn't hear nothing about that. If it was it, I don't know, I don't know that. Didn't hear anything about that.

Q: An-And you did not think about yourself, for your own actions?

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A: No.

Q: You had already done your big act of resistance, yeah. And again, at that point, did people know -- this is a little bit later, of course, did people know what was happening -- again in -- in -- in **Europe**? What was happening to other Jews in other countries?

A: They knew a little bit about it, but not -- it wasn't advertised, nobody -- nobody read the paper what's going on this country or in that country, but we knew, any Jew, anywhere, they had no -- it -- it was not pleasant for them anyway, we knew that. But fo -- to any extent we didn't know how to do -- you know, what kind of **[indecipherable]** its bad, where.

Q: Did you work every single day, or did you ever have a day off?

A: Every single day, yes.

Q: So there was never a day that you did not work?

A: Well, one day, Sunday, we didn't work. Sunday, one day.

Q: And what did you do on Sunday?

A: Ah, do nothing. Relax a little bit. But you had to work hard, you know, you're tired. Six days a week, 10 hours a day, something like that.

Q: So when you would get together with other boys, other young men your age, 16 - 17 - 18, what would you all do? What would you talk about?

A: Well, we were hoping that soon the war will end and you will be free.

Q: Did you ever need any medical care while you were in **Lódz**?

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A: No, I didn't need anything right there, no.

Q: And the clothes that you had still held up after all this time, this is -- these are the clothes you brought from home?

A: Yeah, but you could -- you could change there, you could get something different. You could do that, if it tears up, you know, something like that, you can get it.

Q: Was there like a -- a clearinghouse for clothes?

A: Something like that, yeah, that -- they didn't charge you for that. You could get some clothes, yes.

Q: And did you have to wear any identifying marks showing that you were Jewish, on your clothing?

A: In the ghetto, yes, you have to wear a Star of **David**.

Q: This is in the **Lódz** ghetto?

A: Yeah, yeah, a Star of **David** on the -- on the left side, on the -- you have to wear that, yeah, Star of **David**.

Q: How did you put it on?

A: With the -- with the li -- cotton with the fi -- the corners there [**indecipherable**] a little bit and that's it.

Q: And how did that make you feel?

A: Well, that didn't feel -- not too good, but we have no choice, what can you do?

Q: Were you angry?

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A: Very angry, yes, but you couldn't do anything about it. You just do what they tell you to do.

Q: How did you live with that anger?

A: Well, with the hope that tomorrow would be better, that's all. Always hope and hope and hope.

Q: And did you have any co-contact with girls your age in the ghetto, 17 year old girls?

A: No, never, no.

Q: Were there youth groups, youth organizations?

A: No, not in ghetto. Not so I can -- no, not that I can remember, no.

Q: And -- and what -- you said you did see **Rumkowski** a lot, but you never talked to him, what were your -- what were your feelings about him? Did you admire him?

A: I can't recall what I admire, I might have seen him. Like I told you, he has the chauffeur -- not chauffeur. He has -- somebody was sitting in the coach there, with two horses, he was riding with that horse. He was -- he was allowed to go out in the ghetto, too, and come back. But didn't do me any good anyway.

Q: So you didn't -- di-did you have a feeling that people were very frightened, or just going -- living from day to day, which -- which mood were they in?

A: Yeah, they were very frightened, very frightened, yes. It got worse and worse and worse. You have to stand in line for a piece of bread and you have to pay for that. See,

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that was money, you have money there, the ghetto, with the bills, and of course you [indecipherable] and this is the money we paid. They gave us the money, so had -- you have to buy the bread with that money, and everything else. Had his own -- his own money, he had the money [indecipherable] bills there, yes. I wish I have it now, would be good. Worth a lot of money.

Q: And how did the German guards treat you?

A: Very, very badly. Very bad.

Q: What -- what did they do?

A: Well, they curse you, they beat you, th-th-they kick you. All kind of things, they call you names. Anything they possibly could to harm you.

Q: Did that happen to you specifically, were you beaten and kicked and so forth?

A: Yeah, I was beaten and kicked, yes.

Q: Why? Why did -- for what?

A: I can't tell you the reason why, because I'm Jewish, that's why.

Q: So it isn't that they said you did something specifically wrong, they just did it, they just came around while you were working?

A: Working, or not working, whatever they felt like it. To beat you, to kick you. They got -- th-th-they -- they got a -- a pleasure out of that, you know? They felt good when they kicked you and [indecipherable] you. They felt real good. They smiled, they laughed.

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Q: And -- and you do -- and obviously you can't fight back.

A: No, of course not. Of course not.

Q: And di-did that happen frequently?

A: Very much, often, sure. Very often.

Q: The entire time you were in the ghetto, were you -- you were pressing uniforms?

A: Yes, the whole time, yes, that was my job.

Q: And then, wa -- then what was your next -- next thing that happened to you from the ghetto?

A: Like I mention before, they took us to **Skarzysko-Kamienna**, which is the most -- the biggest ammunition factory in **Poland**. There were three -- three camps there, **A, B** and **C**, but anyway -- and I was there for a few months. Then they send me --

Q: Ho-Ho-How -- how -- how many people left the **Lódz** ghetto with you to go there?

A: I don't know how many. I don't know how many. A few hundred. No, not all.

Some of them still left, they were liberated there, too, but it's not like the **Kalisz** ghetto, only some, because a lot of people there in the ghetto. Was a big pl -- you know, the **Lódz** ghetto was -- there were ca -- a lot of Jews there.

Q: An-And did they tell you where they were taking you when you l -- were l-leaving the **Lódz** ghetto?

A: No, they didn't have to tell where we were.

Q: Was it yo-young men like you in the group? Is that who the group was made up of?

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A: Yeah, they -- that was mixed at that time, the **Lódz** ghetto discuss -- it was **Skarzysko**, they took us another camp named **Wartawerk**, also three camps there, and that well -- I was working on ammunition, I was producing bullets, if you will, for guns o-or pistols. And that was hard work, because their machine, they have to t-teach us if the machine stops to know how to fix it and took a long time to learn it, and if -- and if you don't, how dumb you are, [**indecipherable**] they curse you, they kick you. And we had to learn, and I did. And that was the last camp, those three camps in **Poland**. Then they shipped us to **Germany**.

Q: All right, before we get to **Germany**, you said you were in **Wartawerk**, that wa --

A: **Wartawerk** --

Q: Okay.

A: **Wartawerk**.

Q: Okay, was that in the town of **Warta**?

A: The outskirts of **Czestochowa**, a big city.

Q: So it ha -- didn't have anything to do with the town of **Warta**?

A: No, no, no, that was just camps, there are three camps around there, you know.

Q: Mm-hm.

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Felix Nicinski**, and this is tape number t-two, side **A**. And you had talked before about being in the ghetto, the **Lódz** ghetto, and then leaving that to go to **Skarzysko-Kamienna** and what were the conditions there like?

A: Very, very bad. The -- it was very hard work, working in ammunition factories, you know, you have to produce. And they -- and they stay right behind you, and they look at you, y -- and they -- you know, and you have to work hard, very, very hard, I cannot explain to you. It was very d -- very difficult.

Q: When you say they, do you mean Germans, or Poles, or Jews?

A: The Germans. The Germans would stand there and watching you.

Q: These are Germans in army uniforms?

A: Germans in army uniform, yes.

Q: And what was a typical day like in that particular camp?

A: Well, we got up in the morning, roll call. They gave a little piece of bread, and a little ersa -- **ersatz café**, a-artificial coffee, and you had to work 10 hours a day. That was the -- every day the same, didn't change any, didn't get no better.

Q: Did you get to know the young men your age better? Did you get to know the other y-young prisoners your age? Did you feel like you got to be friends with them?

A: Yeah, we talked to each other. There nothing to talk, but we talked, yeah.

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Q: Did you have any particular close friend, one or two close friends?

A: Yeah, we were all close, we talked to each other.

Q: But were -- w-was there any p -- one that you were particularly close to?

A: No, no, no. Everybody got his own misery and there wasn't too much, too much to talk. Just hope for the best.

Q: What other towns did the other young men come from?

A: All around different cities, I don't know, all kind of cities. They moved you around, that's the whole thing, they moved you all the times.

Q: How long did you stay in **Skarzysko-Kamienna**?

A: Probably about six months or so.

Q: And from there?

A: From there we went to **Wartawerk**. It's a place near **Czestochowa**, around **Czestochowa**.

Q: And -- and it was named because there's a river there?

A: At the **Warta**, yeah, the -- that -- the **Warta** river, it's a very narrow str -- strip of the river goes by there, that was called **Wartawerk**.

Q: And were there other camps nearby?

A: Yes, there were two other camps, **Wartawerk** and **Hazak**.

Q: Okay, and let's talk about your -- what -- what happened in **Wartawerk**.

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A: **Wartawerk** worked on ammunition, was in -- produced bullets for guns and -- and pistols. And it was very, very hard work.

Q: And did you -- did you go into the town of **Czestochowa**? You said it was near **Czestochowa**.

A: You never, never di -- no, that was a camp, you couldn't get anywhere out. You not supposed to, you couldn't anyway. That was a camp.

Q: And again, were you just wearing your street clothes?

A: No, that was already stripes and everything there.

Q: So that was the first camp that you had to wear stripes?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And how did that affect you?

A: Well, what hi -- choice did we have? We didn't like it, we had to wear it.

Q: Did you have a Jewish star on your striped uniform?

A: No, no, I don't remember that.

Q: And the food situation?

A: The food wasn't good, no. Very little food, always hungry.

Q: Did you see any townspeople? Did any of them come by? Any people -- local Polish people, did any of them walk by? Did you ever see any of them?

A: No, that was a ghet -- th-th-that was a camp, nobody go -- could come in or out. That was a fenced off -- th-that was a camp.

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Q: I was thinking over the fence, or [indecipherable]

A: No, nothing like that, no, no.

Q: And again, in -- in -- in that labor camp, was there talk of resistance?

A: I didn't hear anything like that, but I -- no.

Q: And so you just kept going along with what was happening?

A: Exactly, that's what's happened, yeah, had to, had to go along just the way it was. I couldn't do anything.

Q: What did you think was happening to your parents and your brother?

A: I was hoping they were still there and I will see them after the war, af-aft --

Q: You were hoping they were still in -- in the yer -- your hometown?

A: I did, yes.

Q: Do you think that that's what kept you going?

A: I guess that what kept me going, yes, hope.

Q: And again, a typical day in -- in **Wartawerk**, was the same as in the previous camps?

A: Yes, it was hard, very hard work for very little food, and was living with hope that tomorrow will be better, but never -- the day never came.

Q: Was your place of work near where you were living? Did you have to walk a lot or did you -- was the munitions factory nearby?

A: No, it was -- it -- it was -- it was right there, in the camp.

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Q: What were the sanitary conditions like there?

A: Well, it -- it -- you couldn't take a bath or a shower any time soon. Have to splash yourself a little bit once a week, it would be lucky if you can do that.

Q: And were people coming in and out of **Wartawerk**, or were -- were there -- were they taking people away, or -- or -- while you were there, or did everybody just stay?

A: I don't recall th -- I remember one time that they going to ship us to **Germany**, and they did, hundreds of them went to **Germany**, and that was wind up in **Dora**.

Q: Is this the time that you went?

A: Yes.

Q: So when was that?

A: That was the end of '43, I think, something like that.

Q: All right, now how -- again, how did you know you were going to be leaving **Wartawerk**?

A: I didn't know. One fine day they said we going, and we going. They didn't tell us where, and that's where I wind up. We went from -- from **Wartawerk**, went to **Germany**.

Q: How did you get there?

A: Ah, how we get there? I can't recall exactly, was it by train? Could be by train, I don't remember now exactly. Or ba -- by -- b-by -- by military vehicles, I'm not sure now. It's been a long time, I can't recall that.

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Q: Right.

A: But wind up in dar -- in -- in **Dora**.

Q: Now, you did not want to go to **Germany** before.

A: No.

Q: Right. And that's why you escaped. So what were your thoughts now here, that you were going to **Germany**?

A: Oh, I had no choice. I had a taste of it, how miserable I was. I couldn't find anyone walking by myself for weeks and several months. And at least we're going together with -- with other Jewish boys, I figure well, whatever would happen to them, it'll happen to me.

Q: So you then arrive in -- in **Dora**.

A: Yeah.

Q: And -- and what will you do, what were you working at there?

A: In **Dora** it was -- that was the forest -- the forest camp already. And that was -- happened to be the worst one of all, so far. I was working outside, loading the ready material what came out from the bunker, and also unloading the raw material what came in. And the sirens start blowing the [indecipherable] the siren, and they said no matter what you're doing, drop everything, and if you hear that, run into the bunker as fast as you possibly can. So it happen, you know, we hear the siren blowing, and we run into i -- into the bunker and in groups, the Polish groups here, Hungarian groups a

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different place, Romanian, Czechs and so on. And we talk quiet in the Polish so wouldn't understand. And we could hear a little bit that they bomb above us. And was all over, **raus, raus**, out, out, out, went out, and we were disappointed. Were so disappointed maybe next time God will help, it'll penetrate and -- and we'll all get killed, because it was miserable, we couldn't take it no more. Well, another time came and was the same thing, and we were disappointed. And finally they say, well, this is the last week you're going to work here, they're going to go to another place, it's going to be much better. So we say, well, you see, he said **[indecipherable]** he said there's no God, oh there's God, oh glory halleluiah, there's a God after all, we hug each other. The name didn't mean anything, really. So from **Dora**, we went to a place named **Buchenwald**.

Q: Before -- yeah, w-we'll talk about **Buchen-Buchenwald** in a minute. Yo-You were willing to get killed in **Dora** in the bombing raid?

A: Yeah, we were hoping that that -- that will happen.

Q: Why?

A: Because get out the misery, you know, it was terrible.

Q: W-Was this -- were they starting to make the **V2** bombers at that time?

A: Well, they produce the **V2** rockets, which they sent to **England**, they bombed **England, London**, that was the **V2** rockets.

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Q: Now, when you said you were into the bunkers, was that the tunnels that they had at **Dora**?

A: It's exactly the tunnel, where the machinery were and they were all working there inside. That was in the tunnel. We have to go in there when they ha -- when we heard the siren blowing, you know, we have to go in there. That's where we went.

Q: But your work was always outside?

A: Mine was always outside, happened to be, yes.

Q: Because I understand that the people who worked inside couldn't get outside.

A: No, no, they have to be inside, no.

Q: And did they give you enough food?

A: No, very little food. Food wasn't very much at all. Lot of people think because it was a labor camp they gave you more. If they did, I didn't noticed it.

Q: And again, was it just coffee and soup and bread?

A: Yeah, the same thing, yeah. Didn't change much from one camp to the other.

Q: Ho -- were you very, very thin by that point?

A: Yes, I lost weight continuously, all the time, sure.

Q: **[indecipherable]** your health at that point?

A: The health wasn't too bad, just weak, hungry all the time, dirty.

Q: S-So, when you were in **Dora**, did you have any hope left?

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A: Very little, we were disappointed. We were disappointed that, you know, they don't do anything -- a better job than that, than -- they have a heavier bomb, a better bomb to penetrate. They didn't have it at that time. We were disappointed.

Q: Did you know where the **V2** rockets were going to be sent?

A: No, no idea.

Q: Mm-hm. So you -- you stayed in d -- in **Dora** for how long?

A: Oh, quite a few months, I don't know exactly how long, but quite a few months.

Then we went to, of course, the **Buchenwald**.

Q: Did you know what **Buchenwald** was before you went?

A: No, just the name. The same like **Auschwitz**. Was a city, nobody knew anything about **Auschwitz**.

Q: And how many were in your group when you left from **Dora** to **Buchenwald**?

A: I have no idea, whole bunch of us, I don't know. I don't know how many.

Q: And wher -- and where did you think, or -- where did you think you would be going?

A: They didn't tell us. They just move me -- or moved us, we were leaving, and the place was **Buchenwald**. It wasn't too far from **Dora**. The outskirts of **Dora**, not too far, actually.

Q: And when you got there, what did you see?

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A: In **Buchenwald**? We saw misery. In **Buchenwald** it was -- it was a big camp, it was over 80,000 people there. There were boys and girls there, in **Buchenwald**. That was a huge camp.

Q: And where did they put you?

A: In barracks, like those -- those bunks, you know, like -- like sardines, one next to another. And it was -- it wasn't very pleasant at all. The worst of all was the lice. You have so much lice they eat you up alive. You scratch and they nest there, and you scratch more. You couldn't ask -- you couldn't tell a doctor or anybody like this that you got hurt, or hurt you or something. You di -- can't open your mouth and saying anything like that. Once you say you si -- you sick, you're going.

Q: Did you -- wa -- wer-were there lice in the other places that you had been?

A: All of them, plenty. Sunday we took out the blanket, put them in the snow, wintertime. You picked them out, there was a perfect square, all dark, with hundreds and thousands pounds of lice. But the couple, two or three days after, they come back, because they -- they -- there -- there was some eggs still there, and they -- you know, they -- they want a body, they come back. Oh yes.

Q: So you never went to s -- a so-called infirmary?

A: No.

Q: A-And you said you had lice on your body?

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A: Yes, everywhere. Whole clothes, everything was soaked with sa -- with the -- with lice. They eat you up alive, they really did.

Q: What kind of work did you do in **Buchenwald**, or did you do any work?

A: In **Buchenwald** didn't do anything. I don't remember doing anything in **Buchenwald**.

Q: So you just sat, during the day?

A: Do -- doing nothing, just sit there and do nothing. I didn't do anything, I don't remember that.

Q: And again, what were your thoughts when you would see German soldiers? What thoughts would be going through your mind when you would see German soldiers, anything?

A: You was terrified. You see a new uniform, that -- it was very, very upsetting.

Q: Did they ever talk to you?

A: They talk, not a nice way. They curse you. They damn you all the time, no matter what. You never do anything right. No matter what you do, it's still not right.

Q: Did you try to make any attempts to escape from **Buchenwald**?

A: No, not in **Germany**, no.

Q: Because?

A: Well, it was a foreign land. I just wanted to stay in **Poland**. Didn't work, so -- oh no, I wasn't going to do that, no. Not in -- not in **Germany**.

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Q: And again, when you -- were there any people with you, any young men with you who had come all of the -- i-in the different camps with you, the same person whether -- were -- were there a group of people that stayed with you through all the different camps, or was it every time you went to a different camp there were new people?

A: Very few. Some of them did, but not that many, but they moved you around, they split you up, you know. You never knew -- no-not too many from my city. I can count the -- you know, they were with me.

Q: Were you an especially close group, those of you from your city?

A: A close group, sure, yes.

Q: W-Were you a support to each other, do you feel that that helped you?

A: Well we were talking maybe tomorrow we were better, we hope we'll be liberated. We knew it -- it's not good, but we hoped tomorrow will be better, that's it.

Q: And so you were in **Buchenwald** for how long?

A: I don't know. I don't know, six months, eight, something like that, I don't know.

And then we went to another camp.

Q: So for six months you just sat around?

A: I don't remember doing anything in **Buchenwald**, no.

Q: And then they told you you'd be leaving?

A: Well, they didn't tell us, th-they took us one da -- one fine day to another camp.

Q: And where was that?

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A: That was the last camp, the third camp in **Germany**, that was **Bergen-Belsen**, and that's where we were -- we were liberated by the British at that -- the British liberated **Bergen-Belsen**. And three days prior to the liberation, they almost killed me. It was very close. It happened on a Sunday. I went down the basement, there we take -- you know, splash up the face with a little water sometime. And I come up with the -- with a can that -- a rusty can that I had -- I find there, and -- it's water. Sure enough a German standing above, and I'm coming up the steps. **[speaks German here]** Wh-Where were you? Like he couldn't see, he wasn't blind. I said, well I -- I went downstairs to get mi -- water. My hands were shaking and I was spilling the water a little bit, and I knew it's going to be a lot of trouble there. And sure enough, I c -- I get up closer, closer up. He took out the -- the baton, th-the one he had the -- on the side there, the stick. But that was different one, they made it with lead inside it, it's -- every time he hits you, it break your bone. And **[indecipherable]** it over the head, and split my head there, and I falls, luckily, I fall forward and not back, because back is further you fell, you -- you wouldn't be here to tell the story. But I fell forward and I hit the edge and I -- and I couldn't get up, of course, I was bleeding all over. And I was told that the -- the f -- the -- the -- the -- the friends, the one I was sl -- they were sleeping next to each other, they -- they saw me there and they -- they dragged me into my -- into -- into the barrack, in the bunk there, and -- and I was unconscious. I was un -- three -- three days I didn't go to pick up my bread there, nothing like that, I couldn't, I couldn't, I was all

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black and blue and the nose was broken. So anyway they -- when they come there, the British liberated **Bergen-Belsen**, they took me the portable ambulance, if you will. And they did the best they could, they fix my nose. But they didn't put it right back, it's a little bit off [indecipherable] straight, it's a little bit off. And it can be seen or felt if someone touches. And that was -- that was the closest one I ever come to -- to die. And -- an-and -- and that was it. So I was liberated, and then -- then I have a couple of cousins, I da -- wasn't with them in same camp. They were liberated by the Americans, and --

Q: Were -- you s -- you said that your cousins were in your -- in the same camp? Did you say that?

A: No, no, I -- in a different camp.

Q: Oh, in a different --

A: They were liberated by the Americans.

Q: -- different camp. B-Before we get to the lib -- the liberation, again, let's just talk a little more about **Bergen-Belsen**, did you work there?

A: No. No, not in **Bergen-Belsen**.

Q: So again, you just sat.

A: Yes. I sat there, yes, that's all, mm-hm.

Q: And I know you had described very movingly, in detail about, in the very beginning of your story, about the young man who tried to escape and was taken to the

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gallows. You obviously had seen a lot of people, dead people in those years since then.

Wha -- wha -- how did you -- did you ever get accustomed to seeing dead people?

A: You never get accustomed, you see there was every single night people die there.

Every single -- never miss one single night and nobody would die, some people died.

There were 10 - 15 - 20, even in -- in **Buchenwald**, it was recorded in 24 hours, 72

death. So had to take the -- the clothes off, drag them out there, put them -- put them

outside, and then they come with the wagon, which we have to pull it, and others will

put -- put them on the wagons like -- like sticks, you know, they look like sticks, and

move them away. Every single day, every single day, never miss a day. There was

none on -- any corpses outside. You have to put them outside. Take the clothes off,

and put them outside.

Q: What does that do to a 18 - 19 - 20 year old to have to do that?

A: It doesn't look good at all, we don't feel good. We feel well, today is them,

tomorrow i -- it would be me, maybe. That's how they feel.

Q: Was there a feeling of sadness that you had, or was it fear? What -- what do you

think your emotions are when you were forced to see this?

A: Well, it was fear and sadness, both. Yeah.

Q: And was there any intermingling with women in **Bergen-Belsen**?

A: No, there was th -- chicken wire was dividing up, that was the women with the

men. There were nothing common, there's nothing to talk. They were -- they walked

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in their misery, we have our misery [indecipherable] no. There was nothing to talk about.

Q: So in all of those years, once you went -- started going to the labor camps and then to [indecipherable]

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- an-an-and **Bergen-Belsen**, you -- you really had no contact with girls or women?

A: No, I never did, no, no.

Q: And for a young man at that age, that must have been difficult. Or was it not on your mind?

A: No, that wasn't on my mind at all, because we have problems.

Q: You didn't have the luxury of thinking about that. When the -- tell me about the liberation, what -- what was it like? I know you were sick, you said, but did you understand what was happening when the British soldiers came? Did you know what was happening?

A: I understood what's happened because they -- they took all the wires down, and -- and th -- and they buried the corpses in -- in -- in the right place the way it should be buried, no-not mass graves. And it was -- it -- it was different ball game altogether.

And even after the war -- after the liberation, that is, a lot of -- lot of people died there, by the hundreds and thousands because they're not used to eat. The stomach -- there wasn't much of a stomach, it's all shrunk, then they tried to expand, and they with all

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kinds of diseases and sicknesses, you know, and they couldn't take it. So a lot of them died. They have all kind diarrheas, and stuff like that. You couldn't go to the bathroom because there's only one bathroom an-and 50 or 100 - 200 people wanted to go. So the-they built something the outside, li-like a -- a -- you know, and people go there, outside. Like -- like trenches with -- I don't know. Anyway, it wasn't very nice, and so after that, like I mentioned, I had the couple of cousins there who were liberated by the -- by the Americans. They couldn't go to every camp, but in the gip -- in the big camps they did go and looked up names. But after the war you -- you can get your own name, you didn't have any more a number.

Q: What -- what was your -- you were given a number? What was your number?

A: I can't remember now, but I got there about six, seven numbers there. I don't remember that, I don't look at that.

Q: I-In what camp were you given the number? Was it in **Germany** or in **Poland**?

A: That was in **Germany**, I think. Yes, anyway, so i -- th -- my -- my two cousins, my mitha -- my mother and their father were sister brother, so that makes it -- make us first cousins. So they come and -- and a f-few of th -- few of those big camps like **Buchenwald** and they come to **Bergen-Belsen**, look up my name, oh they saw me there [indecipherable] you know and he said, well, what do you have to lose here, let's go in the medical zone. And I already find mine Aunt **Rifka**. Nothing do with -- with me, she not relati -- she not related to me at all. **Rifka** is my cousin's mother's

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sister. So nothing to me. She's already there, but I knew her from -- from the ghetto.

So we went to -- in the American zone, and we stayed there in a place named

Bamberg, not too far from **Nuremberg** where those -- those criminals were jud -- you know, judged. And we stayed there and then they wanted to come to **America**, and I didn't feel like I wanted to come to **America**. It's -- something was bothering me.

What it was is, I want to go as far as I possibly can, I don't have no -- no borders.

Although it's a friendly border here with **Canada**, but th-the borders upset me in

Poland. There was Russians, there were the Germans, none of them were good for the Jews. So they went to **America** and I went a different direction altogether. I went to **Australia**. And --

Q: Right, right. We'll talk about **Australia** in a minute. Di -- whe-when the British came to you in -- in **Bergen-Belsen** for -- at liberation, di-did you feel a sense of freedom at that point? What -- what -- what was it?

A: I felt a sense of freedom cause I knew I was liberated. And th-the loudspeaker loudly was speaking every language there. You could understand that the food is on the way, and the help is on the way. And -- and we feel good, because the wires came down. Oh, that's okay. Th-The wire -- the wires came down and -- and we --we knew we were liberated, and that was it.

Q: What were your feel -- I mean, in all these years of being a prisoner, and now you're liberated.

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A: You had a good feeling when you were liberated, then the -- the -- another thing was hope that my mother and father will be still alive, and the -- the rest of the family, but --

Q: Did you consider going back to your hometown?

A: I never did.

Q: Because?

A: I didn't want to go back because I had the [indecipherable] a gut feeling I had that I'll -- I'll find nobody there. I di -- I didn't want to go. But my cousins did. They -- they -- they encourage me to go and I said no, I don't want to go to **Poland** back there, no. So they went and they went to their city, nobody there. They went to my little city where I was born, and there was nobody left there either. See, what they did is they took the people out, the men, to the cemetery, and they dug a -- a trench there, didn't know what for. And then after they finish, they took all the rest of th -- of the people out there and shoot them and bulldozed them down.

Q: And do you think that's what happened to your parents?

A: I guess. That's all I can guess, I don't know.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Felix Nicinski**. This is tape number two, side **B**. And you

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were saying before that after liberation you did not want to go back to your town, but your cousins did, and there was no one there, and you heard what had happened to your family. So then your f -- and then your -- you said also before that you didn't want to go to a place where there were borders, and that's why you decided to go to **Australia**?

A: Yeah, that's true, I didn't want to have -- if that's what you call civilization, **Europe**, that's -- I have enough of that. So I wanted to go away as far as I possibly can. That's how I wind up in **Australia**. I was there for some 10 years.

Q: Okay, but where -- where were you before then? After the liberation and before you went to **Australia**. Where were you living?

A: In a place named **Bamberg** in **Germany**, not far from **Nuremberg**.

Q: Right, right, right, and what -- was that a displaced person's camp?

A: No, I didn't have to -- I didn't go to a camp. I have enough camps for five years. I went private, only private, in a home, with Germans. With Germans.

Q: Okay, you spoke German by that point?

A: I spoke German very well, yes, even before.

Q: How did you learn it?

A: I had to learn. Ma -- Yiddish is not that difficult, to learn German.

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Q: And so you -- you're in this town, you're 20 years old, in 1945, is that correct?

You're 20? You were born in 1925. And what did -- what -- what did you do and who were you living with?

A: In **Germany** I lived by myself and I got from the -- from the **UNRRA** they call it, they give you a little money and you survived.

Q: An-And did you work?

A: No, not in **Germany**. Didn't work in **Germany**, no, not after the war.

Q: And how lo -- how long did you stay there in **Bamberg**?

A: I stayed there til '48.

Q: So for three years you -- you just did nothing.

A: No, nothing, three years, no.

Q: And wh-what about other survivors, were -- were you living with a lot of other survivors?

A: I met a friend after the war, he was live in the same city, so we were close friends, and that's about all.

Q: This was a friend from home?

A: No, not from my home. From **Poland**, but not -- no, I met him after the war.

Q: And so for three years you -- what did you do to pass the time away?

A: Nothing. Recuperate.

Q: What was your health like after the war?

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A: It wasn't too bad, I wasn't -- I wasn't very sick, except operation what they did on my nose. But other than that I didn't feel too bad.

Q: And you were supported by **UNRRA** you said, for food and rent and clothing.

A: Yes, yes. Yeah, we have enough of that, too.

Q: And were there a lot of other young men in your position, doing the same thing?

A: Yes, quite a few, quite a few, yes.

Q: And did you all get together frequently?

A: Not often, but we got together, yes.

Q: And t-tell me about making arrangements to go to **Australia**.

A: We have to go to the -- to the embassy, you have to put your name down, you have to wait for the court, you know, you have to wait til they call you. And they did, and I went.

Q: And when did you apply to go to **Australia**? When did you first make your application?

A: It took a couple of years, I think. Something like that.

Q: It took a couple of years from the time that you applied until you got -- yeah, the permission.

A: Yeah, that -- that was **England**, the-they didn't want too many Jews to -- to go to **Australia** for some reason, that's why it took so long.

Q: Did you know any English at that point?

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A: No, not at all.

Q: And that didn't disturb you, knowing that you were going to a country th-that had a language you didn't understand?

A: No, it didn't bother me, I knew I'm going to learn, I'm young, I could -- I could learn, and I did.

Q: And -- and how did you get to **Australia**? Who made those arrangements, the -- the boat? Ho-How did you -- who made the arrangements for you to go to **Australia** when your number finally came up?

A: That was the -- the -- the Australians, the Australian embassy. They -- they arranged that, and have to sign it, wherever they send me to work, I'd be willing to do it. And that's what it -- I went by -- went by -- by boat. By ship, yeah.

Q: What was the name of the boat?

A: [indecipherable] It's a Swedish ship.

Q: And what was your feeling when you s-stepped off your -- the land of **Europe**? The continent of **Europe**.

A: Yeah, I felt good. Leaving **Europe** was -- was fine, I -- I -- I liked it. If I don't see **E-Europe** again would be just good -- okay with me too. I have enough of **Europe** for awhile.

Q: And what was the voyage like? Who else was on the boat with you?

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A: The voyage was very nice, it was very good, and we arrived in **Australia**, you know, in that -- they put us in the camp for a little while.

Q: W-Were there many others like you, doing the same thing?

A: Yeah, a few of them, a few Jewish people. Most they were Gentile boys. Not many Jews, a few of them, not many, no.

Q: When you say Gentile boys, you mean Gentile German boys, or --

A: No, no, no, not Germans. Hungarian, Romanians, you know, stuff like that. That kind.

Q: Yeah. Had they been war victims and they wanted to leave **Europe**, too?

A: They were victims too, but they chose to go to **Australia** for some reason. I -- I chose for a different reason, yeah.

Q: So are you -- you arrived in **Australia**, and --

A: Yes. And I was in a camp there, and every Saturday night there was some kind of a pre -- a performance, like a concert sometimes, and acting. And that was free. So, what's happened is, an Australian couple was sitting next to me, and I couldn't -- I couldn't understand, th-they couldn't -- they couldn't understand what I am saying, but nevertheless, we [indecipherable] they gave me the telephone number to call, and I went there and have supper, they call it tea, actually, in **England** they call it for tea, but that's supper. And I learned a little bit that. Anyway, finally they told me to come

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to live with them, and I did. And they treat me very, very well. They were not Jewish people. They were Australian people and --

Q: What city was this in?

A: That was a -- city was **Adelaide**, south **Australia**. And I stayed there all the time til I came here to the **United States**, they treat me very well, and --

Q: Did you work in **Australia**?

A: Oh yes, I work. I was a barber, cutting hair, a barber. And --

Q: How did you get the training?

A: I learned it in **Germany**. Had to have something, you know, I haven't got anybody to fall back on, you know? Have to learn a trade in **Germany**. In **Germany** I learned.

Q: You mean after the war?

A: Aft -- of course. After the war, of course after the war.

Q: So you said you didn't do anything --

A: Well --

Q: -- for -- for those years, but you did.

A: I -- I wa -- I had the impression to make -- making money, to work something -- no, no, not like that, no, I had to learn something, sure. And when I went to **Australia** to those people there, they treat me very well, she is [indecipherable] days, she said -- there was a boy and a girl there, they have. The boy was the older one, the girl was the

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younger one. They say if -- if -- if **Felix** -- you don't like what **Felix** is doing something, never open your mouth. Come to me and I straighten up, you know? It is --

Q: What were the names -- what were the names of the family?

A: What's that --

Q: What's the name of the fa -- the Australian family?

A: **Harrison.**

Q: Their first names?

A: The first name was -- h-her n -- her name was --

Q: Okay, we'll come back to it, that's not -- that's okay. So you went -- how did you learn to be a barber in -- in **Germany**? Were there classes, and who gave the classes?

A: Yeah, there was a school. I went to school there, and you know, I do what they have to do, what they tell me to do and I -- I pass that. When I went to **Australia**, I ga -- had to go another one there, too, to th -- another test. Not in school, but the test, and I passed it. And I had my -- my license, and I worked there.

Q: Was it hard for you to learn English?

A: Not that difficult. When you're young you can pick it up, particularly when you live with people, you know, you get -- you hear the same language all day

[indecipherable] you have no choice, you had to learn. That wasn't too bad, no, no.

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Q: Were -- were -- I'm curious to go back to when you learned this t -- this skill of barbering. Wa-Was it done for refugees or former s-survivors? Was it done by the Joint Distribution Committee, or -- who did it?

A: That was for anybody, like a school here, you had to go and learn.

Q: So it was just a regular German school of barbering?

A: Regular school with German, yes, yes.

Q: Okay. Okay. So you were in **Australia**, and you were -- did you work in a barber shop?

A: I work in a barber shop, yeah. It -- not my own, but I work for somebody, yes.

Q: And how long did you stay in **Australia**?

A: 10 years. I come in '58 here.

Q: And did you always -- during those 10 years did you stay with the family the whole time?

A: Yes, I was barber all the time, yes.

Q: No, did you stay with the **Harrison** family the whole time?

A: I stayed with them all the time there. Not quite 10, but a little bit I was in the camp there to begin with, but I was there nine years, I was with them.

Q: You lived in their home?

A: Yes. In their home, yes.

Q: What -- what do you think inspired them to take you in?

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A: I can't tell you why because th-they asked me I had parents, I told them, you know, I was in camp. And they weren't Jewish, I was surprised they -- they took me in, you know. I think they have feelings, you know.

Q: Hm. Were there any other Jewish families in **Adelaide** that you met -- **Adelaide**?

A: Yeah, there -- there were other people there in **Adelaide**, yes. There were other people there too, yes.

Q: And did you -- were you in contact with the Jewish community of **Adelaide**?

A: Yes, I went to shul there, it was a shul there, yes, oh yes, went there. I met Australian Jewish people there, and we in contact, very close contact. We play cards together. They invites me -- you know, t -- invited to play cards. We have supper together. It was nice.

Q: And were they understanding and want to hear what -- to listen to you and did you talk about what your experiences were during the war, to them?

A: Yeah, they ask me and I told them, like I tell you here. I told them everything, yeah.

Q: Were you in contact with other refugees from the war in **Adelaide**? Were there other refugees from the war like you were?

A: There were some there, yes, but I didn't know, I just met them there, in **Adelaide**.

Q: And did you all stick together, since you had been through the same experience?

A: Some would, not that much, because th -- I was with the family, you know, more th-than anybody else.

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Q: Why did you decide to leave **Australia**?

A: Well, first off, I had a couple of cousins here, they say well, why you so -- being so far away, we have no -- not much of families, not bad here, this and that. And I had a friend I met there too, after the war, and he was a barber and he came here first. So he was going to **America** and I went to **Australia**, but we contact each other. When I came here I work for him for a little bit, for about three years, then I got my own shop after that.

Q: Was it hard to get a visa, or to get permission to come to live in the **United States**?

A: I don't think it was difficult, no. To come here wasn't -- wasn't difficult. To go to **Australia** was difficult, but here, no.

Q: So once you made your mind up to go to **Australia**, it was very easy to make the arrangements?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: To come to the **United States**?

A: Yes, mm-hm.

Q: And where di -- an-and what was the **Harrison's** reaction that you were leaving?

A: Well, di -- we were corresponding, and the mother correspond every -- I never send them for their birthdays, but she send every birthday, never missed. But she passed away, then the daughter took over. And she writes now, and every birthday I got a card, for [indecipherable] to send me a card. Not -- not our [indecipherable] but their

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[indecipherable] but whatever, it's okay. But I -- they haven't forgotten me, no. She was here, too, to visit, too, with the ma -- husband.

Q: This is the daughter that --

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: And what is her name?

A: **Jen -- Jane Harrison.** The mother was **Silma, Silma Harrison.**

Q: And the fa -- do you remember the father's name? Do you remember the father's name?

A: No, the father was yo -- yo -- he died when -- when I -- when I -- he wasn't very -- very long there, after I met him there, very short time he passed away or something, so I didn't know him that well.

Q: So you came to the **United States** by boat, or by plane?

A: By plane. To **Hawaii** first and then here. Stopped in **Hawaii.**

Q: This is your first time on an airplane?

A: That was the first time on a plane, yes.

Q: And what was it like to put your foot down on American soil?

A: Well, had my friend wa -- my friend, th-the one, the barber, he was waiting there, and I saw him there and it was very, very go -- it was a good feeling. So I stayed with them for a little while and I got --

Q: What city was this?

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A: The -- **Washington, D.C.**.

Q: Oh, your friend was in **Washington**, so you flew to **Washington**?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And you knew this was the capital of the **United States**. Did that make any -- was that important to you?

A: I knew it was the capital, but had to live someplace, wouldn't make any difference.

Q: So you stayed with your friend in **Washington**, and -- and you said started -- and worked at a barber shop?

A: Yeah, I worked for him for about 30 years.

Q: His name is?

A: **Sal Arbus** was his name.

Q: And then what happened?

A: Then I got my own, I bought a place somebody -- I bought it from an it -- Italian fellow barber shop, and had a couple of guys working with me, and then the -- have another one too, after that. And then the second one, I -- I retired and that was it.

Q: And tell me then, about your -- your -- meeting your wife.

A: I met my wife -- I knew a -- a fellow here in **Washington**, and he met a -- a girl in **Baltimore**, which her husband passed away, and he married her and I can -- I went to visit him and we were talking and I said, didn't anybody hear, you know, a nice girl or something I can meet? He said, yeah, there's a sister, a brother who live here in the

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Ricetown Road, he said, they're very nice people. I can give you the telephone number. I said okay, give it to him and I call him up. I talk to her and she say yeah, you like to meet me. So I met her. So I saw her the -- everywhere -- I couldn't go every day because I was in **Washington**, she was in **Baltimore**. And so we met -- so four times a month, let's say, we saw each other, once a week. In about what -- three months or so we married. And we're still married for 40 -- 47 - 48 years or something like that, in 1949 -- '59 we married. 1959.

Q: 1959.

A: In '58 I came, '59 I married.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful, that's wonderful. Let's just talk a little bit before we end, about your feelings about what you went through. Do you think a lot about your experiences, today? About what you went through?

A: And there's not a day you don't think about. You don't talk about it, but you think about it. It's always in your background, it never goes away.

Q: You said your wife had been a survivor also, where had she been?

A: Well, she -- she survived, too. She was also liberated in **Bergen-Belsen**.

Q: Mm-hm. And you said you -- when you met her and you asked her, what your answer was? When you a -- when she told you that.

A: She told me she was there in **Bergen-Belsen**, I say I was there in **Bergen-Belsen**, too. So, that was it.

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Q: Do you and she talk about the war years frequently?

A: She doesn't talk too much, but she got wild dreams.

Q: Yeah. And do you feel very American now?

A: I feel American now, yes, yes. Yeah, I do.

Q: Did you become more religious because of your experience during the war, or less religious or the same?

A: About the same. Didn't change much.

Q: Did you feel that you're more questioning of God, let's say, because of what you went through?

A: I'm a questioning all the time. For years.

Q: Are most of your friends survivors?

A: No, no, not -- not -- no, not most, no. Some of [indecipherable] some of the -- all kind of [indecipherable] there. No, no.

Q: So when you're with people, do you talk about your experiences when you meet people?

A: I don't bring up the subject, but they ask me, I talk about it.

Q: Is there anything that triggers you during the day? That triggers, like s -- a -- a noise or a smell, or something that triggers memories of what you went through during the war?

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A: Yes, if you -- if you hear shooting, you know, fights, stuff like that, that brings memory back, sure. Absolutely.

Q: A-And what do you -- what do you do about that? What -- how do you handle that?

A: Well, th -- you try do the best you can not to take it -- you think, well, the war is over, it's not any more like it used to be. It'll be okay. And you -- you try to forget.

Q: Ha-Have you any desire to go back to **Poland**, or have you been there?

A: I have no desire and never been there. It's not for me.

Q: Why not?

A: Because I have nobody -- nobody to -- to greet, nobody will be there. I wouldn't know anybody now anyway. Even though we knew the Poles, they were the [indecipherable] I wouldn't know it now, so many years went by. So tho -- no use for me, I -- I would never go back, no.

Q: Are -- are you -- we -- well, was anything triggered when the **Eichmann** trial took -
- took place in **Israel**? Di-Did it start you thinking again?

A: Well, it's the -- was the right thing to do, they should -- they should get the same treatment like they did to the others.

Q: Do you -- are you a strong Zionist?

A: I am a Zionist, yes.

Q: Have you been to **Israel**?

A: I been to **Israel** four times so far, yes.

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Q: And when you're there, do you meet with other survivors?

A: Yes, my wife, she had -- she had the sister there and a brother, they passed away since. Also a nephew, he passed away young. He was 53 years old, had a heart attack. But anyway, so we went to see her family, in which they're just about all gone now.

Q: So you feel very American?

A: I feel American, yeah, sure. Do my best to be one, a good one.

Q: What language do you think in? What language do you think in? Do you think in English, or do you think in Yiddish?

A: I think in both. Home we speak Yiddish all day every day. When I go out and talk to people, that's English.

Q: Mm-hm. You've been retired for how long?

A: Since 80 -- 80 -- '86 - '88, something like that.

Q: An-And do you do anything? Do you have any hobbies now?

A: Not too much, not too much. I -- I have different tapes I watch, like Jewish -- mostly Jewish I have, a lot of Jewish tapes. Different actors, singers.

Q: What -- what are your thoughts about **Germany** today?

A: I don't know today, there -- there's a different generation altogether, so I don't know what to say. I know the other, the old generation, they were not good, they were evil.

Q: So if you met a young German today, what would your thoughts be?

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A: I wouldn't discuss too much. I mean, you have nothing to do -- you wouldn't know it anyway, what went on. Maybe -- maybe he was told, but he didn't do anything really. Yeah.

Q: Have you been to the Holocaust Museum?

A: Yes, I have.

Q: And what are your feelings when you walk in there?

A: Well, the feelings is -- to me it's nothing new, I've seen it before. I went -- I-I went through it. And my wife **Doris**, she never went there, she doesn't want to go there. And I went because I had a cousin from **New York**, the one I was talking about, he came and I took him over with his wife, but my wife, she wouldn't go.

Q: Was it a very painful experience for you? Did it bring back a lot of memories?

A: Yes, it was, yes.

Q: Do you think the world has learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

A: That I'm not sure. I'm not sure about that, because you see different country like -- great anti-Semitism exists even now, even today. So I don't know. Maybe they learn a little lesson, but not to any great extent.

Q: And you -- are you -- do you have any optimism that it will change?

A: I'm not sure. I hope it will. Little bit hope.

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Q: Sounds like that's been the -- the message of your whole life. Is there anything that we haven't covered, or anything that -- any thoughts that you have that you'd like to say before we close?

A: Not really, no. I'm glad you came over and I did what I can, the best, you know, and hope it'll help.

Q: Certainly is, it's a very important contribution that you made. Well thank you. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you, too.

Q: This concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Felix Nicinski**.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview