

RG-50.120*0004
Zvi (Tzvi) Aviram
December 18, 1992

01:01

Before we begin, I would like to say a few words. We are meeting here, our intention is to preserve the events so that people can speak about the experiences in their lives in Germany prior to the Nazis as well as under Nazi rule. My name is Heinz Zvi Abrahamsson. I was born in Berlin in 1927. We were a family that lived in Berlin during that entire period.

01:02

My family included my parents, me and my sister, who is two and half years younger than I, her name is Betty, she is alive and lives in Australia. Our family lived in Berlin during the entire period about which I am speaking. It was a relatively large family because the parents of my parents came from large families, there were lots of children and grandchildren. We lived in the central part of Berlin and were heavily involved in the Jewish community life of Berlin.

01:03

What I would like to say in this interview is that I wish to preserve my experiences for my children and grandchildren so that when the day comes when they might be interested to hear about these events it will be much easier for them to watch a film and thereby better understand these events rather than to read about it in a book, and that is one of the reasons why I have decided to appear here and to provide this interview and speak about that period.

01:04

In pre-Hitler Germany the Jewish community was very large, well organized and wealthy. There were about 500,000 Jews in Germany, more than 100,000 - 140,000 of whom resided in Berlin. The Jews in Berlin did not live in ghettos, everyone was free to live wherever one liked and one could work in any occupation that one can possibly think of. The Jews reached the highest levels and were very wealthy.

01:05

They were store owners, industrialists, engineers, judges, etc. The head of the police in Berlin was a Jew. The involvement of the Jews in the life of Germany was very deep. Even though the Germans were always anti-Semites and even though there were always some Germans and Christians who fought against the Jews, nonetheless following the Emancipation which took place at the time of Mendelssohn, the Jewish community developed deep roots and spread in Berlin and in Germany and achieved unlike anywhere else.

01:06

What destroyed that life was WWI, when Germany was defeated and had to pay heavy reparations to its enemies, France and the US. The Germans began to blame one another, and to ascertain who was responsible. In every nationality there are always those who look for scapegoats and as usual they look to the minorities. So there were many parties, not just the

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Nazi party, with different currents some of which fought one another and among themselves, and each wanted to be the strongest.

01:07

At the same time, there was rampant inflation. The value of money dropped dramatically. Someone who earned money today did not have any in his hands on the morrow. That person had to run with his money to purchase necessities so that he would have something to eat because by the next day he would not have money. This is what my family told me, it's not my personal experience.

01:08

My parents were married in Berlin in 1920-21. They were lower middle class. My father was a cobbler and my mother a seamstress. They both came from poor homes. They were raised in Berlin. Their parents came from Poland but my parents were born and educated in Berlin. My father served in the German army in WWI for a number of years until he was wounded twice in the war and then could no longer serve.

1:09

They lived in a number of apartments, it wasn't customary to buy, one rented. One day they rented an apartment and that is where I was born in 1927. Thereafter, they moved to a different apartment which was in the central part of Berlin. That apartment had a basement and that's where my father set up a shoemaker shop, it was his own private business. We lived in the apartment above the shop.

01:10

My father managed the business. My mother sewed dresses, mostly for Jewish acquaintances and friends, but she also had many Christian customers. During that period, the Nazi rise to power began. We lived there until 1933. In 1933, the Nazis came to power, I was six years old. I will never forget the day that they came to power. They paraded through the streets of the city with lit torches.

01:11

Even though I was only six years old I will never forget it. That period of time was a very difficult one. There was huge inflation. It was very difficult for my father to keep up the business because there were those who pressured my father, they did not want my father, a Jew, to openly have a private business, because he was a Jew they wanted him to close the business.

01:12

When my father had to close the business from that time going forward he was unemployed. He was forced to close the business because he was unable to renew the lease and he was told that he had to leave. It was that simple, when you are told that you have to go you go. We felt a great fear. I guess it was a subconscious feeling that what was going on was something that was directed against us. I have never forgotten that.

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01:13

So we had to move to someplace else. Before I began to go to school, I went to a nursery school. It was a completely Jewish school, there were no Christians. The community greatly assisted the Jews who didn't have the ability to pay for things such as nursery school or travel. At that time in Berlin, there was a large population of Jews from Poland.

01:14

From around 1910 there were many people who left Germany for the US, but the Polish Jews who came to Germany remained in Germany. So the population of the Polish community of Jews in Berlin greatly increased. As a general rule, they all lived together, like a small ghetto, not that they had to but that is what they were used to from Poland and they continued to do the same in Berlin. Where we lived was not far from that area.

01:15

We only lived in the new place for a very short while, we were not wanted there. So again we moved, this time to an apartment in Zehdenicker Strasse, in central Berlin, into a building which housed both Jews and Christians. There were many Jewish tenants in the building, though most of the tenants were non-Jews. There was a school located on the same street, a public school, and that's where my parents enrolled me, it was the close to where we lived and it made sense. I am speaking about 1933, that's when I began public school. It was a large building, a very nice school, with nice spacious classrooms.

01:16

Initially, we were treated very well. There were about six or seven Jewish children in my class. We fit in nicely. As children we had reasonably good relations with everyone. As times passed, relations deteriorated which was self-evident because wherever one looked, in the press there were so many bad things written about the Jews, in the Sturma, on the radio, there were anti-Semitic articles. I remember this. I remember the change in relations from the time we started school to the time that we left.

01:17

We were in that school for about six years until we had to leave, from 1933-1938. Where we lived there were many Jews, not as much as in the Polish neighborhood but there were many Jews and also Christians. Overall, I can't complain about the non-Jews in our building, they behaved reasonably well. We knew that there were a number of families from which we had to keep our distance.

01:18

We avoided them because otherwise they might curse us or behave in a rough manner, but not to the point of raising a hand against us, that didn't enter our minds. On the other hand, we had excellent relations with other neighbors, for example, with the tenant who lived directly opposite our entrance. We had good relations with them, warm and friendly. We would be invited over there on Christmas, we invited them for Chanukah. It didn't matter that my mother sewed dresses for the wife, after all relations between people are always give and take. But all in all

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we had good relations with them. Our building had a concierge.

01:19

The concierge would get an apartment in the building for free. In return, he would take care of the building and keep it clean. People like that always know what's going on in the building. He treated us very well. We had nothing to complain about in terms of the concierge. We lived on the fourth floor in a courtyard. Towards the corner of the building there lived a few other Jewish families. One of them was a Jewish family from Poland. In 1938, the Nazis took all the families that had come to Germany from Poland after a certain date and threw them over the border back into Poland.

01:20

If Poland did not accept them, they were thrown back over the border to Germany. It was like a ping pong game, back and forth. Relations between Poland and Germany were terrible. Our extended family was large and very close. There were grandparents, aunts and uncles, many relatives, and we would get together often. There would always be 30-40 people and children when the extended family got together.

01:21

Each of my grandparents came from large families. My grandfather's sister had six children. And the children also had children. So I recall the family get together with a great deal of fondness. On holidays we would celebrate together, especially **Pesach** [Passover] and **Rosh Hashanna** [Jewish new year]. My father would lead the Pesach Seders, we had two of them as was customary among the Jews living in countries outside of Israel.

01:22

Pesach was very festive so we were very happy when the holidays would roll around. We weren't a religious family but we celebrated the holidays. My father was an organizer in the Great Synagogue. It was from that synagogue that the Jews were later deported.

01:23

The cantor was a good friend of my father's. So every Rosh Hashanah my father would go to the Great Synagogue and do things there, I would go with him and I liked it very much. Later, I became a **bar mitzvah** but that is a different story. In school, we were a group of Jews. We stuck together, we were good friends and we would look out for one another. In general, we were the top students in the class. Some of the teachers treated us well, others less well. Here and there they'd say a harsh word.

01:24

We had no choice but to take it from them. The situation kept getting worse every year. In 1936, because of the Olympics in Berlin, the situation was somewhat better. The Nazis wanted the Olympics to proceed smoothly. After the Olympics, things became tougher and the smart people began to look for a way to leave Germany. Generally, the smart ones were the wealthier people because it was much easier for them but there were also middle class people who were

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looking to leave, to go someplace else.

01:25

No one could have foreseen the level of hatred that was reached. Life had become increasingly difficult, it was not good, it was not pleasant, one did not feel well about living in Germany, and we as children felt it too, it did not go over our heads. For example, we could be walking in the street and we would see someone hit a Jew just because he felt like hitting the Jew, it was that simple. And one day it happened to us in the street.

01:26

We were playing downstairs together, a group of kids, Jews and non-Jews. We were playing ball. We were playing on a quiet street. We saw an old Jew who lived in our building running for his life. He was an elderly man with a beard, from a Polish family, one of the families that was subsequently thrown over the border to Poland. The incident about which I am speaking happened before 1938. The old Jewish man was being chased by a number of boys. He managed to reach the door of our building.

01:27

The doors of our building were massive doors, not like the simple doors of today that we have in Israel. The doors where we lived were heavy doors and they were large enough to permit a horse and carriage to enter into the courtyard through them, they were constructed in that manner precisely to enable a horse and carriage to enter. The concierge was standing outside. He opened the door for the old Jewish man and allowed him to enter because the Jew was a tenant. He didn't allow the boys who were chasing the old Jew to enter, he told them that he would not let them in. He had the courage to save the old man's life from the **Sturmabteilung (SA)** [Brown Shirts].

01:28

The concierge behaved very courageously. He felt that as a fellow human being that was what he owed the old man, he saw no reason to permit the Jew to be attacked and he stood up to the boys and they left. So life continued. We had friends, I would visit my friends, friends came to my house to study. We would go out after school.

01:29

We were also members of the **Judischer Sportverein**. In Germany there were clubs, organized clubs for adults and for children, sport and youth clubs. Later, they would cut those clubs. I remember that at least once a week we'd leave the city and play sports. It was just for the Jews. The non-Jews had their own clubs. This had been going on for years. We enjoyed it.

01:30

There was tennis for adults and handball for the children; we played soccer. In the Jewish community sport was very well developed. My father, because he had been in the army, was a member of **Reichsbund Judischer Frontsoldaten (Reich Federation of Jewish Front Soldiers, RJF)**. The Jews in Germany felt that they were not only Jews but also Germans. After all, my

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father had fought for the Germans, he had bled for them.

01:31

In the beginning my father couldn't understand what was going on, what the Germans were doing, he thought that it would pass over quickly, it was a fleeting moment something that would pass. Every week he would meet with the other members of his club and they would talk about what once had been, about the past. As the the situation kept deteriorating everyone began to think about emigrating because they felt that they could no longer live in Germany but the situation was very difficult because there was no place to go. No one wanted to accept Jews. The quotas were made more restrictive and limited.

01:32

In light of the fact that my father was a shoemaker there was a chance that he could get out but because he didn't have money that too fell by the wayside. I recall a time when my parents were studying Portuguese because they thought that we would move to Sao Paulo, Brazil. That idea also was abandoned and another door was shut. The truth is that they were very few options, it was very difficult for my parents to even think about where to go.

01:33

The family even considered having my father leave first, the thought being that he'd start working and we would follow afterwards. I recall that in 1936 the Jewish community in Berlin was organizing tours for Jewish children to countries outside of Germany. The idea was to get the children out of the country, perhaps to a Jewish family, and maybe later the parents would be able to leave too and join the child.

01:34

In 1936, I received a visa to go to England and I went to England. I was there for six weeks. But unfortunately for me, the family to whom I had been sent had children of their own and their children became ill so I was unable to be housed there. They looked for a different host family for me, one that did not have kids, but they were unable to find one so it didn't work out and I returned to Germany. But my parents' idea was a good one, parents were prepared to pay any price to at least get their child out.

01:35

In 1935, we had to leave the German school which we had been attending. The schools in Germany received an order that all Jewish children had to leave their German schools and thereafter attend only Jewish schools. So one day all the Jewish kids in my class had to pack their things and leave. We then went to a Jewish school. I benefitted from this because the curriculum in the Jewish school was much better even though many of the good Jewish teachers had already left the country. We learned Hebrew and other languages.

01:36

We learned things that the students in the German schools weren't being taught, for example English. In the German school they learned Latin but not English. We were in that school for

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four years. So I was with the same Jewish kids that were with me in public school. My sister began her education in the Jewish school. From the outset, my parents enrolled her in the Jewish school not in the German Christian school which was on our street.

01:37

I had not felt ostracized in school. We felt discrimination from the teachers, they were Nazis, but we kids did not fight one another on account of religion. Nor were we segregated in terms of seating. In fact we all played together.

01:38

It's not as if the teachers called our parents in and said it might be better to take your kids out and to put them in a Jewish school. That did not happen. There came a time when we ourselves understood that we had to leave the German school. The order came from above. It seems that there were too many Jewish children in that school probably because of the neighborhood.

01:39

In that period 1938, my uncle, a brother of my mother, managed to get an entry visa to Argentina. He was the first one from the family to leave. He was a barber. He was the kind of guy who couldn't keep his mouth shut.

01:40

He was lucky because he was a Communist and he had a lot of problems with the Nazis and had he stayed he would have had even more serious problems. So he went to Argentina and it worked out. The rest of us talked a lot but didn't do much.

01:41

I remember quite clearly that when the family would get together all the discussion revolved around when to leave and how to leave. I also remember that on the holidays when we went to the Great Synagogue, the Rabbi had to be careful when he delivered a sermon because who knew to which ears his words would reach. The sermon would be about the portion of the week as well as what was going on in terms of the situation; that is carved in my memory.

01:42

The uncle left in 1938. His present to me was his bicycle. I felt like a king. I rode from one end of the city of Berlin to the other. I took advantage of that freedom, I wasn't a timid boy. I did many things that I should not have done.

01:43

Even though there were restrictions, some formal and others not formal but practiced because it could've been dangerous to act otherwise, I didn't pay attention to any of them. I think that my behavior at that time influenced me later and I ended up staying in Berlin and not going to the camps. So in 1938 we had to change schools and that was wonderful. Our new teachers were excellent. I remember one teacher in particular.

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01:44

I will never forget that teacher. As a child he had been stricken with infantile paralysis. He had to be lifted into position, he couldn't stand on his feet. He was extraordinary. We listened to every word that he said to us. He was our main teacher, and was an exemplary one. Though he was handicapped, I will never forget him. We had English teachers and history teachers and math teachers, we learned very well.

01:45

We completed our schooling, which is not the case with the children in the younger grades. One random day a decree was issued that school was over. That happened in 1938, shortly before **Kristallnacht**. One morning, the whole world turned upside down. The cultural attache to France was assassinated in Paris. It's not clear exactly what happened there with **Grynspan** but that isn't really important.

01:46

The Nazis fell upon the Jews all over the country with total brutality. On that day, anyone who had not realized what the Nazis were like, who didn't believe what they were, who thought that they had some humanity, on that day we knew with complete certainty, without a doubt, with whom we were dealing. I remember what happened very well. I know what happened because I saw it with my own eyes. I saw the destruction, the burning. I did not stay inside, I was in the streets, I wasn't afraid to go out, I didn't look Jewish. I saw what they did; the rampaging, the destruction, burning, plundering, robbing, vandalism.

01:47

Berlin had been a commercial center, all of the wholesalers were Jews, all of the beautiful shops were owned by Jews. What happened had been orchestrated in advance. Every Jewish shop owner had to paint on his window, e.g., Moritz "Yisrael" Mendelsohn, the word "**Yisrael**" or "**Sarah**" (for a female) had to be added to one's name and that also appeared in all official documents, in passports and in the "**kennkarte**" which we received, there would be a letter "J" and then one's name. So they knew where all the Jewish shops were located and they had no problem whatsoever breaking in, burning, plundering and doing whatever they wanted to do.

01:48

At the same time while that was going on, two of my uncles were arrested and sent to **Sachsenhausen**, a concentration camp near Berlin. They were there for about four to six weeks. Then they were released but on condition that they leave the country and pay a fine because they were people with means. Actually, that wasn't a bad result because that meant that they would be able to leave the country, if they could, but not everyone who agreed to leave was able to do so. Initially, they weren't successful. They were released, they went home and they paid the fine. There was no normal work anymore, life was no longer normal, there wasn't much of anything anymore.

01:49

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Nothing was normal anymore. We knew that we were living in a kind of holding pattern but waiting for what? We weren't sure, who were we other than something to be hit. They could do with us what they wanted. This feeling penetrated deeply into our souls. My uncles told us that they had received many beatings, that they were treated terribly, that there were killings there, that they could do anything to a human being that they wanted to do, and that there had been lots of killings. That was just the beginning, the real plan came later.

01:50

From then on the situation was very serious, every aspect of life was impacted. Prior to those events, one of the arrested uncles had been involved in the stock market. He had made a great deal of money.

01:51

However, once he came out of Sachsenhausen the previous way of living was no longer possible, the world in which we lived was an entirely different place with different norms. Nothing was the same. First of all the Jews had to pay for the repairs for the damage that the **SA** [stormtroopers/brownshirts, Nazi paramilitary] had done to the shops and businesses. The Jewish community also had to pay a fine of two billion reichsmarks to the Nazis.

01:52

The well off members of the community had to pay the fine and repair the shops. So, which Christian would be prepared to enter a Jewish store after what had happened. We are talking about Berlin, I can't even begin to imagine how the Jews were faring in the small towns, it's completely without logic to contemplate how one could live under those conditions. The Jewish community in Berlin was so intertwined with the German society in general. Also, there was a great deal of intermarriage in Germany that also had to be taken into account. So now the Jews were forced to sell their stores and their houses since they couldn't do business anymore.

01:53

Of course that meant that they would have to sell their property at below normal asking price, and naturally there were lots of buyers, who wouldn't want to buy at low prices, but the Jews didn't have a choice, and that also meant that they would have to leave the country. All of a sudden everyone realized that we had to escape, but where could we go? There really was no place to go. There was a strong current of Jews that were trying to get to France, to Belgium, to Holland via the **Grüne Grenze**, the green border as it was called, someone took you to the border and then you would try to cross.

01:54

Or, someone had a passport that did not have a "J" and with that kind of passport one could leave, true with only one suitcase in hand, by then they were willing to leave like that with nothing but one suitcase. As for Palestine, there was something known as a **certificate** that cost 1000 pounds sterling, which was a great deal of money, so even getting out that way was very limited. The people that managed to reach France, Belgium, Holland, they also lived under very difficult conditions, and that was even before the Nazis got to those places.

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01:55

Initially, my uncles were not successful in leaving the country. Later, once the war began, in 1940, before Russia got into the war, via Manchuria, one of the two uncles managed to get out and make his way to Shanghai, there was a time that Jews could get to Shanghai. He became a broken man, though in Germany he had been very successful.

01:56

Life changed completely, there was no way one could support oneself. I was a boy, eleven years old. What changed for me not over one day but during that entire period was that even though I was chronologically very young, I became mature. I understood everything, there were no secrets.

01:57

They spoke so much about the ongoing difficulties of the time, the things that were happening to us, I became a big boy at eleven. My sister who is two years younger than I, remained a happy little girl, she really didn't understand what was going on. Our family continued to stay together, we continued to meet at family functions just like in the good days.

01:58

As long as we were able, the family continued to remain together, one tried to help the other. There was an elderly grandfather in a nursing home who needed help, there were elderly uncles who needed help. For example, there were relatives that had owned a textile factory. So even though the factory had closed down, they continued to work on a smaller scale sewing parts of garments, doing a small part of the work, piece work.

01:59

They would then pass the unfinished garment along to a factory. So in that manner some Jews were still able to do some kind of work to earn bread. But big money or big profits was no longer possible. All of the Jews in Germany fell to a lower economic level and there was no way to get back up to where they once had been. After Kristallnacht there could no longer be Jewish judges or lawyers or even actors.

02:00

No one was prepared to hire Jewish actors. Even the most famous Jewish actors could no longer find work. Who would hire a Jewish actor? Some of the more famous actors left but others didn't. Those that remained set up all Jewish theater companies and they performed solely for Jews. With the passage of time, the theater companies, the choirs, they became better and better and the Jews had their own culture. There was a Jewish orchestra.

Disc II

02:01

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The other uncle, not the one who went to Shanghai, remained in Germany. He wanted to go to Holland.

02:02

Ironically, that uncle married a non-Jew. He was the only one in the family who did that. His parents were very much against it. They tried everything to stop it. But the love was great and eventually we found out how successful that marriage was, not only for the uncle but for many others as well.

02:03

So all the doors were closed off more or less. We were all prisoners in a kind of large prison with a terrible feeling that we were approaching something not good, we weren't sure what it was, but we knew it would not be good at all, something terrible.

02:04

Not only did the Germans put down the Jews. In addition to internal politics, there was the larger political world. Let's not forget what was going on with the rest of Europe, Czechoslovakia and Poland, Chamberlain, Munich. The politics vis a vis the rest of Europe were moving together, hand in hand, it was one and the same. Germany had conquered all of Europe and we were stuck, we could not escape from that predicament.

02:05

Meanwhile, we received letters from Argentina, from the uncle that got out early, that he was feeling good, that he found work there as a barber, he even found work on the ship getting over to Argentina. So he was doing OK. The second of two uncles, the one that managed to escape, though he no longer was able to support his family, he had made it out of Nazi Germany, at least he saved himself and was far away from the goings on in Europe.

02:06

As for my father, from the time he was forced to close his shoe shop in the basement, he worked from home. He did not find steady work outside of the house so he repaired shoes at home, like many other Jews who carried on working from their homes. My mother continued to sew at home, people brought her material and she sewed dresses and did very well. Actually, she was the one who sustained the household. And so we managed. We had no choice, we continued, we had to find a way to manage to exist, there was no other way, and that's what my parents managed to do.

02:07

My parents managed the survival aspect and we kids went to school. We had an apartment on Tiergartenstrasse on the fourth floor, in the courtyard with a large living room, a bedroom which I shared with my sister, a kitchen and a bathroom. Life was more or less organized, school, visits with the family, my sister had a fixed day once a week to visit the family, I had one day a week.

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02:08

So things proceeded in an orderly way other than the fact that we lived in poverty. Human beings become used to every situation including poverty and even to inhumanity. When there is no choice, you get used to what there is; life continued.

02:09

Before the war broke out, just as in 1936 when my parents sent me to England, they found a way to send my sister to England. One day in school they asked the girls in the class who among them would be prepared to leave their parents and go to England. My little sister, without thinking, raised her hand, she was just a little girl at the time. 17 children were chosen, my sister was one of them. My mother agreed to it.

02:10

That was very surprising. Every Jew knew that war would break out shortly, we could smell it. Perhaps the average German wasn't paying attention and didn't know it but we Jews understood that it was imminent. And yet my mother was prepared to send my little sister to the unknown and we knew that the rest of us weren't going anywhere. The papers were put in order, my Mom sewed her as beautiful a dress as possible under the circumstances.

02:11

All of us took her to the train station in Berlin. We said goodbye to her. One of my uncles, Martin, who is still alive and lives in Berlin, said to me and I will never forget it, that once we took her to the station, even though we had not as yet said goodbye to her, she was gone from us, separated, she removed herself from the family. This was in June. One and half months later, the war broke out and she was in England.

02:12

It was hard for my mother and for me too, I missed her. Even though on the one hand I liked the idea that I was the only one home with my parents, I felt that something was missing. We had always played together. When we met after the war she said to me, "You would always play with your friend Victor and I would have to leave the room, you would chase me out of the room."

She really doesn't remember much from those years.

02:13

We were a large family. The uncle that I was speaking about, Martin, is the brother of the uncle who married the non-Jewish girl. There were six children. One brother fought in WWI and was killed. Another brother, Kurt, married the Christian. Martin lives in Berlin. Erich went to Shanghai.

02:14

One brother was killed in Berlin in slave labor and one child, a girl, died in Auschwitz.

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02:15

Kurt died after the war, Erich is now 90 or 91 years old and lives in the US. Martin is 86 and lives in Berlin. In any event, as my uncle said, my sister broke the connection and was no longer with us.

02:16

Although we missed my sister my parents were glad that she had managed to get out and that at least one of us was safe. It's hard to describe what people were thinking when the war broke out. When Hitler came to power, many people had said that he would fall quickly, that he wouldn't last. But the thing about war is that you know when it starts but you don't know when it will end. We saw from the beginning that the Germans were experiencing victories, victory after victory.

02:17

The Germans were conquering one country after the other. I followed what was going on. I listened to the radio. I read the newspapers, I went to the movies and saw the news. We didn't see any end to it. We were so unfortunate. When the family got together what could we talk about? Just the disasters that were happening. There was no hope, no one was optimistic.

02:18

After a period of watching the success of the Nazis you had nothing to be optimistic about, you could not fathom what kind of an end there would be, you could not even hope. Everyone was waiting to see what the US would do. We recalled that in WWI, when the US entered the war, the US turned the wheel of the war around. So we waited with the thought that the same thing might happen again. But meanwhile, we saw the losses that the British were experiencing, later in Dunkirk, and then later when Japan entered the war and started overrunning one country after the other; the feeling was just terrible. The Germans entered Poland, I'm sure that you know all about that, I don't need to elaborate.

02:19

As for the Jews in Berlin, I had to turn in my bike, Jews were no longer able to ride bicycles, Jews could not have a radio anymore so as not to be able to listen to the news, Jews had to turn in all their gold, furs had to be turned in. We were told that anything of value had to be brought to such and such a place. You had to comply, they injected such fear into you, you could never feel secure, it's as if they were always watching you.

02:20

Until that time I had ridden all over Berlin on my bicycle, I went to the lakes outside of Berlin and swam. I would go there on my own, I didn't want to involve anyone on my outings because it was too risky. Once, I almost drowned in one of those lakes because the water was too deep. But it worked out and I survived.

02:21

Once, when I was riding around Berlin on my bike, I got caught in the tracks of one of the

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electric tram car. I fell and was injured. Usually when a child falls everyone tends to rush over which is exactly what happened. The people who were there did not know that I was a Jew. They rushed over, they took me to the Red Cross where I was bandaged, everyone wanted to join in the action.

02:22

They wanted to be nice to take me home but I said no there was no need. I am telling you this so that you should understand how we were feeling. We were always afraid, one always felt that one had to walk on the side lines otherwise you would be punished. Nearly everything that you wanted to do was forbidden.

02:23

The Jewish community would send kids on vacation. In 1938, I was sent to Reuzengebergte, it was the most beautiful vacation that I had as a child. It is the one of the most beautiful mountain areas in southeast Germany, close to the Polish border near the city of Breslau.

02:24

The Jewish community had a kind of dormitory there. We were there for six weeks. It was a terrific vacation. Right next to our dormitory the Nazis set up a dorm for the Hitler Youth. That was a problem, they didn't leave us alone. We fought with them, we threw stones against each other and hit one another even though we weren't allowed to do that, but it was before the riots and the upheaval.

02:25

Until one day, the leadership of our school put a stop to it, they closed the dormitory and sent us home. I won't forget that vacation. It put some spice in my life. But this shows you that the community wanted the youth to still feel good notwithstanding our unfortunate lives at the time.

02:26

The Germans were no longer permitted to read certain things or to see certain plays, but ironically we Jews could do so. So we Jews actually got to experience culture to which the Germans no longer had access. There were concerts and orchestra performances. The Jews always knew how to get organized and deliver culture to the community.

02:27

After 1940, from time to time, the British began to periodically bomb Berlin. People had to go to shelters. We went into the same shelters as the non-Jewish Germans, this was in 1941. No one, not even the Nazis gave us a problem with that. We were in the same shelters with the Germans even with the Nazis who were in our building.

02:28

The shelters weren't strong enough to withstand a direct hit. So tree branches were used to buttress the sides and the ceiling. Luckily for us the building, which during the Communist era was in East Germany and is still standing today, was not hit.

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02:29

With the start of the war a great deal of trouble began for the Jews. First, we received special food coupons and on each coupon the word **Jude** was printed.

02:30

The Jews were allotted much fewer calories than the Christians. The Jews were limited in the amount of meat, sugar and vegetables that could be acquired. We couldn't get fruits at all. We were also limited in the hours that we could shop, e.g., two hours a day, 4-6 PM or 5-7 PM, late in the afternoon, by that time there was nothing left to buy; that was done deliberately. Jews could not travel or walk around the city aimlessly. They could go to work and back, that's it.

02:31

If a Jew was found walking about, he was punished. They knew where the Jews were supposed to be because Jews had a card that indicated where they lived and worked. So Jews couldn't randomly walk around and go where they pleased. I went to school until 1941. I started the Jewish school in 1938 and finished in 1941. I completed elementary school there.

02:32

Before I completed elementary school I became a **Bar Mitzvah**. There were still a few synagogues in Berlin, not many were left, there were very few of them. Those that had been burned were not rebuilt. There was the school on Rigaer Strasse on the corner and in the yard there was the synagogue. On Kristallnacht, they had forgotten to burn it down, so the synagogue remained where it was. I remember the day of my Bar Mitzvah. I remember the day and the time and I remember the Bar Mitzvah very positively. I had a very nice Bar Mitzvah. There were lots of people in the synagogue for my Bar Mitzvah.

02:33

There was a wonderful Rabbi, and I chanted the **Haftarah** nicely. It's a lifelong memory, at least my parents were able to succeed in doing it. And, I guess that it can be said that it was the last large family gathering that we had of the extended family. A lot of people came. We had such a large family. This was in January 1940. I was still going to school. Everyone came. I had to give a speech.

02:34

The Rabbi also came and gave a speech. It was so impressive, I still remember it today, it was truly impressive. Too bad we didn't photograph it, in those days it wasn't common to do that. I received a prayer book which I still have, protected, at home. So that passed peacefully. From time to time we received mail from my sister. She did not remain in England. Because of the bombings in London the children were sent to Australia, luckily for them.

02:35

Throughout the war years she was in Melbourne, Australia. That is where she grew up. It

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wasn't easy for her, she was by herself. We have to think for a moment. What did people feel in those days when they were in Berlin? Let's look at the situation. There was a world war going on, there were fronts all over the world; the Nazis against the whole world.

02:36

And there we were, sitting there, in the middle, in the heart of the monster, in Berlin. A Jewish community in one large prison that was unable to move, closed in among themselves, feeling that the whole world hated them, that no one wanted them, when they wanted to run away they were thwarted, there was no place to go, a feeling that you were doomed but that you had done nothing wrong at all; all you wanted to do was to live.

02:37

You were being persecuted for only one reason, that you were a Jew, children like me, the entire Jewish population. Everything good was taken from you, all you could do was exist. You couldn't live normally, you weren't provided with anything, not an opportunity to earn money, not culture, not anything. When you wanted to buy something you couldn't, either you didn't have money or you didn't have the opportunity to shop, you couldn't visit places you couldn't go to public places or sit on a bench because if you went to a public place there was a sign that said that you couldn't sit on the bench.

02:38

So you weren't even given the opportunity to breathe, you could only live in your home. If you truly followed all the regulations that were forced on you, you were unable to do anything at all! And this was not in a ghetto, it wasn't in a little town in Poland. This was in a large city of four million people. Jews weren't put in a ghetto in Berlin, yet they lived as if they were in a ghetto. They by and large continued to live where they had always lived.

02:39

It's true that some of the wealthier Jews who lived in villages or in the very best of neighborhoods were forced to move out to a different place. But for the most part Jews like us lived together with Christians in the same building. There were a large number of Jews living in the area where we lived. The feeling was just awful. It was a constant pressure on the human being and it influenced every aspect of family life including relations between fathers and mothers, parents and children. We did not know what was going on in Poland at all.

02:40

As I said, my Bar Mitzvah was one of the most beautiful days. Afterwards, I finished school, I graduated. My parents still had a ray of hope. They thought that I would learn a profession, that of a locksmith. A trade was always good, that was their thinking. There were still some Ort schools. There were still some Jewish schools, the **aliyah** school, the **hachshara** schools. At the time, the Nazis still supported the idea that young Jews should learn a profession and go to Palestine.

02:41

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After all, Jews could not get into the US or Canada or Australia but in 1940 one could still go to Palestine legally and illegally so the Germans supported that idea. So when I graduated, my parents decided that I would learn to be a locksmith in the Ort school and I was enrolled. There were teachers and students, older kids and younger kids. And as in all schools, there were pranks played on the younger kids by the older kids, there were lots of stories going on there but generally there was a good atmosphere there.

02:42

But it didn't last long. In Germany one graduates in April and then I learned for a short period until September, about six months and then there was a decree that those schools were to be closed as well. We received a notice that all young Jews were required to report to forced labor. My parents were already working in forced labor, my mother in **AEG** and my father worked for the community cobbler shop.

02:43

When the young people had to report to forced labor I was sent to a large clock factory, one that made all kinds of clocks for the German army, for batteries, for planes and other things. I worked only at night. So, in 1941 at the age of 14, as a Jewish boy, I had to work at night from 11:00 PM until 6:00 AM. The Germans worked during the day, but the Jews worked at night.

02:44

At that time, Berlin was already being bombed as were other cities in Germany, like the Germans were doing to London. Things were different than they were at the beginning. There were still some victories, in 1940 the Germans had entered Russia and had placed a siege around Moscow and the Germans were also in Africa. So, the Germans were in control of Europe.

02:45

But I viewed myself to be a free person and I continued to go and do whatever I wanted to do. I continued to wander around the way I used to do, and even though I was supposed to wear a badge, I rarely did. When I left the house I would remove the pin to which it was attached and put the badge in my pocket in order to walk around Berlin unencumbered. I went to the movies with a friend, I went wherever I wanted to go. My friend's mother was a non-Jew, his father was a Jew. The mother died when he was very young and he lived with his Jewish father.

02:46

So my friend wasn't protected, had his mother been alive, he might've been protected. We were very close friends. During that period, his uncles would play billiards so I too learned how to play billiards. His uncles were wholesalers of toys and other goods that they sold to stores during the period that was still relatively good.

02:47

He and his father did not live far from us so it wasn't difficult to get together and to go out. Work was not interesting but it was a good way to pass the time. The relationship between workers

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such as myself and management was OK, we were treated fairly, the manager was a decent person and he treated us decently so there is nothing to complain about in terms of how he behaved towards us. Here and there he said a rough word, but he was a decent human being and we had nothing to complain about. In 1941, the expulsions of the Jews from Berlin began.

02:48

In the autumn of 1941, my mother's sister received a letter addressed to her house that told her by such and such a day prepare to travel for work to the east, to pack a suitcase, a sewing machine, but not to pack too much and by a specific date someone would come to take her from the house. People just accepted that, you got a letter, you had to go! It didn't occur to anyone not to follow the instructions, to try to hide or escape or refuse to go or who knows what.

02:49

And that is what happened. They prepared, packed, and someone came and took them away, while the house stayed the way that they had left it. After they left, we did not hear from them anymore. Someone told us that they were sent to Lodz and put in a ghetto and taken to work. And probably that is what happened, at least in connection with the initial expulsions. But no one really knows, no one saw, no one knew exactly what happened. We knew that this was the beginning of the end, the first ones went to the east.

02:50

So we realized that slowly but surely our turn would come too, that eventually it would happen to each and everyone. More and more people received those letters, they prepared and were taken away. At the same time, the luck of the Germans at the borders was turning. Also, the **Wannsee Conference** took place. All that was left for us in Berlin at the time was to sit and wait until you were sent to the east.

02:51

At that time we didn't know about the Wannsee conference, we didn't know about the killings, we didn't know anything. During that period we didn't know anything at all. Meanwhile, I worked at night. There was a problem at home; I worked at night, my father worked during the day, my mother in the afternoon. Family life no longer existed at home. We barely saw one another during the week. We would pass each other because we worked at different times. Sometimes, at the end of the week we'd see one another. Family life was destroyed.

02:52

In addition to our different work schedules there was the constant pressure on the Jews, there were the bombings from the air, there wasn't much food, we had to buy things on the black market. We had a few friends but we no longer had connections with non-Jewish friends. From the time we were expelled from the public school we no longer had connections with our non-Jewish friends from that school. We lived in a closed society, just Jewish kids, a small group of kids, closed among ourselves. We met, we did the best we could, we had friends.

02:53

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We tried to make the best of what we could do under the circumstances, we met at each other's homes, we still danced a bit. I still remember that as a boy, they tried to teach me a little bit of social dancing. There were some moments of happiness, you can't say that there weren't any moments of happiness. There always is a little bit of something, someone would make a party or a birthday, or someone would give you a little something, so there were some moments of happiness notwithstanding all of the pressure from the outside. We got used to the outside pressure because it was never ending and also we didn't see that there would be an end. We also tried to listen to the news from England.

02:54

There were some people who had radios in their homes even though that was a very scary thing to do. I must say that until that point in time, our relations with our non-Jewish neighbors in the building in which we lived were quite correct. They did not do us any harm. When we met them, they always said hello. We have nothing to complain about when it comes to them. Even those families with whom we didn't have friendly relations, we just did our best to avoid them which was the best strategy to follow.

02:55

We couldn't hear the news from England at our neighbors' houses. But having said that, I must tell you that my mother had a close friend, an observant non-Jew, and the two of them remained friends until the day my mother was taken to Auschwitz, it's not that they saw each other every day but they would meet. Her attitude towards my mother did not change and the same can be said for our neighbors but what changed was that they were afraid and they were more careful, quieter, they spoke less, but they were basically correct.

02:56

My father had a brother in Berlin, he was married to a non-Jew. That means that Kurt was not the only one married to a non-Jew. They had grown children. They had one son who also lived in Argentina, but there was no connection between the two sides of my family in Argentina. Our relations with my father's brother were not good. His name was Leon.

02:57

Where I worked there were all kinds of characters. I worked there [unintelligible] for two and a half years, from 1941 till 1943. That's a long time for a young boy. I worked at night.

02:58

When I would get home in the morning, the house was empty because my parents were out working. I would go to sleep. I slept until noon. Then I would go out or meet with friends or family. There wasn't much that we could do. When I was a very young boy, my whole family would go to the lake area. We'd take a boat and we would be out all day. But when the war became a total war the Jews could no longer do that.

02:59

Initially, the Germans were victorious but as the war continued, it became more difficult for the

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Germans, they found it harder to overcome their hardships.

Disc III

03:00

The Jews had to work in forced labor, in all kinds of factories. The Jews regarded themselves as good workers because they were able to acclimate well.

03:01

The Jews acclimated themselves easily. They did all kinds of things. At the time, in Berlin, all the males were soldiers. All German boys from the age of 18 were either in the army or in the SS. So there was a labor shortage in Germany overall, which meant that the Jews had to work in all kinds of different jobs. The women took the place of the men in factories and wherever possible women were put to work.

03:02

The German women were good workers. Order was order and they knew how to work. They went to work every day and came back in the evening. But there was still a labor shortage. So what did the Germans do? They brought in many foreign workers, just like today. They brought them in from all the countries in Europe, France, Holland, Belgium, from wherever they could. They grabbed them, young people off the streets and instead of putting them in Auschwitz they brought them by train and put them to work in factories.

03:03

They worked for the most part in the armaments industry. In general most of the industrial work in Germany was concentrated in the area of Berlin. That's why later on in the war the Americans and the British went to great lengths to bomb the factories around Berlin. So they worked in armaments and ammunition. Because there was a shortage in the labor force, they not only used foreign workers, they used Jews as well, starting from 1941. They worked for AEG, for Siemens, for all of the most well known factories.

03:04

There were thousands of workers, men, women and even children. They worked night and day, the hour of the day didn't matter. Travel permits were only issued from home to work. If one wanted to go anyplace else, one had to go by foot. For example, if I wanted to go to my uncle Leon's house I had to walk for an hour to get there. It didn't matter what season, winter, summer.

03:05

I walked all over, to the movies, to friends. It didn't matter to me. But that was not the case for my parents. I didn't tell them what I was doing. From September 1941, we had to wear the yellow patch. I took it off, it didn't bother me at all to remove it. So we carried on. We all worked.

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03:06

We didn't have much food, but we didn't starve. The black market was thriving. We weren't paid much. For example, I received 30 pfennigs an hour, my parents were paid a bit more. But all told it wasn't much money. We couldn't do much. My mother continued to sew for acquaintances, neighbors, whoever came. We bought our food at the store, we could buy food but we were restricted in terms of the hours that we could shop.

03:07

We shopped with coupons. We were issued a number of coupons per day. Food was very standard at the time. The Germans stole all the good things from all over Europe and brought them to Germany. I recall that early on in the war, the Wehrmacht, I am not talking about the SS, the Wehrmacht soldiers came back to Berlin from France with all kinds of furs and perfume and beautiful fabric that didn't exist in Germany.

03:08

Wherever the Germans went, the soldiers stole. They went to Holland they stole cheese. Whatever could be grabbed, the soldiers grabbed. The German government did it in a more established manner. They demanded from the governments of the vanquished countries that they provide them with certain goods. For example from France, they told the French government that they had to provide a certain quantity of coal or iron. Or in Czechoslovakia, they told them that they had to provide planes. Skoda worked full time providing the Germans with Messerschmitts, or tanks. They used all the foreign factories for the German war effort.

03:09

From Romania Germany got oil for German industries. And that's how it was. The Germans plundered all of Europe. Everyone knew it, it was visible to the naked eye. This was all out in the open, we all saw it, for example preserved tins of food from Hungary, we saw the tins with our own eyes. We saw the Hungarian labels, the tins were then sold in Berlin. During this entire period things were different in Berlin then they were in other places. What went on in Berlin was different than what was happening in the surrounding small towns.

03:10

The persecutions of the Jews in the small towns was much greater than in Berlin. And in the beginning at least the expulsions from the smaller towns was much more effective. They simply rounded up all the Jews and expelled them. I should summarize. Until 1933, the Nazis weren't in power so the dirty work of subjugating "the streets" was done by thugs.

03:11

After 1933, when the Nazis came to power, they controlled what happened to the Jews. Most of the decisions were not in writing, they were verbal, I can't really particularize. But for example, the requirement to turn over bicycles and radios and jewelry. Those things that don't sound like a big deal but in fact had a major impact, those things were not legislated.

03:12

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There wasn't any specific legislation about things like that. Instead, the head of the Jewish community was told what was required to be done and he then passed it along to the Jewish community. The Jew knew that he had to do what he was told. Obedience was complete. We were always afraid of punishment. The second period was from 1933-1938.

03:13

From 1935, the **Nurnberger Gesetze** were issued (**Nuremberg Laws**). They set out specifically what the Jews had to do, what they could and could not do, their obligations, who would be considered to be a Jew, what is Jewishness, etc. I knew this personally because we talked about it daily.

03:14

I felt tremendously insecure during that whole period. That period had a tremendous influence on me to such an extent that I still feel it today, 45 years later I can't free myself of it. The nature of government, the way the government acted, how they spoke. So, that was the second period which lasted until 1938. In 1936 there was somewhat of an easing because of the Olympics so they were a bit more lenient because Germany wanted good relations with the rest of the world, but they made up for it once the Olympics were over.

03:15

The situation for the Jews became increasingly tougher and then there was Kristallnacht in 1938, and then afterwards when the war broke out in 1939, we were virtually imprisoned and could not get out, though prior to the war there were many Jews who tried to get out. Initially, there were major German victories at the front, Europe was plundered, and all the goodies were brought to Germany. In 1942, however things became more difficult after the Germans invaded Russia and they were unable to get to Moscow and then had to retreat. Many German soldiers were killed.

03:16

So the Germans began to feel negative impacts from the war. We really don't know much about what was happening in the east. There were rumors, that Jews had been placed in ghettos because families from Berlin were sent there though we were told that they were being sent to work.

03:17

That is the insanity of it all, things were hidden because of the way the Germans would explain things. There were always rumors. We lived on waves of rumors. Whoever you met they talked as if they knew what would happen. People always assumed the worst but no one spoke of death.

03:18

The Jews were not permitted to do anything at all just go to work and eat a little something and that was it, they were not allowed to do anything else. The non-Jews were very guarded towards us, they were afraid to talk to us out in the open in the street. If you met them inside the

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building it was a bit different but out in the open they were very cautious about speaking with a Jew.

03:19

No one wanted to talk to us, they were afraid. There were those who referred to us derogatively as **Juden** but there were others who would give us an orange or a piece of chocolate. Nothing like that happened to me because I didn't walk around as a Jew except when I went to the grocery store, but I know that it happened to others.

03:20

The stores such as the grocery or the bakery were not far, they were on the corner. During the winter we needed coal. As Jews we were given leftover second rate coal, but we had to be satisfied with that. In Germany it was cold in the winter, we had to burn coal for warmth.

03:21

I would walk around as a non-Jew, I wasn't interested in having connections with non-Jews. I was only a kid, no one really knew me. I hadn't yet had the opportunity to form connections. I was too young. After all, in January 1943 I was only 16 and in February I became part of the underground.

03:22

So everyone was working. There were some people that could not work but they had to document their inability to work. Tens of thousands of people in Berlin were working until the age of 65.

03:23

For example: Railroad tracks needed to be repaired, that was very hard physical labor and demanded strength. The huge screws had to be removed, then the metal had to be lifted, many people were needed to do the job. My uncle Martin did that kind of work. Another type of work was to knock down partially bombed out buildings.

03:24

My friend did that kind of work, the attitude of the supervisors towards him as well as the other Jews who did that work was correct.

03:25

Of course there were always some people who weren't nice to the Jews who were working but that was not the norm. On the one hand the supervisor could say to you, you know that you are a dirty Jew but here, have a piece of bread. In many instances they had no desire to hurt you, they had to fulfill an obligation, they were afraid.

03:26

I had a grandfather, my mother's father. He had four children. His family name was Jacobson. My father's father was called Abrahamson. Those were eastern European names, son of

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Jacob, son of Abraham, but in Germany the names were slightly changed. So on my mother's side, one aunt died at a young age, then there was my Mom, Margarit, then there was an uncle, and then there was Elizabeth.

03:27

Aunt Elizabeth was the first one to be expelled to the east, in 1941. The uncle went to Argentina. So my mother was the only one left out of the four children. My grandfather was a widow of many years, he lived in a Jewish old age home. There were a few Jewish old age homes in Berlin.

03:28

One day all of the old people in the Jewish old age home were taken away. I had been going to visit my grandfather regularly, once a week, he so enjoyed my visits, he was very proud that his grandson would come visit. But one day when I got there, he was no longer there, he was expelled in 1942. The old age home was on Oranienstrasse. Life was so difficult, it was such a struggle to live.

03:29

On Oranienstrasse there was the most famous Jewish hospital in Berlin and in it was a wing which served as the Jewish old age home. That grandfather had a sister, Jenny. She was married to family Grunberg about whom I spoke earlier.

03:30

So the family over time became fewer and fewer until 1943. At some point during that period, I am not sure exactly when, there was a difficult occurrence.

03:31

The Germans would from time to time put on an exhibit, a display in the Lustgarten, against the Russians, referred to as the "**untermenschen** from the East," the Russian untermenschen, the Jewish untermenschen [inferior people, subhumans, masses from the East]. There would be an exhibit about the nationalities from the east, how inferior they were, and of course that included the Jews. At the time there was an idealistic group in Berlin of young Jews who were Communists, the **Baum-Gruppe**. They decided to sabotage the anti-Soviet exhibit.

03:32

They placed a bomb under the exhibit; it exploded. While the explosion didn't cause much damage the fact is that something like that even occurred. That really made an impact in Berlin. They caught the entire group and killed them. I think it was in 1942 or 1943.

03:33

I read about it at the time. I wasn't at the exhibit. The propaganda really played up the incident, to stir up anti-Jewish sentiment, as if to say look at what the Jews did. The idea was to rouse up the people against the Jews. They would always lump the Jews together with the herds from the East and the Bolsheviks and claim that they have to be eliminated.

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03:34

I went to the movies, often. The Nazis made good movies, you wouldn't believe it but they were really very good. I saw the famous actress/singer **Marika Röck**. I saw the movie **Munchhausen**, it was so out of the ordinary for its time.

03:35

I also saw **Jud Süß**. What was in those movies, there was grandeur, marches, army music, how the enemy gets attacked and defeated.

03:36

Every week we would read updates on how much tonnage was destroyed by the German batteries that were launched at sea. Huge amounts. While they may have exaggerated somewhat, today we know that they definitely sank a great deal of tonnage. We were truly so unfortunate. Every day we read how Germany was advancing, Germany conquered Sevastopol, and Odessa, then how they captured this and this number of missiles and took this and this number of captives. They never publicized how many losses Germany suffered in order to win those battles.

03:37

When the Germans attacked Russia, it was not to be believed what happened. The Russians were completely surrounded, all that they could do was surrender. The Russians didn't want to fight, I remember that very well. It was only when the Germans started to butcher them or place them in camps, then they began to fight.

03:38

I know that personally. Some of the Russian prisoners were put in camps in the outskirts of Berlin. They were starving, they wore rags, they were so unfortunate. The Germans did not give them anything, many were barefoot. The same thing happened to the Poles. The only people that remained relatively free were the French, the Italians, the western European countries. T

03:39

They too were brought to Germany for forced labor and they too were brought to camps outside of Berlin, but those camps were much better, they were orderly, not that they were so great but those people felt that they were only there temporarily. The Germans were so pedantic and orderly. If something was really important to them they would have it fixed that very day, labor was not an issue.

03:40

Every time that I saw a movie, it was propaganda, to brainwash the people that the Germans were the victors, that Germans are the Aryan race, the elite, that Germans are the only ones who know how to do things. Everything that we heard or read lead us to believe that what the Germans wanted to do was to arrive at a peace treaty with Britain. But the British didn't want it.

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03:41

As long as Hitler was winning, the people supported him wholeheartedly, it made no difference whether one was a Nazi or not, and they can't say otherwise today. What broke their support was Stalingrad and Rommel in Africa. When those things happened, the people felt that a new period was upon them.

03:42

When the heroic slogans could no longer be used, and the people heard of the surrender in Stalingrad and the defeat of Paulus' army, that's when things changed.

03:43

We never heard that the Germans were pulling back, we heard that the Germans were straightening out the line of battle. Stalingrad happened after I joined the underground.

03:44

At work, there were a number of Jews, and I made some friends there. There was one guy, he was older than me, he said to me listen I don't want to be expelled, I don't want to go where they intend to send us, I have a place, if you would like I can take you with me. I think he was a Communist and he had contacts with the Communists. He believed what he was saying.

03:45

I have to tell you something. I always knew and I always said that I would not go to the east, I simply would not go. I don't know what I based that feeling on other than to say that I was just a boy and I simply did not want to do what they wanted me to do. So when he told me what he was going to do, sometime before March of 1943, I responded by saying that I am with you.

03:46

The day arrived when we were notified that we were being expelled. I don't know what the heads of the Jewish community knew or didn't know, what the Gestapo might have told them, and what they told their families. But we had no forewarning, when it actually happened, that we were being expelled. No one knew, no one was prepared, no one had packed up. .

03:47

We were used to the idea that you were notified in advance. Many people would commit suicide when they were notified. They either took pills or closed the house and turned on the gas and never woke up. Older people did not want to leave. After all what would a 65 year old who was barely hanging on in Berlin do in the east, how could he be able to work, what could they do there?

03:48

The suicide rate was very high, it was a big blow. And the expulsion came without any advanced warning, or sign. One day people came to work in the morning, all of sudden trucks showed up. It was like a military operation in all respects.

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03:49

There were policemen, SS and all kinds of people assisting them, even Jews, but mainly police and SS. They had many trucks, they took the people out of the factories. The only thing that the people had with them were the clothes on their backs.

03:50

They took some of the people to former synagogues. The synagogues were being used as collection points, a transit point. Others were taken straightaway out of Berlin to a place where they were loaded on a train. I had completed work at 6:00 AM and they arrived at our factory at 7:00 AM. That was one of my first pieces of good luck, there were others, such as that I had met the older fellow in the first place.

03:51

When I finished worked, I went home and I slept and I got up as usual. I went out and started walking around as I always did, without the yellow badge. If caught, I would've been picked up immediately and loaded on a truck.

03:52

But as I was walking around, I didn't see a single truck and I didn't see a policeman or an SS officer. I knew right away what was happening. So what did I do? Of course I ran straight to the friend's house, the one who told me that he had a place where we could go. As I got to his house, I saw a truck in the distance with policemen.

03:53

I rang the doorbell bell and when he opened the door, I said to him, hurry we have to go, there is a truck in the distance and it is collecting Jews, we have to go. He said to me, Heinz I don't want to go. If everyone else is leaving so am I.

03:54

I was totally bewildered I said come on let's go, we have to hurry, they are getting close. He said, listen, here is an address, go to this place, see this man, tell him that I sent you. He will let you in, send him my regards. He was limited in his ability to walk, he wasn't a healthy person. I took the paper, said goodbye and left.

03:55

My parents were supposedly at work. Before I had gone to work that day I still had parents, a home, some kind of security, some kind of framework. I had something, even though life was terrible, I still had a life. I was a boy, what should I do? I imagined what was happening to my parents.

03:56

I ran to my uncle's house, Uncle Martin. My uncle and aunt Marie, the one who was a non-Jew, were at home. I told them that the Jews were being taken and that I didn't want to go,

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that someone had given me an address. She said, Martin you are going with me. She and my uncle had a house outside of Berlin. So I parted from them. I had nothing to do there.

03:57

I started walking the streets, what else could I do? I decided to go to the name and address on the piece of paper. It wasn't in the best of neighborhoods, who would lived in such an area? Communists, the man was a communist, who but the poor are communists.

03:58

I sent him regards from my friend. He looked me over, he said I will help you, but not now, later, I can't help you out now, I have to make preparations. Come back later, in about a week. I thought about it, after all we had never met before, but he said that he would help me. So I left.

03:59

I walked around and around. What could I do? I didn't have money, just some spare change. I walked around and I met a friend from school, Poldi Chones. I asked him if he knew what was going on. He said that he knew. He was a tough guy. He said to me let's go over to so and so's house (whose mother was a non-Jew but the father was a Jew), maybe they can do something. So we went there. They greeted us very nicely. They gave us something to eat. They said, well to live here is difficult, how can we do that, we have to think about it.

04:00

Now that I think about it today, I realize that it would've been impossible to live there; to live in the underground in Berlin, without support, money, papers, etc., would have been nearly impossible. How could I have thought it possible? One needs papers, money, a place to live, papers are essential. What could one do without papers? If one met up with a policeman, what would one show him?

Disc IV

04:01

We were together, we had nothing and we didn't know what to do. We walked around all day.

04:02

In the evening we decided that temporarily we would go back to my apartment and spend the night there. Before we entered, I knocked on the neighbor's door. She was very frightened.

04:03

She said that the Gestapo had been there, that they were looking for me, and that I should go to the synagogue where my parents were. I had no intention of doing what they wanted me to do. I decided to take certain things from the apartment, things that I felt that I must preserve and give them to the neighbor.

04:04

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On the door was the Gestapo symbol with a warning that no one should enter, that it was out of bounds, that no one was permitted to enter upon pain of punishment. But what did I care? So I entered and I gathered some things and gave it to the neighbor for safe keeping, and I also took some documents. Without her knowing it, we decided to sleep in the apartment that night. That very night the British bombed Berlin in a way that had never been done that way before. They used incendiary bombs.

04:05

I'll never forget that bombing. It was precision bombing, it was terrible, the bombs fell one after the other. We were on the fifth floor, it was just unbelievable to see something like that, the planes flying between the bombs that were falling. So we spent the night there, you can't forget something like that.

04:06

But we had a neighbor in the apartment below so we had to be very careful, we couldn't turn on the faucet, we couldn't go the bathroom, we had to wrap our shoes in rags, but what else could we do. It never entered my mind that could sleep outdoors in the public park, there were Jews who did that.

04:07

What choice did we have. My uncle told me years later, do you think that the Nazi downstairs didn't hear you? I subsequently spent other nights in the apartment at a later time. Who knows? Maybe my uncle was correct and that the downstairs neighbor wasn't such a devoted Nazi after all, it's hard to say, but the fact is that he didn't turn us in.

04:08

The next morning, we left the apartment and went back to the house of the nice couple, the mixed couple where the wife wasn't Jewish. Their name was Beck. They said, OK you can sleep here, on the roof. At that time in Germany, people would get a portion of the basement as well as a portion of the roof.

04:09

People would enclose their area of the roof. There was also a common area on the roof where people would hang their laundry. So the next morning, we didn't want to go down the stairs of my building so we went via the roof and from there down to the street level.

04:10

The kids in that family were good friends of Poldi. They said you can sleep here with us on the roof for a few days. They also gave us food. We were there for a few nights. But they too had trouble with neighbors. Usually, the neighbors were OK but there is always one who isn't.

04:11

One night the bed collapsed. The next day, a neighbor came up to the roof, probably to hang laundry. He saw the blankets or the pillows and started to shout, who is sleeping up here? So

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that was the end of staying there.

04:12

We went back to my apartment. Meanwhile, I had contacted the Communist again, but once again he put me off. Every evening we went up to the apartment and slept there and every morning we would run away from there and leave. We would enter and leave via the roof. One evening my friend went first via the roof, he entered but the door shut and I was locked out, I could not get in.

04:13

One of the other neighbors heard and cried who is walking around there? I didn't know him, but he had seen me so I had to come down. He was connected to the Nazis.

04:14

The next door neighbor came out to see what was going on. I said that I live in that apartment and I just wanted to get in. The Nazi said so why are climbing around up there? He then turned to my next door neighbor and asked him if I really lived there; the neighbor confirmed that was the case. Can you imagine, he didn't say one word extra, they could've said he's a Jew, but he didn't, he just responded to the question as briefly as possible, "yes, he lives here." So the Nazi said, OK but don't wander around up there. Well, from then on we knew that we could no longer sleep there. As usual, in the underground, it's kind of like a rule, there comes a point when you get burned.

04:15

If you stay in one place and just sit there it's one thing, you can stay put for awhile. But if you are in motion and you wander around and you are nearly of draft age, you are always afraid. What if a policeman would see me and stop me?

04:16

The truth is that probably nothing would've happened, after all why should a policeman be interested in stopping me if I am on the street but when you are living life on the run you can't help but be afraid that something bad will happen that perhaps there is something about you that is not quite right and that he will notice. I was worried that someone would ask me for my papers. But unlike in Poland, we were living in a big city, Berlin, which was a metropolis. The police couldn't spend their time questioning people on the street and asking them to show their papers. But the danger was always there.

04:17

We were floating, suspended in air, nothing was organized for us, there was no way that we could've continued in that manner for an extended period. I knew Jews who simply slept in the park. During the day, they would sit in the park and every night they would sleep there. I know this from personal experience.

04:18

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I have an acquaintance, from a mixed marriage. One day she confronted a Jew in the park whom she would see sitting there on a daily basis and went right up to him and said to him, you are a Jew aren't you? He nearly fainted. She helped him and ultimately they got married, but that doesn't matter, the point is that there were people who were able to do that, they could detect who was or was not a Jew.

04:19

I knew a woman who could do just that. She turned over many Jews to the Germans. In fact, there was a recent article in the news about it. More about her later. Meanwhile, at the same time, parallel with what was going on with me, there was a strong, active, well organized Zionist party in Berlin that always concerned itself with the youth. There was a school, they gave the kids a good education, there were **Hachshara** centers around Berlin where the Zionist youth received training to immigrate to Palestine.

04:20

The **kibbutzim** that you see around here, such as **Hazorea**, **Givat Brenner**, the old people who live in the kibbutzim, now they are old but when they were young they received training on Hachshara and from there they came as a planned group to Palestine. The Nazis tolerated the movement until relatively late in the war. They were interested in that kind of thing.

04:21

Most of those young people went to Palestine with **Aliya Bet**. The Nazis found that useful, because they wanted them to cause problems for the British in Palestine. Also, they wanted the Jews to go to Palestine, because they wanted the Jews to leave Germany, their attitude was who needs them in our country! So for quite some time the Germans tolerated the Zionist group in Germany until the Jews were expelled. There was an ongoing debate among the **Hechalutz** members; whether to go to the East, or to stay in Germany and join the underground. Most wanted to go to the East. But there were those who wanted to go underground and to be in an active underground.

04:22

The majority of the Hechalutz Zionists wanted to go to the East with the other Jews because they were of the view that they had always been taught to help the elderly and the children, that was their job and what they were supposed to do. To go to Israel was in any event closed off, so they felt that it was incumbent upon them to help their fellow Jews as they were being taken to the East. Such innocence! Until that time I wasn't a member of the Zionists. Many went to the East. There were a few, a small number, who survived, though most were killed, but some managed to survive that hell.

04:23

Jizchak (Yitzchak) Schwersenz, I am sure that you have heard the name, was one of the people who was against going to the East. He was always of the view to join the underground. When I joined the underground, he was already part of it. He was a good friend of the Beck family. He

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had a group of his own in the underground. It included people such as Gad Beck, Bulleh(???), Davidowicz (Davidovicz), so there was a group in the underground with whom he continued the Zionist way. They would meet weekly insofar as possible, they would make **havdalah**, they made holiday parties, with prayer services and meetings.

04:24

He wanted to help the young people, to keep them steady, to encourage them, to make it easier for them to bear this very difficult period. My friend Poldi was a member of the group. By way of Poldi and the Beck family, I became involved with the **Chug Chaluzi** group in Berlin. I became acquainted with Edith Wolff (Ewo), and a very strong connection developed among us, we were a group of Haluzim, Chug Chaluzi [circle of pioneers].

04:25

We tried very hard to help one another. This took the form of money, food or helping to find a hiding place, the situation was very difficult. Yizchak and Ewo busied themselves with Poldi and to my great good fortune, they took care of me too. They found me a hiding place in Karlshorst outside of Berlin, a train ride that was a bit further away. There I got to know a guy, also a Jew. We stayed there together for an extended period of time.

04:26

We are speaking about events in 1943. The Chug Chaluzi continued to meet often. We met for the most part outside of the city in the forest but for the holidays we would meet in the city at different families. One time we were with Ms. Littman(?), another time with Ewo's place, it depended on the reason for the gathering. So we began to get organized. I had a place to be, and friends.

04:27

Having friends was very important, it was such an invaluable emotional support. Most of them were not in the underground, they were of mixed marriages. I must say the mixed marriage aspect was critical. 50% of those who survived in Berlin did so as a result of the support that they received from the non-Jewish females of the mixed marriages. In this connection, I would like to return to the topic of my uncle Martin and aunt Marie. She told Martin that he was going with her to the country home outside of Berlin where she and my uncle lived.

04:28

They also had an apartment in the center of the city. From time to time, I was able to use that apartment. For example if for whatever reason I didn't have a place to stay, I was able to use that apartment, they gave me a key so that I could enter. So I was set in terms of where I could be. I had the hiding place in Karlshorst, my uncle's apartment in the city and from time to time also the country home outside of the city. They didn't live in the apartment in the city after the expulsion of the Jews. Aunt Marie took the furniture and all the things from the apartment and moved them to the country home, which usually could not happen.

04:29

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Here's an example of Nazi propaganda. The Nazis confiscated Jewish apartments as well as their possessions because they said that the Jews stole it, it was never owned by Jews, it all had belonged to Germany! Once the victories of the early part of the war ended and the Germans started to feel the effects of the bombings, the property that had once belonged to the Jews and that had been warehoused was given to the Germans who had lost everything and had also lost the security that they once felt. There were many empty former Jewish apartments that were simply given over to the Germans whose homes had been destroyed.

04:30

They told the people that the US entered the war because of the Jews, the Jewish capitalists are to blame, they are to blame for the war. They are responsible for everything, the German people were the victims of Jewish world wide connections.

04:31

The German people heard this kind of stuff night and day, it dripped into their heads from 1933. From the time a youngster entered the Hitler youth at six years old all that he heard from day one was anti-Jewish propaganda, that's all that they heard and knew. It's no wonder that they believed it. As for their parents, they were afraid of the youth. There were more than a few incidents of children denouncing their parents because of some remark against Hitler or the Nazis among the Christian families.

04:32

I became a member of the underground on February 28 or 29, 1943. That was the date of the general total I expulsion of the Jews from Berlin. It was also the day of the heaviest bombing of Berlin.

04:33

After that expulsion, I was wondering around for about a month, sleeping here and there wherever I could. The German people liked having a piece of property outside the city in addition to their apartments, where they could go on weekends and work in the garden. So people had little cabins outside of the city. I was staying in one of those cabins in Karlshorst.

04:34

The place in Karlshorst was a kind of colony where people had cabins. The German person in whose cabin I was staying also had an apartment in the central part of the city which was relatively nice. The other person in the cabin was someone whom he had placed there, I had never known him before that time.

04:35

I lived in the cabin with him, Victor was his name, until November 18, 1943. The whole cabin was one room with two beds, simple, primitive. We had to pump water from the soil by hand. For us it was just a place to sleep, it's not that we hung out there or had anything to do there. I lived there but I spent my time with the group, mostly with Gad Beck, his sister Miriam, Poldi, Yitzhak, and my family uncle Martin, and uncle Kurt, the husband of aunt Marie.

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04:36

Uncle Martin, who lived with aunt Marie and uncle Kurt, had a friend who worked with the railroad. He was not a very sympathetic person. Martin was the only one who could connect with him. When Martin joined the underground, he kept up the connection with the man.

04:37

The man had a girlfriend. He also wanted to join the underground. He met a German who gave them shelter. The German was a carpenter, a simple man who permitted them to live with him. The German wasn't in the army, he pretended that he didn't hear well.

04:38

One day the doctor who would periodically examine the German recognized that he was faking the hearing issue. He gave him a letter to give to the army; the German opened it and read it. The letter said that they wanted to send him to Commando 99, Himmelfarb commando. That commando was a special squad; they wouldn't be lined up against a wall and shot but they would be sent on missions from which they would never return. So now he had to make a choice. He knew that he would not survive the commando unit. So he decided to approach Martin to take him and the couple who was living with him into the underground.

04:39

Aunt Marie agreed to hide them! So now there were four people whom she was hiding. Martin, the couple and the German. The house was very small, two rooms, it was very primitive, made out of wood. The friend of Martin had an acquaintance who worked with ration coupons.

04:40

He would buy and sell food coupons, Martin told me about him and suggested that I try to do that too so that I could earn some money to live because I couldn't support myself.

04:41

So I made the connection and I started to sell food coupons in bulk. They were not, for example, single coupons that would entitle you to a piece of meat. They were sheets of coupons for a months worth of food. The coupon person had an in with the government printing office.

04:42

You have to understand that the underground was not a unified entity. They were different groups and each group was a closed entity onto itself but, here and there, they would have a connection, it was very dangerous, but otherwise you couldn't survive on your own, you needed someone and there had to be some kind of framework, each group had some kind of framework and a group would cooperate in a limited way with another group. There was a whole network. Ewo had a connection with another group and through her I made the connection with someone who had the coupon work.

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04:43

Through that connection, we sold lots and lots of coupons and that's how we were able to make money. This went on for awhile.

04:44

Meanwhile, as that was going on, we continued with our life in the Chug Hachaluzi of the underground. True, it was dangerous to walk around, but just as we were able to make our way when we were living with our families, we were able to make our way living the underground, under these new conditions too. You get used to it and to living with the danger which existed all the time. We would always hear that someone was caught by the Gestapo or that someone was betrayed.

04:45

Over time the Chug Hachaluzi grew in numbers. The person who allowed me to use the room, told me that we, my roommate and I had to work for the Communists. He was also a Jew. We never asked or told one another what each of us was doing or with whom we were involved, and that was the best way to act under the circumstances, neither of us knew what the other was doing in the underground, our boundaries were sharp and clearly defined. And in the underground that is the best way.

04:46

So, we were forced to work for the Communists. We bought guns, someone set that up for us, it was a one time deal, no one looked to continue that connection, you wanted a gun so you got a gun, put it in your pocket, and that was that .

04:47

I got the gun via the underworld. I had a mauser. I learned how to use when I got it, on the spot, I was taught how to use it, how to take it apart, how to put it back together and how to shoot. I never shot it, things did not get to that point. I had it with me all the time, but I didn't have the opportunity to use it.

04:48

So, the job that the communist wanted us to do was to distribute communist pamphlets. There was nothing more dangerous at the time than to do that kind of work in Berlin. It was plain and simple suicidal, in the middle of Berlin to distribute communist material! No one in my Hechalutz group knew that I was doing that, I didn't tell them. I knew how to keep boundaries, there was no need to tell them what I was doing, it was healthier that way, this is something that I had to do but I didn't have to tell the others about it, it would not help anything for them to have known.

04:49

The less one knows the better. I could sleep better that way and so could they. No one could get information out of me that I didn't know. Under torture, whatever kind of torture, they would be able to ask me the name of roommate but if they would ask me greater details about his

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activities there would be no way for me to reveal that kind of information because I simply did not the answer. I was the only one from my group who was armed. Victor also walked around with a weapon.

04:50

Listen, there are always ways to get things done if there is a need, in fact at a later time I got another gun but that's a different story. So I got an order to distribute the pamphlets and an order is an order, there was no way not to do it. We did not go together, he went one way and I went another way, each of us on our own walked to the train station with pamphlets and a gun in our pockets and in each train car we left pamphlets.

04:51

Life continued. The situation continued to worsen. By this time we knew what was going on in the east, we knew everything, we would listen to the radio from London, England all the time. What we knew was news from the East relating to the front. Although later, we also knew what was going on in the East.

04:52

Gad had a friend from school, Carla (Karla) Wagenberg. (Wagensberg). She was one of the people from the **garin** [group] that went to the East. She somehow succeeded, by way of a "meister" [military title] it doesn't really matter who, in sending us a postcard, to Berlin. From that point in time, we knew what was going on. She managed to convey information in the postcard in a circuitous manner about what was really going on there. She wrote something like everything is OK here but for the **aruba** [chimney]. And in that manner, by talking around things, she was able to convey information. I saw the postcard with my own eyes, it was sent to Gad Beck's house and I heard it read aloud.

04:53

From the postcard we were able to understand that something terrible was going on, that people were being murdered. She [Carla] survived. She played the flute in the orchestra at Auschwitz when the workers would go out to work and when they would return. We received the postcard when I was in the underground, in 1943. Beck's family was from a mixed marriage, his family continued to live in Berlin until the end, so they were able to receive mail. The postcard that she wrote was after the final expulsion of the Jews and from that point on we knew exactly what was going on.

04:54

Our group got larger and larger, more people joined, and without any doubt the dangers also increased. We joined the underground around the first of March. During the summer months, by the first of June, the news started to arrive that people from other groups were getting caught. We heard that the group that had bought a lot of food coupons, from that group some were caught.

04:55

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So it was a chain, that's when the wheels started turning. One person would get caught, then another, and then yet another. Someone would betray someone else, and slowly things began to unravel. Dr. Kaufmann, then Ernst Hallermann, , then the biggest blow, Ewo Wolff. She was told that she had to report either to the police or to the Gestapo, I'm not sure which. There was a whole debate whether or not she should go. She said of course that she had to go, what other choice did she have. She knew how to worry about everyone, except herself.

04:56

I had some kind of papers, a combination of things, but they weren't worth much. I relied on the fact that I was young so I wasn't carefully checked. So what happened was that she (Ewo) went, and did not return. Meanwhile, people continued to live, to move from here to there. Poldi for example, he had to move from here to there.

04:57

I was lucky, I stayed in one place. Once in a while I went to my aunt's house, but I really didn't want to take advantage of them, she had her hands full with the four others that she was hiding. Sometimes I went to visit them, to sit with them for a while, it's good to sit with family during such times, to talk about things that once were. But Poldi had it tough, to move around a lot, he was with Yitzchak (Jizchak) Schwersenz a great deal because he too had to move around.

04:58

One day the Gestapo came for Poldi. Somehow they found out where he was staying and they waited for him there. He tried to protest his arrest but it didn't help him. He was taken to the Gestapo and was badly beaten, it was terrible. I was told afterwards how terrible he looked. That made us feel very badly. We began to feel that the ring was tightening around our group.

04:59

Hallermann who had been a big help to Ewo, was also caught. He gave his documents to Schwersenz, which was a big deal. That meant Schwersenz could walk around. Ewo also had a friend who could make fake identification cards.

05:00

So our group began to diminish but we continued to meet. We made a party at Linke's place. It was a holiday, perhaps Chanukah. We got together, we sang together. It was a spiritual boost to help us feel better and to rise above what was going on around us.

Disc V

05:01

I had joined the underground for self preservation, in order to take care of myself, I wasn't connected to anyone in the beginning. But later, when I joined the Chug Hachaluzi it was a mutually beneficial relationship.

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05:02

We helped each other in all ways. The help took the form of helping to find a hiding place, food, a way to make a living, in all ways that one can think of. On the other hand, we tried very hard not to be conspicuous. Until that time, if I look at our group, there weren't too many of us in the underground. Most of our group was made up of people from mixed marriages.

05:03

The underground with which I was familiar was made up of people from the Kaufman group, he looked after the people in his group, the group of my aunt Marie which was a special group; the people in her group, those whom she was hiding in her house were never allowed to go outside except here and there if absolutely necessary, and then there was our group. Those that were in the underground from our group were Poldi, me, the family Zeitman (Maurice and Ester, ???), the mother and father, so there were a number of people.

05:04

We tried to help one another more or less. We would get together, not only on holidays, not often, and not in people's homes, we would go outside the city and there we would spend the day together. We didn't do it often, because as a group you would be noticeable, which is dangerous, but we would meet, and we would spend the time outside of the city, we didn't want to be noticeable. There might be six to eight people at a meeting, ten maximum, but even ten was too much. We are talking about the period 1940-1943 when we would meet.

05:05

There were some other people associated with our group, people such as Eva Fleischmann, Rudi Bernstein, they belonged to our group but we weren't close with them, we didn't meet with them often. There was Gunther Dawidowicz, Margo Dawidowicz (Gunther's) wife, the group was larger but we didn't always meet. The help was a kind of spiritual help, you knew that there was someone to talk to. It makes a tremendous difference to know that there was someone you could talk to. Initially, when I was on my own, I felt very miserable but when I was with others, I felt much better.

05:06

When we would meet, it wasn't always the same people, it would depend upon the circumstance. I can't tell you now how large our group was in total, perhaps 20-30 people something like that, it always changed. Afterwards, when you look back, you see that the group was larger than I thought, but when you are in it you think that it's small because you don't get together with everyone and you don't know everyone, you may just know a name. If I look around, we were very lucky; with the exception of Poldi all of us from our small group survived.. And that's a big deal.

05:07

Poldi did not denounce us, he didn't break under interrogation, he could have told them some things but not all that much. He was more involved in things that affected him personally. I

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knew more. I had more general information because I went around more and worried more.

05:08

I worried more because of the ration coupon work. I was more active and I had to be more active. At that time we recognized that we would not be able to continue much longer to do what we were doing and that we had to find a way to escape. Jizchak made a connection with a woman, her name was Gerhardt, I don't know her other name. She was Oberstudienrat Gerhart(?). She lived in Zepernick, near Berlin, a very noble woman, a very strong woman.

05:09

He spent some time with her, I don't know how long. He was well connected to her. She in turn was connected with people who lived near the Swiss border. She thought that perhaps she would be able to help us to get across the border to Switzerland. And that is one of the explanations as to how Jizchak was able to get to Switzerland some time later. Also, once when I had problem where to stay, he arranged for me to stay at her place outside of the city. She was an elderly lady, on a pension. I was a sickly boy, I had a form of tuberculosis and my health had seriously deteriorated.

05:10

She arranged for me to see a doctor. The doctor examined me and told me what I should and should not eat, but of course there was no possibility for me to follow his recommendations. Personally speaking, my economic situation had greatly improved because of my dealings at the time so in theory the idea of crossing the border was a possibility. At that time, to cross the border cost 4,000 marks, that was a large sum of money at that time.

05:11

I stayed with her for awhile, but I had to leave, she was afraid. Until the end, until the 18th of November, I was in the little cabin with the young man who shared the cabin with me and from time to time we continued our work for the Communists. Like I said, Kaufmann, Hallermann, Ewo, and Poldi had been caught. In any event, on November 18, I was alone in the cabin, my roommate slept somewhere else that night, luckily for him. He was much older than me.

05:12

During the night of November 18 while I was sleeping, two men from the Gestapo broke in, they actually were Jews though I didn't know it at the time. They came in with pistols drawn and arrested me. What can I tell you, my world was destroyed that day, it was just terrible. Here I was, after eight months, having managed rather well for myself notwithstanding that I was very young. I had not given my address to anyone. Some people knew more or less where I lived, but not my street, not my exact address.

05:13

But I guess what they knew was enough for them to find me, apparently they had been looking for me for awhile. It started when Kaufmann was caught and his group was disbanded, they also got the food coupons. When Hallermann was caught they also got the food coupons so

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they began to investigate. The name "Heinz" kept coming up in the interrogations. So they were interested in finding this Heinz because they thought that would get them to the source of the stolen food coupons, never mind that Heinz didn't know anything either, but they thought it would help to find Heinz.

05:14

Somehow they got to me, they heard that people were living in huts, etc., basic detective work. So that night they caught me and took me to Grosse Hamburger Strasse.

05:15

It was not pleasant, they beat me, they put me in a bunker, they kept me isolated and every day they interrogated me. So my group knew I was caught, they had to be careful, how could they guess what I might say? My aunt, my roommate, Jizchak, with one word from me they could be caught as well.

05:16

Life was already very tough for my aunt Marie, uncle Kurt went to work daily, he was a Jew so he went to forced labor daily. Aunt Marie went out on her bicycle every day, she had to worry about getting food for six people.

05:17

She had one food card for herself that of a non-Jew and one for her husband, a Jew, which was not worth much. So she had to scramble around to get food. She had some sources, one of them was a church, there was a priest there who helped her. She went to her sisters, she didn't tell them about the others, she would say Kurt didn't have food.

05:18

There were five males and one female. It was problematic, the lone female was engaged to one of the men but another one was after her and that caused tension, not with my uncle Martin, he wasn't involved, it was with one of the other men. One day, one of them took out a knife and wanted to kill the other one, that's how difficult things became. Imagine, people living cooped up day and night with nothing to do, no food, no work and extreme danger of getting discovered, also bombing nearby.

05:19

When I was arrested, aunt Marie told them that they had to leave, who knows what could happen, So the three others left.

05:20

As for uncle Martin, Marie had a neighbor whose husband was at the front so he wasn't coming back so fast. The neighbor agreed that Martin could stay at her place. It didn't occur to me to give out any names! When I was caught, the owner of the hut, the Communist was also arrested.

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05:21

I don't know how it became known that I was caught. Somehow it got to Gad Beck but how I am not sure. You have to understand what was going on with me.

05:22

From minute one they kept asking me what I had been doing with my time, that is what they wanted to know, how I had been spending my days, and I told them, but the question is what did I tell them. I had to tell them something otherwise they would've killed me. I didn't tell them who had been living with me in the hut. Instead, I told them that Poldi had been with me, after all Poldi had been captured a few weeks before me so I didn't think that I would be getting him into trouble.

05:23

Eventually, they realized that I had lied about Poldi and I was given a beating, but that's a different story. As for the food coupons, I had to say something, I couldn't say that I found the food coupons in the street. The coupons were printed in such a way, it was a series, so if they get the series they can trace back where they were printed, it was inevitable but when I was caught they had not as yet traced the coupons back to the source.

05:24

So I told them all kinds of stories about how I got the food coupons. They wanted to know where I would meet my source, how often and how we would do business.. There were always two Gestapo men in the interrogation sessions.

05:25

I told them how I would meet my contact at one of the popular food places, a chain like today's McDonalds, and I would meet him on this and this date at this and this time. So the Gestapo said let's go there. Well naturally nothing happened; we did it once, twice, three times and no one showed up. They would take me in handcuffs. They realized that nothing was going to come of it. But meanwhile, I had managed to drag out the time; from that place there were also expulsions. The prison where I was being held had been an old age home and a gymnasium (a high school).

05:26

It became a prison with bunkers downstairs and a prison upstairs, part of the place was for minor criminal acts. People like me were considered the tougher cases. It was there that I had heard about **Stella Kubler**, I met her. She would walk around there. Initially, prisoners such as myself would be interrogated and after they had squeezed out all the juice they would be sent to Auschwitz. I was caught by two Jews who worked for the Gestapo in order for them to be able to remain free to walk around Berlin.

05:27

When they finished interrogating me, they put me into another room with ten other people, Jews. There is a monument outside the building with a plaque which states that from this spot,

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55,000 men, women and children were sent to Auschwitz. Moses Mendelsohn is buried in the yard there.

05:28

Downstairs are the bunkers in a long row. At one end was a wing for prostitutes, French girls. That wing was the police/ criminal wing. I was sent to the wing for those who would be sent to Auschwitz, one transport had already been sent, there were other Jews there. Meanwhile, by that time they had caught someone else from our group, from the Zeitman family. The Zeitmans were from Berlin, two parents, a son and a daughter. The children were our age.

05:29

The father was some kind of merchant. He dealt with diamonds and did all kinds of money business. He had excellent connections with the Gestapo, I don't know exactly what his relationship was with them. What I knew was that something wasn't quite right with him. One day, they brought the father, the son and the daughter to the prison. They were caught by Stella Kubler, at the opera. She knew exactly where to find Jews like them.

05:30

The Jews who were in the underground were like that, they wanted to periodically go to cultural spots, to breathe "fresh air." They lived under a false sense of security that in going to such public places they were probably safe, because who would recognize a Jew among so many people. We also went to places like that. So one day, the three of them were caught. The father and son were put into the cell where I was placed. I didn't know what kind of interrogation they had undergone. I was caught on November 15, they were caught sometime in December, mid December I'm not sure of the date.

05:31

The whole time there were bombings of Berlin. On one side of the bunder was a street, around the back was a cemetery. Between the cemetery and the building was a path that at night was lit up. In front of the cemetery was a fence so that we would not be able to escape that way, not that we were ever let outside to breathe fresh air, we were not taken outside.

05:32

So as I mentioned, my landlord had also been caught. When he was arrested he had the food coupons on him. He too was interrogated about how, where he got the coupons. He also told them stories. He said, what do you mean, that fellow is a Jew? It never occurred to me, he came to rent the hut, it never occurred to me that he was a Jew! I have to tell you I was amazed, he actually got out of it, they let him go. He was caught because he was the landlord of the hut.

05:33

No one knew details about "Heinz" (me). Yes, they were looking for Heinz, but they were not

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able to connect Poldi to Heinz or Hellmann to Heinz. Evu knew of the connection but by that time Evu wasn't there. I told them that Poldi was my roommate when I was interrogated but by that time Poldi wasn't there. Don't forget I was arrested six weeks after Poldi, I heard from some of the other prisoners that he was no longer there.

05:34

So what do you do when you are a prisoner? If you still have your wits about you, and you are a little bit on the ball you start to think about what you can do to help yourself.

05:35

The Zeitmans were like that as was I. So we started to plan, how can we get out of there. Near our cell was a storage place where tools were kept, things that in case of a fire you could use them to break down walls.

05:36

There were windows. In Germany, part of the window is above ground and part below ground. But all of the windows downstairs in the basement had bars and they were nailed to the window sill. We also noticed that part of fence in front of the cemetery had a break in it.

05:37

So in order to open our window we needed a tool. We had observed that when the air raid alarm was sounded, the lights were turned off and we the prisoners were ordered out of the cells and into the halls. We could not remain in our cells, we had to stand in the halls. So one evening when it was dark we took one of the tools from the storage place back into our cell.

05:38

We pried out the nails that were holding the bars over our window and we were able to release the bars. We saw the opening in the fence and we saw that there was room enough for a head to protrude from our window. If an opening is large enough for a head to fit, the rest of the body will fit too. We put the tool under our beds and inserted the bars back. And we waited. It wasn't a good time to do anything else because a guard was outside and there were too many watchful eyes. Zeitman and I did it, and we waited.

05:39

That was on January 1, that was a big day, my son was born on January 1, I will never forget that day. So on January 1, at night, when the air raid alarm was sounded, and the bombs started falling and it was dark, we didn't stay in the hall, we went back into our cell, took out the tool, I pried open the bars, and Zeitman went first, out the window, through the fence and disappeared. Morritz went next, then me. Seven people got out that way that night.

05:40

It's just too bad that they didn't worry more about the daughter. She came into our cell, but at the same time a little kid wandered into our cell and saw that the window bars were open, ran into the hall, and started shouting, they are escaping from over there, they are escaping from

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over there. It was just a kid! This story made history with the Gestapo, that seven people should be able to escape. I can't describe what happened there next because I wasn't there. But I can just imagine what happened, I am sure that many people were sent to Auschwitz because of that.

05:41

But in truth the fault for our being able to escape did not rest with the Jews. The Gestapo didn't have a proper guard there at the time. When aunt Marie realized that I had not named names, she allowed the others to return to her house. They pleaded with her to be allowed back, they cried, they had no place else to go. So now we were outside, where should we go? I didn't want to go to aunt Marie, I had a feeling that things weren't good there.

05:42

I went with Moritz, the Zeitman son. He said to me, Heinz come with me. They were very wealthy. They had lots of hiding places. He took me to a hut in south Berlin where we stayed for a few days. Meanwhile, a connection was made with Gad Beck. Very quickly the news spread.

05:43

Up to that point no one had known me, no one had a picture of me. After I was arrested that was no longer the case, I was known and recognizable. So I went with Moritz, the family looked after us, but the party came to an end quickly. One day there was an air raid and there was a tremendous explosion, I can't even describe it. We youngsters went through such hell. Everyone else went to the bunkers. .

05:44

We remained in the hut, it was made of carton, flimsy, the explosions were terrible. They also threw firebombs from the planes. The anti-air defenses were right next to us, not even 100 meters away, the noise was deafening, things were burning around us. We cried, we went out of our minds and fled. We ran into the street, all the houses were burning.

05:45

When there is so much heat mixed with clouds, it started to rain, black rain. It was like the bombing of Dresden and also Hamburg. So that night I went to aunt Marie.

05:46

Aunt Marie lived outside the city. They had an area outside of the house which was used for making compost. They took out all the waste material that was in there, that was a terrific place to be during the air raid.

05:47

We could see everything from there, there were about 500 planes, there was a name for their formation, the planes came in very close together for protection and they released their bombs

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at the same time.

05:48

So that month I went to aunt Marie. This was in January 1944, this was already after Stalingrad which was in December. So things weren't going well for the Germans, not in Russia and not in Africa either and the Americans were already making headway in south Italy. The situation wasn't like it was earlier, the population no longer felt so confident.

05:49

So after I escaped I had to start all over again. Though we helped one another, we didn't have much. We didn't have money. Jizchak already had one leg outside the door, he had planned his escape to Switzerland. He had gotten the green light from Ms. Gerhart and another woman. In February, he crossed over to Switzerland.

05:50

Gad Beck heard about our escape. He wanted to see what was going on with me. The Becks and my aunt Marie were in contact with one another. He knew that there was a certain day that she had to collect her coupons, she had no choice but to appear at a certain spot on a certain day.

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05:51

So he waited at the spot where he knew that she would have to appear, but she didn't come. What happened to her? That day, she was sick. She finally came, he saw her and she whispered her that I was at her house.

05:52

So, Jizchak was about to leave and I couldn't stay with aunt Marie. So they had to find me a place, which they did, with a Mrs. Simke near Alexanderplatz. Jizchak had stayed there for awhile. She was a terrific lady, she also liked money.

05:53

But I didn't have money. She took me in anyway. I can honestly say that I felt good there. I had a little corner in the kitchen at night. During the day, I helped her around the house with housework, I washed dishes, she had a son who was wounded in the war. It seems that they always hated the Nazis. Her husband was a driver. They were very simple people, but they wanted to help. Her son had only one leg, he wore a prosthesis.

05:54

They had two children, I babysat the children. I was there for about two months. They looked after me, and took care of everything that needed to be taken care of. When there was an air raid, I went with the family to the bunker, there was a large one in Alexanderplatz.. I was very afraid to go out. Actually, on one occasion when I went with the family to the bunker, I had to take the kids with me, I saw someone from the Gestapo, a Jew. I ran away, he ran after me, but I was able to lose him.

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05:55

Another time, I was walking near a bridge, and I saw someone, I ran away. Life became much harder for me, I lived in fear from the police and from the Gestapo. So I was left with that family. Jizchak escaped, but we were in contact with each other, with the group. When Jizchak got to Switzerland, he immediately became active.

05:56

He made contact with Hechalutz, with Nathan [Schwalb] Dror who was the in charge of all the Jews in the underground in all countries. Dror was told that those people needed help that otherwise they would not be able to survive. Dror immediately, without any questions or delays, sent money with someone via the Swiss embassy with a letter that included addresses as to whom the money should be given. On that list were the Simke family which is where I was staying, the Beck family, Davidowicz, and others.

05:57

That was a very dangerous thing to do because the money could have fallen into the wrong hands. The money got to Beck and that's when a new story began.

05:58

First, we now had a connection outside the country so we had hope, that perhaps, according to our thinking, we had options, that there might be an avenue of escape for us. What we didn't know was that at that time, in May, some people had been caught: Mrs. Maya, people who helped others get across the border, they were caught and killed. In any event, the money arrived and was put into the Chug Hachaluzi fund.

05:59

The money immediately began to be actively used for things like finding people hiding places and for food, to help people meet their needs. The money didn't stay in one spot, it was spread around to different hiding places so that if part was discovered, there still would be other places where money could be obtained.

06:00

Some of the money went to aunt Marie, it was clear that she was loyal, some went to the family Lowenstein, they were a mixed marriage, they were good friends and loyal to the Chug Hachaluzi, and part of the money remained with the Chug Hachaluzi and specifically with me and Gad Beck. Once Jizchak escaped, Gad Beck and I took over the group more so Gad than me because I had to be careful.

06:01

Until that time, Gad could have been free, he was a child of a mixed marriage, a **mischling**, he didn't have to join the underground, he chose to join for his own reasons. He didn't officially join, but he quit his job, he used to work in demolition of buildings, not that he ever worked, he didn't, he knew how to manage without working, but that is what he was registered to do. But

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from that point on he dealt with managing the Chug Hachaluzi, doing what was needed to help people. You can say that from then on the organization became a better organization.

Disc VI

06:02

Luckily, by way of the person from the Swiss embassy, the money and the letter got into the hands of Gad Beck. Not only were there addresses listed in the letter but all kinds of veiled instructions from Natan Dror as to what we should and should not do, though written not in a straightforward manner in the event the letter fell into the wrong hands, we understood his instructions.. A new period started for the Chug Hachaluzi. Gad took his work with the organization very seriously.

06:03

We divided the money and placed it into a number of hands so that if discovered it would not all be lost. We gave some to Aunt Marie, some to the family Lowenstein, and we began to get organized.

06:04

It took some time to ramp up. I had just escaped from jail, I myself was still not settled mentally or physically.

06:05

The prison where I had been held was run by the Gestapo. However, as was the case in other things Gestapo related such as ghettos, the Gestapo handled the major issues that were important to them, the rest, the smaller jobs, they turned over to the Jews to manage. The person who was in charge of the prison on Grosse Hamburger Strasse was Dr. Reschke, he was once a principal of a school on Grosse Hamburger Strasse. Also, it turned out that there were still some Jews, not from mixed marriages, who were in all kinds of positions.

06:06

There were some doctors, and some nurses who were still in the hospitals, for some reason they were kept in Berlin. When I was in prison, I met a guy who was once in a train carriage, it was not a passenger car but one that was meant for livestock, that was on the way to Auschwitz.

06:07

He had managed to cut through some netting, there was netting over all of the openings, and that's how he escaped. He was eventually caught again and that's how I met him in prison. Of the seven of us who escaped, only three of us were not caught. I don't remember their names, I had only known them briefly for about a month when I escaped. .

06:08

The prison breakout was not in the newspapers, the attitude to the Jews was not to

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acknowledge their existence.

06:09

Originally, when I had been caught, I had a piece of paper in my pocket that had Gad Beck's address on it. When I was interrogated, they asked me what was my connection to the Becks, I said that I knew them. After I escaped, they went to search for me. The first and natural place to look for me was by my old landlord. He was not a Jew, they believed the story that he told them when he was arrested, so he had been set free. Once I escaped, they paid him a visit and told him that if he were to see me, he should notify them immediately. They also went to the Beck family.

06:10

They thought I might be by the Becks. When they got there, both Gad and his twin sister Miriam were there as well. Gad is a good actor. When they arrived, he played as if he were the absent minded professor, he acted as if he didn't understand what was going on, what they wanted from him, so they left him alone. they asked Miriam who said that we were friends.

06:11

That's how she got in trouble. They said, oh so he was your friend, where would the two of you go? She said here and there. So for about a week or two they made her take them to the places, restaurants, etc., where we supposedly had gone out. Nothing came of it and after a few days they left her alone. That was the first contact of the Gestapo with Beck. By the time I was back on the scene about one month later, they didn't pay attention to the Beck family and didn't know what was going on with the money. I was at the Simke's, the money arrived, the organization started to become active and was easier to organize to find food.

06:12

In Berlin, there was a very well developed black market. There were about one million Germans in Berlin. They had coupons, while you were able to live on that, people were always trying to have more than what appeared on the coupon, that's human nature, for example soldiers coming back from the front, people wanted to spoil them a little so they wanted to get a little more than what the coupon bought, when there is a shortage people always want more than what they are given, so it wasn't surprising that there was a black market.

06:13

It was also wartime, Berlin at this the time was being heavily bombed. The destruction was visible, there were neighborhoods that were badly damaged but there was no time or money or workers for repairs.

06:14

The wounds of war were quite visible and you saw more and more of that every day. There were about a million Germans in Berlin plus all the **auslanders** that had been brought there from the surroundings. The German men were at the front, There were many foreign young men around so the German women had dealings with them. That's human nature and there

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was no problem with it. There were French and Italians and German women were involved with them. Most of the black market problems were the problems of the foreigners in the city.

06:15

As for the children, parents tried to get them out of the city to the surrounding countryside where it was safer and also it would lighten the load for the mothers who were without their husbands. There were many wounded and also widows. The atmosphere was not like it was at the beginning of the war, you could feel it, the mood was different, the spirits of the people had fallen, there were defeats, the victories were over. People already knew how to read and listen between the lines.

06:16

The Germans were not embarrassed to listen to the news and the radio from England. This was 1944, that's when I escaped. The connection with Switzerland was established, money was coming from Switzerland. The recommendation from Natan [Schwalb/Dror] was to get organized and go to Switzerland, Jizchak had done it and we were told to do it too. There was contact. After Jizchak escaped there were others who did so as well, but that entire circle fell apart.

06:17

Those that helped Jizchak to get across the border were captured. Ms. Gerhardt was caught but she was able to get out of it. So the connection was broken, notwithstanding that there was money, it was impossible to get to Switzerland. Gad was very, very active at that time. He was always on the road, arranging things, getting to know people. He had a special talent, an ability to make a connection with people and especially with friendly people.

06:18

He knew with whom you could be friendly, with whom you had to be careful, with whom you can connect, with whom you can talk to about certain topics and with whom you had to be careful. So the outside circle of helpers of the Chug Hachaluzi grew and broadened, for example he connected with the family Christella [??] and through them he met others who were willing to help. So our situation, organizationally and monetarily stabilized.

06:19

We realized that we had to remain there, at the time there was no other choice. We made contact with a baron, Baron Kronenberg, whether he was a real baron is another question, let's put it this way he was a charlatan who changed his name many times as the situation demanded. He said that he had a connection at the Swiss border who would be able to help us get across the border to Switzerland.

06:20

We decided that we would try it out. Miriam had an official document, a **post ausweis**, that even today is still officially recognized by the government offices, with a picture and a stamp.

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Luckily, she had managed to get that document renewed and it did not have a "J" stamped on it. The "baron" said that he was prepared to travel with her to the border and to see if there was an opportunity to cross. So we gave them money, food coupons, food, and a little valise. They went by train, separately, in separate compartments.

06:21

The train stopped at Konstanz, they changed trains to Siegen a town closer to the border. The trip took hours, there were air raids, there were inspections on the train, but she was a little young person with an official document so no one gave her a problem. When they arrived at the border, she saw that he indeed had a connection there with someone, they took a hotel, in different places. He spoke with someone.

06:22

They had dinner together and they decided that the next day she would walk to a certain place and try to cross the border there. The next day, the weather wasn't so good, but she started out. She was a young girl and off she went, marching along. She walks and walks, she was born in 1923 so she was about 20 years old. This wasn't like the crossing that Jizchak had made where he was taken to a certain village to a building and he was given directions and it was known where the destination was, where they would end up in Switzerland.

06:23

With her it was different, she didn't know where she was going, she just kept walking. All of a sudden she meets two soldiers. They stop her and ask her, Ms. where are you coming from? She said, I don't know, I must've made a mistake. What could she say, she didn't have a name or a destination place that she could tell them. They said to her, don't you know that you were already in Switzerland but that now you are back in Germany?

06:24

What happened was that there is a certain area that's kind of a circle where part is in Switzerland but there is a part that is also in Germany. They said, we'll help you to get back. She was afraid, she thought this is not for me, it's not for my nerves, she didn't have any more food or coupons. She decided to return to Berlin. This was a lesson to us that it was not possible to do something that was not organized, you have to have some kind of foundation otherwise you will get caught. So the test with Baron Kronenberg failed.

06:25

By way of the family Christolla [???], also an intermarried family, she was Christian, she had two sons, her kids were in Berlin, she had a boyfriend, an officer in the German air force who worked at the airport, he had an important position there. He had control over certain documents.

06:26

She managed to persuade him to sell documents for money. So through him, for the first time, we had documents, all of us. They had to be restamped every month, the documents indicated

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that we worked at the airport, Starken [???], the airport of the air-force and those documents were sufficient for any inspection. If you had that document in your pocket you were protected, you could get around provided you didn't do anything stupid. I also received that document.

06:27

This man, once he tasted money, was prepared to do anything, provided you paid him. I don't recall what name I used on the document. During that same period, there were still a number of members of the Hechalutz group around who had participated in **Hachshara**. While the place was now under the control of Christians, some of the youth, those that were products of intermarriage were permitted to remain there and to work, the Jews had been taken away, but the kids that were the products of intermarried parents, were allowed to remain. They were relatively free, they did not suffer in any way, they continued to work but it was a type of forced labor..

06:28

Among those youths were three brothers, the Wallach brothers, with whom we had connections. We had connections with all kinds of groups including those brothers. At the time, Gad Beck and I were always on the road. He was more like the foreign minister of our group in charge of the big things, like hiding places, papers, getting money, moving money, making connections, whereas I was involved with things like making sure we had food.

06:29

We decided that we would visit those brothers. We took the slow train, we were in different parts of the train.

06:30

When you walked around in those days, you noticed every little thing, like the Israeli soldiers of today, if you didn't do that you were lost. When I got on the train I noticed that documents were being checked. I quickly left that car, got out of the train, and then reentered the train in a different car. The train started moving and wouldn't you know it, the same Gestapo man whom I had seen inspecting the documents in the first car that I got on, was now in my car.

06:31

He asked me for my papers and luckily, they were fine and he let me go undisturbed, but the experience cost me in terms of my health! We arrived in the town where we were supposed to be, but the actual place was far from the station. We rented bicycles but Gad didn't know how to ride a bike.

06:32

Somehow he managed, when you have to do something you manage to do it. We got there, we met the people we were supposed to meet, we passed on to them what we were supposed to give them, they gave us food, we got along very well with them. But they had received an order to leave that place, they were told that they had to go to Berlin to the Gestapo building. They slept there and from there they had to go every day to forced labor.

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06:33

We were very frightened, we didn't think that situation would last long. They didn't know if their mother was alive, she wasn't around any more. We decided that we couldn't allow them to remain there, one day they could be sent to Auschwitz. So we decided that we had to get them out of there. We had the authority to do that.

06:34

We told them to be prepared, that we would be moving them. One day when they went to work, all three of the brothers ran away before the police could figure out where they had gone. Gad had arranged a place for them. Meanwhile, I also had changed houses. I was now staying with one of Gad's cousins.

06:35

The cousin worked in a factory where there was an engineer. That's how things worked, you had to get to know people. If you knew someone, then you would get to know someone else and slowly build a network of connections. The cousin told Gad that he was sure that it would be possible to make an arrangement with the engineer. So Gadi started to talk to him, slowly drawing him in, persuading him that it would be the right thing to do, that it was worthwhile. Gadi had a special talent for things like this.

06:36

The engineer had a friend, a female. She was divorced. She was very much in love with the engineer and would do anything for him. She owned two apartments. He persuaded her to rent out one of them.

06:37

He didn't tell her for what purpose,, so all that she did was to rent out one of the apartments, so we had an apartment. Meanwhile, the Gestapo moved from one location to another, I think because their former building had been bombed, and it was no longer suitable to serve as a prison. So the Gestapo moved from Grosse Hamburger Strasse to Oranienstrasse, which was in a different section of Berlin..

06:38

They moved into a building that had been part of a huge compound that had at one time served as the Jewish Hospital in Berlin, the Jewish old age home had been there too which is where my grandfather used to live. It also used to be the morgue. In that building the Gestapo built bunkers to house the Jews that they caught prior to sending them to Auschwitz. The name of the engineer was Paul Dreier, he survived the war. Her name was Ms. Pfeifer (Pfeiffer???), she was the one who agreed to rent out the apartment to us.

06:39

The apartment was five minutes from Oranienstrasse, which was both good and not so good. The apartment was convenient;. Its entrance was such that it was difficult for the other tenants

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in the building to see who was entering and leaving. At times, we were six to seven people in the apartment. One day the engineer came over to the apartment. When he saw all of us there, he became frightened about what he had gotten himself into, but he kept quiet.

06:40

His girlfriend who had gotten divorced because her former husband who was a fairly well known artist had been in the apartment with his lover, in the very same apartment that we were renting, and killed her right there. Now that was an interesting episode. So that was the reason that she was prepared to rent that apartment, she didn't want to live there and didn't even want to go in there or to have anything to do with that apartment.

06:41

So our group got larger. Originally, the three brothers came to our place when they escaped, then we separated them and sent them to different places. By that time we were more organized and had other apartments. Another guy came to us, Paul Zavelstein, he had asthma. We had a problem with him. Actually, you have to think about it. What happens when you are in the underground and you get sick? There are clinics, I myself had to go to a clinic when I had a terrible tooth problem.

06:42

What can you do when you go to someone to hide you and you get sick? But if you have pain there is no r choice, you need medical attention. With Paul we had a problem, he was sick and needed medication. Luckily, on the street where the apartment was located there was a nurse who was Jewish. She would've been sent to Auschwitz but she was a cousin of Dr. Lustig, the director of the Jewish hospital in Berlin, about whom there are mixed views. In any event, because of him she was not sent to Auschwitz and continued to work at the hospital. Through her we were able to get medication to help ease Paul's asthma.

06:43

In May, the connection to Switzerland via "Maya" was broken. She was caught which meant that we no longer could get to Switzerland. It's now close to June 1944. The Russians were always pushing for the establishment of a second front. The Americans opened the second front on June 6, 1944.

06:44

For those of us in Berlin, we had always hoped that there would be a second front, the whole world was looking at Fortress Europe which the Germans had created. So when the second front opened we were so full of hope that the war would end quickly.

06:45

When the officers mounted a coup, Gad was actually right there, where it all happened. They saw the hysteria that broke out among the Nazis.

06:46

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We were so sure that Hitler was dead and we were so hopeful but later we heard his voice on the radio. He was a different man, the way that he spoke was so full of hatred, the way that they spoke about the officers and the aristocrats, terrible hatred, they slaughtered all the high ranking officers. We saw it at the movies.

06:47

The way that they killed the officers, hanging in a very painful way. It was something absolutely horrible what was done to them, the whole episode was shattering. They were not bad people, they wanted and were prepared to move in a different direction than the Nazis, we had pinned our hopes on them, that they could've saved us.

06:48

All our hopes were shattered, we realized that all of our problems remained. From that day going forward the Nazi regime was in full, effective control over everything. The army was now a different army, Hitler appointed them. Now every citizen was under Nazi control.

06:49

As a result, the life of every German citizen who walked on the street was impacted in every way. Everyone was under the pressure of the Nazi party. I would like to digress and talk about the Warsaw ghetto.

06:50

We in Berlin did not hear much about the life of the Jews in the East, actually we heard nothing at all. Except, when the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto broke out, it was in all the newspapers and we read about it and knew that it had taken awhile for the Germans to quash it.

06:51

We heard that they fought for about three weeks until they surrendered. After all, all of Europe had fallen to the Nazis. At least such a large population of Jews that had lived in Warsaw fought against the Nazis and fought bravely until they were defeated. The Poles did not want to help the Jews, they gave them very little assistance. But what we saw later was really something, the Russians did to the Poles what the Poles had done to the Jews.

06:52

When the Russians entered Poland in 1944 and got to Warsaw, the Poles at the time had risen up against the Nazis and were fighting very courageously against them and asked the Russians for help. The Russians did not help them. They waited until the Germans completely defeated the Poles and only then did they open up against the Germans with bombs.

06:53

We were aware of what was going on around us. We heard that the British had come to the aid of the Poles, that they sent them ammunition by plane, as much as they could, that there was a big Polish officer in exile sitting in London. So, many things happened in 1944; the Normandy invasion, the uprising of the German officers, the battles in the East where the Germans were

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being pushed back, that the Allied forces were nearly split in two in the battle of the Ardennes.

06:54

What didn't happen in 1944! I don't even know how I completed 1944. But somehow, I managed to survive, somehow things go on. In fact, 1944 ended well for us. Our group grew, we had all kinds of opportunities, we had the ability to hang on because of the money and support that we received, and we felt that we could hang on and that we might even prevail.

06:55

We hoped that the war would end soon. We hadn't thought that before May! Meanwhile, Gad and I continued to live in the apartment the whole time, we were able to disperse the others to different places, usually with single women. There were all kinds of women who were prepared to shelter our people, at least temporarily, a month or so and then they would have to move on.

06:56

My aunt Marie hid her four people for a whole year. Our group helped her, we were able to give her money. She had her own garden where she was able to grow all the fruits and vegetables that were possible. How she worked from morning till night. I was able to arrange that she received the honor of the "Righteous Among the Gentiles." Life was tough, and despite all of the destruction, life was also full of hope.

06:57

Everything was falling apart but the Germans persevered. If something was destroyed they repaired it immediately and saw to it that things worked. There was no such a thing that there was no water or electricity or food. One can say that until the end of 1944, Berlin had everything that was needed. But as for the Germans in the east, in Königsberg and eastern Prussia, they had to retreat, they had to leave and come to Berlin.

06:58

They no longer had homes. Even the houses that had been taken from the Jews were no longer enough to house the people. People walked around in the streets and because of all the bombs that were falling there were many fires. We saw this, we knew about the bombings in Dresden. People literally burned up in the streets, they turned into torches because of the fire, and they burned to death. We read it in the papers.

06:59

They couldn't even touch the asphalt in the street because of the heat. This happened in Hamburg too, people couldn't even walk on the street. Also, at this time, wherever the Americans fought, whether in the Pacific, in Singapore, or wherever, the Japanese were retreating, the Germans were retreating, the Italians were no longer fighting together with the Germans, so we were full of hope.

07:00

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Aunt Marie had a home in the city and a house in the country. The country house needed to be heated and coal couldn't grow in the garden! The house in the country didn't have coal but the one in the city had coal. The problem was how to get the coal from the house in the city to the one in the country, it was a distance of about 20 kilometers. They had a little two wheel cart, but she did not allow the people who were hiding in her house to go out.

07:01

Finally, it was decided that my uncle and the non-Jew who was in hiding would take the little cart and go by foot from Blankenburg to the house in the city which was in the city center. No one stopped them! They managed to load up the coal and started to return to the country. When they were just about nearing the country home, the cart broke down. Now what, they were two people, without papers, with coal! The non-Jew was a carpenter and he managed somehow to fix the cart.

07:02

So they were able to heat the house. Eventually, the house in the city was totally destroyed. the area was bombed and everything was destroyed. It was near Alexanderplatz.

Disc VII

07:03

In addition to those of us in the underground, there were many Jews of mixed marriages who lived in Berlin. For the most part, the Christian women were more loyal to their Jewish spouses than the men were to their Christian wives.

07:04

The women remained loyal until the end. The men went to work in the morning, forced labor, and would go back to their homes at the end of the day. They had no reason to walk around the city. There were many families near us that lived that way. For example the Beck family. They lived in an apartment around Alexanderplatz, all of us lived in the area. Mrs. Beck was a convert to Judaism. She had a Nazi neighbor who lived upstairs who said terrible things to her about the fact that Mrs. Beck had a Jewish husband. She would curse her all the time.

07:05

How long can one tolerate such talk? One day, the Nazi Christian woman cursed her one too many times. Mrs. Beck took what she had in her pot, hot milk, and she poured it over the Nazi lady. Now that you cannot do. Mrs. Beck was home alone. When her husband came home he said to her, you know what you did means trouble. She became very frightened. It didn't take long, someone came in and told them that they were taking them to the police.

07:06

That was their good fortune, that they were taken to the police. The Beck family had lived there

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for more than 20 years. All of the police in the area knew them, from the most simple police officer all the way up the ranks. They were highly regarded as honorable people who didn't bother anyone. A report was filed and they were told to go home. Had they been taken to the Gestapo instead of the police, the husband never would have returned. The Nazi lady raised hell but it didn't help her one bit.

07:07

There are so many stories. When I was in jail, all I could think about was how I could get to Switzerland. All I kept hearing was how good things could be for us in Switzerland and how so and so was waiting for us there. That was very nice but it didn't help us because how could we get to Switzerland or even near to the Swiss border!

07:08

The fellow who arranged the papers for us, the officer, had an idea. He said that he was prepared to load up a military truck with some very large crates and drive us to the border, that it would be a very simple thing to do. We didn't want to risk it, we were too afraid to turn ourselves over to him.

07:09

We didn't have too much of a connection to Natan (Nathan) Schwalb but we did have a connection, when we needed it.. A very rich person, who had a jewelry store in Berlin and in Switzerland would bring us the money from Switzerland. He dealt in diamonds, the stores were a side line. So when we wanted contact with Schwalb we had it via that rich man.

07:10

Actually, towards the end of the war we had too much money. We knew that the end was drawing near. The empire was beginning to topple. After the battle of Ardennes, the allies were already entering Germany. So we knew that the end was coming.

07:11

Gad said that we had to do something with the money, to buy something, because once the war would end, the money would be worthless. So we bought jewelry, he bought some opals but it brought us bad luck. He bought it from a Hungarian, his name was Lustig. It turned out that Lustig was an informant for the Gestapo. The Gestapo didn't know where Gad was living or where he was but they were getting closer to us.

07:12

As I mentioned earlier, Gad had a unique ability to get close to people, to artists and actors for example and to people in the arts. As you get closer to those kind of people you learn that many people were anti-Nazi. It actually became a habit at that time, to be anti-Naz, because they saw the way the wind was blowing and knew that the end was coming. Nonetheless, the German propaganda machine kept working in full force. Though Goebbels was a true master of propaganda, the people didn't swallow it anymore by the end of 1944. .

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07:13

We did not know that Jews were in Oranienburg, probably because no one from our group had been sent there, though we knew that Oranienburg existed all throughout the war. From our narrow group the only one who was caught was Poldi, he was the only one that didn't survive. Evu was a different story.

07:14

So Gad got into groups that were previously not willing to close their eyes about certain transactions. We later learned that Lustig was a Gestapo informant. Meanwhile, I bought weapons and I had to move people from the underground from here to there to keep from having them discovered.

07:15

I am now speaking about 1945, a year after my escape from prison. We were managing, but we began to feel that the ring was tightening around us because of Lustig.

07:16

Of the three brothers that I told you about, that we freed, one of them was very young, younger than I. He went someplace with another boy and they encountered the police. The police asked them for their papers. The other boy was armed. The one that we had helped ran away. The other one shot the policeman and then ran away.

07:17

The boy, Moise, who was the youngest in our group, was caught and taken to the Gestapo. They did terrible things to him, he was no longer a human being after what they did to him, it was worse than what was done to Podi, notwithstanding that the other boy, who was the shooter, really didn't have much of a connection to Moise or to us. We really had not had dealings with him.

07:18

The Gestapo started to question Moise, and here we are it's March 3, 1945, when everyone knew that the war was at an end, the Russians were already in Frankfurt, and all of our cover was blown. Poldi had not revealed anything, I had not revealed anything, but now at the very end of the war, now is when we became completely exposed. the young boy gave everything away.

07:19

That night Gad and I were in the apartment and they came for us. Gad told me not to raise my gun, not to do anything, from us they would not be able to get anything. But Moise told them whatever he knew, he didn't know where his brothers were so they weren't caught.

07:20

Moise told them about all the intermarried couples that were helping us, so they were all

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arrested, the Lowensteins, a woman who worked for the underground, Mrs. Glazer, and others. He was a completely broken person afterwards.

07:21

He is not even prepared to fly over Germany anymore. He is a very strange person today, you cannot become close to him. They came for Mrs. Glazer, but she was able to get out of it. You see if you have your wits about you and you know how to manage situations, you stand a chance.

07:22

My luck was that I knew how to keep boundaries and not to talk about things, I just kept things in separate compartments so to say and did not mix them or talk about the different compartments to others.

07:23

When they came for us, they didn't expect to see me. There were two Jews who came for us. The last name was Abrahamsson, the same name as mine.

07:24

So we said to one of them, are you really prepared to arrest us, here we are at the end of the war and are you really prepared to arrest your fellow Jew, you will pay a heavy price for this in the future. But we couldn't talk to him. I caught up with him after the war. At this time, Berlin was in chaos, as was Germany, things were falling apart.

07:25

So we were taken to the Gestapo, the first thing that they did was beat me, they were so happy to have at last caught me. The father and son who escaped with me, Zeitman, were still alive, the sister who had not escaped with us remained in prison until the war ended, she was not sent to Auschwitz. They were rich enough to be able to find ways to get by until the war ended. Our group did not help them monetarily, we knew that they had enough money of their own..

07:26

Gad's sister Miriam was also arrested, but his parents weren't. . The Lowenstein's were caught, they has a great deal of money, they didn't know what to do with it so out of fear they flushed it down the toilet.

07:27

The Lowensteins were a very well connected family to the Nazis too. She was part of the nobility through her mother. Also her sister was married to the mayor of Potsdam, who was a big Nazi. The Lowensteins had helped us but it's too detailed to go into it.

07:28

The Gestapo kept themselves busy with us, even though we were two months away from the end of the war. They knew that we were the heads so they were busy with us. They took us by

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car for interrogation to Prinz Albrecht Strasse.

07:29

Gad told them so many stories. He was terrific in those things. He was very badly beaten. Afterwards they realized the extent of his stories. Gad also wrote poetry. He was badly beaten for that.

07:30

The main thing was to tell all kinds of stories, but not to give anyone away and to keep dragging out the time. As I see it, each day after my arrest in 1943 was a gift from God, every day He gave me a gift. We dragged it out every day for another day. One day a bomb hit the bunker where Gad and Moise were in the same cell. It was a direct hit.

07:31

Gad was buried under the ruins, Moise was OK. Moise started screaming, the Gestapo came running.

07:32

The Gestapo man kept screaming, I need Gad alive, whoever manages to get him out of the rubble will be set free. A Frenchman heard that and said that he would get Gad out from under the rubble. He started digging with his hands, for hours. Gad started screaming, I hear water rising, get me out of here.

07:33

The Frenchman was freed. Gad was taken to the hospital. He played the part very well. The doctor in the hospital, Dr. Lustig, the relative of the Jewish nurse who had been able to get us medicine for the man that we had hidden who suffered from asthma, told him not to worry, he would take care of him.

07:34

He kept giving Gad medicine. One day Gad was released from the hospital. He was not completely well, he walked with a cane, but he was basically OK. He was taken back to the Gestapo. It was now April 21, 1945. The Russians were right there. Now the Gestapo had to think what to do. They could either kill all of us or perhaps save their own necks by releasing us.

07:35

On April 21, 1945, the Gestapo man signed release papers for all of us, he came to tell us goodbye and he left. We remained there until the Russians came. All of us from the Chug Hachaluzi had remained alive except Poldi. Ewu had been circulated around 17 prisons.

07:36

It was her own fault, she got enthusiastic about every cause, she was a communist. In fact she is still a communist today, she is alive, she lives in Haifa. She suffered a great deal, her nails

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were ripped off, it was terrible being in 17 different prison camps.

07:37

There was total chaos, something different was going on in every street, shootings, bombs falling.

07:38

We said that we were Jews but people didn't believe us. We were able to communicate with the Russians.

07:39

We didn't have it bad in the prison, they fed us, we had a place to sleep, true it was on a straw mat, but it was OK. After a few days, we decided that we had to visit Gad's parents, to find out what was doing with them. So we started walking. Near the prison there was a bridge and next to the bridge there was a bunker and in the bunker there were cannons and soldiers were still firing from those cannons. And the Russians were shooting back at the bunker. It was crazy.

07:40

We were looking for food, we had to get across the bridge, so in the midst of all that we kept walking. Meanwhile, the planes were firing too; the situation was crazy.

07:41

We decided that we would go by train so went to the train station. There was an attendant at the ticket booth. He asked us whether we had tickets, we said no, so he said without the proper document you can't get on the train. So these are the Germans, that's the reason the war dragged on for so long. When we arrived at Gad's parents' place there was such joy and happiness. We found his mother, we asked where his father went. The Mom said that he had gone out to look for food.

07:42

You can't imagine what he found, the best of everything, there warehouses that were full of food that had not been distributed. The father was a nice guy, he was a red head, his face was shining, he brought back lots of sardines and gave out all the goodies. We loaded ourselves up with food.

07:43

The mother told us you can't imagine what happened to me yesterday. I looked out the window and I saw a Tartar soldier looking at me pointing a gun. She was scared to death that he would kill her! We took the food and we returned to the camp for a few days until the situation settled a bit. We decided that each of us would return to our own homes to look around and see what was still left. Gad knew that he had a home and his family. The other guy who was with us, Hans, knew he still had family. I had to look for Aunt Marie.

07:44

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We decided that we would look around and that by a date certain we would meet at a specific place and decide how to realize our Zionist aspiration, we actually thought that way. I first went to Blankenburg, but Martin was no longer there, he was with the neighbor and he stayed there living as man and wife. I stayed with Aunt Marie.

07:45

What can I tell you about the Russians in Berlin? They arrived after thousands of kilometers of battles. They had suffered terribly. They fell like flies along the way. When they arrived in Berlin and conquered it, **Zhukov** allowed the troops to do whatever they wanted for three days and they took full advantage of that, officers and simple soldiers alike, and that is exactly what they did, whatever they wanted to do. They arrived where Martin was staying and they raped the woman with whom he was living, they raped her terribly.

07:46

You see what happens, sometimes people, good people who had nothing to do with all the horrible things that were going on, get hurt even though they don't deserve it and that is exactly what happened to her and to so many women, they were raped, tens of thousands were raped. . It was a very strange time, everything was unsettled, things were like air, no one knew what to do, we were broken, nothing was in order. We understood that it would take a long time for things to settle down in Germany.

07:47

I went around with Martin. One day we encountered a group of Russian soldiers. They stopped us and asked us what we were doing, where we were going, they interrogated us, in their eyes we looked suspicious. We said that we were Jews. They said if that if that is the case you must have been collaborators otherwise how could you as Jews have survived. Luckily, there were some commissars, they were usually Jewish, and we were able to speak Yiddish with them. One of them spoke to us mainly to me and said if you really want to prove that you are what you what you say you are bring me some Nazis, some collaborators.

07:48

So I took some of the Russians with me and I went to Oranienstrasse where I had been imprisoned on and I looked around. Luckily, I found the guy who had arrested me, the Jewish informant. He pleaded with me for his life, he said it wasn't his fault, that I should leave him alone. I told him you should've thought of that before, that now it's too late.. They took him away and sent him to Siberia, he never came back from Siberia. There were others, like Stella Kubler but I wasn't involved, I had my own accounting with the man who had arrested me and that was that. The Russians let me go. But I saw that Berlin wasn't the place for me anymore, that I shouldn't remain there.

07:49

The brothers Wallach decided that they were not staying, that they were going to the west from where they had come, to look for relatives. Meanwhile, we organized a group, it was me, Gad, the Nachman family, and others and we decided that we would leave Berlin and initially head

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south towards Munich and then we would continue further to Israel.

07:50

So on July 5, 1945, when the Americans came in, not in force but only a small contingent pursuant to a gentlemen's agreement that Berlin would be divided into four sectors, we left. We walked across all of Europe by foot. I don't know if you can understand it, but everyone in Europe was walking. After the war everyone simply wanted to go home. There were millions of foreigners outside Berlin, the Spanish, the Danish, Poles, everyone was trying to get home.

07:51

For the most part everyone was on foot. There was a train but you couldn't go more than 50 kilometers on it. The Russians were all over. Unfortunately, though the Americans captured a large part of Germany, they had an agreement with the Russians that they would withdraw. Whenever we would arrive at a place the Americans were withdrawing! So we ended up in the Russian sector and it took us a long time to progress. The Wallachs had it much easier, they immediately ended up in the American sector.

07:52

The most difficult part was crossing a river. There were always guards there. There was no system or order as to when you could cross, it was by whim, either the soldier opened the passage or he didn't, he could've been sleeping with a girl that evening which meant that the passage might not be open that night and we would not be able to cross. So we made ourselves documents. Miriam was English, I was Australian, another had a certificate for Palestine. We told them stories and we were able to convince them to allow us to keep moving.

07:53

So we were able to move on a little bit at a time until we arrived at Thurghein which is a nice area, and to Blankenheim which is not far from Buchenwald. Blankenheim is a nice little place. Little places in Germany didn't suffer too much during the war. The little towns weren't bombed, there was no point in wasting bombs on the little towns. They hit the large cities, the population in the large cities. There are those who say that the Allies did not want to destroy the industrial sector because they wanted industry to continue operating after the war and there are stories that German industry was working with allied industries. Had they wanted to destroy the industrial sector they could have, the fact is that they didn't and there all kinds of stories about that point.

07:54

Actually, the cities were mostly destroyed. In Blankenheim, we rented a hotel room and we walked around. There, for the first time, we met a large group of young people from Buchenwald. There was a hospital in Blankenheim. The Americans liberated Buchenwald, not the Russians.

07:55

The Americans did what they could in terms of immediate aid, others they brought to the

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hospital. There were many cases at the hospital of people suffering from tuberculosis and it was there, at the hospital, that for the first time we met a large group of Jews who had been in the camp. Until that time, as we were walking all over the country, we met only Gentiles from different countries. That's when we began to hear about their experiences but they could barely get their stories out, they would talk and cry and talk and cry. There was good food there. The Americans had supplied them with good food. When the Americans withdrew and the Russians arrived they didn't take the food for themselves, but they did not resupply what had been used up. No one thought about what would happen once the food ran out.

07:56

The staff of the hospital was German, a lot of them were Nazis, and they didn't care what happened to the Jews who were in the hospital. Also, they didn't treat the sick perhaps because they didn't really know how to treat tuberculosis. The belief was that it should be treated with rest and food so that is all that was done for the patients. We wanted to continue on our way. By the end of the war we no longer had a connection with Natan in Switzerland.

07:57

We wanted a connection with Natan, we viewed him as a kind of father, we wanted a connection with "father." So we tried to reestablish that connection. Meanwhile, connections were being made by the people in our group and some of the Jews, there were some romances and marriages.

07:58

So we stayed there for awhile. There were some really smart good people among their group that said to us that they do not want to remain in Germany, that since we were Zionists and we wanted to go to Palestine we should take them with us, that we owed it to them to take them along with us. By "us" I mean the Chug Hachaluzi from Berlin, we were about seven people. Me, Gad, Berne, Renay, Buller, approximately seven people.

07:59

Not everyone was willing to leave, some from our group remained in Berlin. It wasn't so simple just to pick up a stick and a backpack and leave even though we had gone through hell in Berlin. I left my only remaining relatives, Uncle Martin and Aunt Marie. I knew that my parents weren't coming back. We had waited in Berlin for two months until we saw those who returned.

07:60

Meanwhile, my uncle, my father's brother who had the papers to my parents' house, wouldn't give them to me, he said he was saving them for my father though we knew that my father wasn't coming back. After lots of screaming and arguments, he gave them to me. My Aunt Marie was very angry at him.

08:00

So, we who were always active continued to be active, after all it doesn't cost money to be active. We went to the authorities and organized a transport. Though we didn't know Russian,

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we managed to organize a transport. Those from the other group who were coming with us were Polish. One of them, I can't recall his name, later became a famous violinist. We also organized the obtaining of the necessary documents.

08:01

What we didn't do to get them out of there. We also had to organize railway transport. Don't forget, at that time there was no rail transport between the Russian and American sectors, but we were able to somehow get under our control one little railway car of the train, one was enough. The situation was fluid, things weren't so smooth between the Russian authorities and the Americans. We played them off against each other.

08:02

Somehow, the Americans became aware that there was a large group of Jews from the camps that were sick and wanted to cross over to the American side. They were from the UNRRA, and they managed to convince the Russians to let us have a car on the train. What we didn't do to get them out of there.

08:03

I recall that there was even one person from the NKGB (the Russian Gestapo) who got on the train with us. They made our lives miserable until the very last minutes. But we got out and crossed into the American sector. Now that was an entirely different world. We had escaped from a world of poverty to one of plenty, to a democratic world, an entirely different story.

Disc VIII

08:04

So we arrived in the West where we so desperately had wanted to be. We didn't want to remain in the east, to go from Nazism to Communism, that just didn't sit well with us. We recognized that we could not remain in the east. We also wanted to go to Palestine. When we arrived the joy was tremendous, we were very well greeted and received. The only unpleasantness was the disinfecting process. We were sprayed with DDT all over even into our pants. Our hair was checked. Everyone was checked. We were examined carefully for fleas and lice to make sure that we weren't diseased and to check what kind of condition we were in. They gave us all kinds of goodies. They treated us very well.

08:05

We were taken to Bad Hersfeld and we stayed there awhile, there really wasn't any place to put us, until the group rebelled; they said that they didn't come to the west to stay in a camp, they wanted to go to a hospital and to be treated so that at long last they could regain their health. Transport was arranged for us. Two trucks were assigned to take us towards Munich which was a considerable distance away.

08:06

We travelled day and night, until we arrived at St. Ottilien where there was a sanatorium. The

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Americans had set up a hospital there for refugees. When we got there, they knew exactly who we were. We were called **Sheerit Haplita**, and that is precisely what we were, the surviving remnant. **Hechalutz** had heard that Gad and Zvi and a group from the Chug Hachaluzi would be arriving.

08:07

They probably looked for us in Berlin, then in Hersfeld and that's how they knew that we would be arriving. We got ourselves organized, we received rooms, the sick were taken for health care. We wanted to become active, to organize. For us the whole thing was very strange. Until that time we weren't used to Jews from the East, we really didn't know Jews from Poland and Russia. We didn't know Yiddish, we knew German, we had never encountered masses of people from a totally unfamiliar place.

08:08

"When we were in Blankenheim, that was the first time that we heard what had happened in the East from those who actually underwent the experience. So we realized what had happened to our parents.

08:09

We went to Buchenwald but by the time we got there all the people were gone. We are now speaking about July, August, September. Time passed quickly.

08:10

We got organized. We met with the representatives of the Hechalutz from Switzerland. We were taken to Switzerland, to Constance (Konstanz) where we met with Natan Schwalb, which was the first time in my life that I met him. That is when we received instructions as to what to do. We were told that a group would be arriving to Germany from Israel and it would be their responsibility to deal with **Aliyah** (immigration) from Germany to Israel. They would organize courses and make the necessary arrangements, to the extent that they would be able to do so, to help those who wanted to go to Israel. That group was not as big as the **Joint**. We were told to take control of the group from Israel. The Joint and UNRRA were very active after the war, and they worked very hard on behalf of the Jews.

08:11

We went back to Munich. The group from Israel came, first just two or three people. Dr. Chaim Kaufman, Yehoshua Levi who became an important person in the **Histadrut**, Genia Taversky, who became a member of the **Knesset** at some point. They were good people, most spoke German, they had a German background which was important.

08:12

We received a small office outside of Munich which was next to the Jewish community. We began Zionist activities in all of Germany though we were mostly active around Munich. We also got to Dachau and Bergen Belsen.

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08:13

We got to work registering people who wanted to go to Israel. There were so many people who came to us from the East. There were those who had gone back to their homes in the East after being liberated from concentration camp and then left their hometowns and came to us. That happened with some Polish Jews after the program in Kielce Poland.

08:14

The pogrom gave a renewed push to those who wanted to get to Israel. There was no border insofar as those people who were actively helping the refugees who wanted to get to Israel. Gad dealt with **aliyah aleph** and I deal with **aliyah bet**.

08:15

Gad dealt especially with women and in particular with pregnant women who wanted to get to Israel and have their babies in Israel.

08:16

Gad's parents from Berlin came, they managed the house where the **Sochnut** [Jewish Agency] was located. They took care of housekeeping type things there. Very important people came to the Sochnut building, including Ben Gurion. Gad and I worked with the **Bricha** people.

08:17

We arranged transport, by train, by truck. I arranged transportation to France or Italy by way of an entire train with the **Reichsbahn** of Munich, I was the connection between the Sochnut and the railway company. I am speaking about Aliyah Bet. Aliyah Aleph involved fewer people, it dealt mostly with people who had certificates to get to Palestine. Aliyah Bet dealt with masses of people and was a very powerful movement.

08:18

People were willing to travel once again in railway cars that were not meant to transport passengers, just to be able to get to Palestine. There were camps outside Marseilles. So we arranged transport to camps outside of Marseilles where the people would have to wait until arrangements could be made for a ship. When the numbers weren't that large, we arranged transportation by way of trucks. All the trucks had to be the same model, we arranged for drivers to wear uniforms and to have lists of the passengers and the passengers to have documentation. It was a great deal of work and it was organized outstandingly well.

08:19

Twenty or thirty trucks would arrive at the French border and they would travel the way the American army travelled in Germany with a jeep in the front or the rear. The people at the border were paid off. There were no transports that were forced to return, that did not happen. The Germans in charge of the trains were also paid off, we had no difficulty with them. Everyone was paid off.

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08:20

In addition to that kind of work, I also did general work for the Sochnut. I dealt with displaced people. I visited Bergen Belsen with the **Brigade** (Jewish British infantry group). There was an accident, one of the drivers of the Brigade got caught under the truck. We had to run away because we as civilians couldn't be seen riding with them so that was an unpleasant incident.

08:21

I attended conferences, we had to show people that we were a state in the making so there were conferences. We organized conferences, to give people the feeling that we were doing something. We represented the Jewish group from Bavaria. I didn't have a way to get back. I thought I would bet back with the soldiers but as a civilian I couldn't, that was in the early stages, as we were getting organized, so I had to get back to St. Ottilien on a German train that carried coal.

08:22

I came back with Dr. Greenberg who at the time was the head of the hospital there and also the Jewish community. You can imagine how I looked, I was all covered in black coal dust, but I accomplished what I had to accomplish. Somewhat later, we sent the transport that went on the Exodus.

08:23

That was a wonderful period in my life, a very active period, when I did something good for the state and for people. Working with people and getting to know new people, to once again be involved in Jewish life that had been lost to us when we were in the underground, all that came back to us as we did the work that we were doing.

08:24

Among the people with whom we were dealing were also **Kapos** and the Jews were looking for the Kapos. If they found one, they wanted to kill him. Once I had an incident with the Jewish community. I was in the community center. They found a Kapo. They put him inside a room, I was in the room, they beat him with sticks nearly to death, I ran away from there, I didn't want to be involved with that incident.

08:25

The displaced people from the concentration camps wanted to connect with one another, there were many weddings, either those that had lost a spouse or young people who wanted to get married to start a family, but they were all "damaged," you felt it. There were some very difficult incidents. All kinds of social structures had been destroyed and everything had to be rebuilt. We also had some wonderful moments, with the Sochnut people, with some of the intellectuals who were around us, we put out a newspaper, there were political parties, there were discussions and debates between the groups.

08:26

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There were groups of children who were brought to us. Some were brought by the **Mizrachi**. I remember one of the kids who was brought from the East, he would say that his name was "Moshe" Mizrachi, because he was brought to us by the Mizrachi movement, he had to say from which party he was from. What can I tell you, such is the Jewish people, there is nothing you can do about it. We wanted to build one large group but that's not how things work, that's just the way it is. All of the wonderful dreams that we had in the beginning, Frenkel who was later an editor of Haaretz, Avraham Melamed later of the Knesset, we were there together.

08:27

It was a wonderful period, the work, there were personalities. You felt that you were doing something, you had satisfaction that you were moving things. There were some cases of suicide but not notably so. We wore uniforms, we could go wherever we wanted. All of the people of the group from Israel had a certain status which the UNRRA had conferred upon them.

08:28

The Germans had it tough. They had nothing to eat. They would sell themselves for a cigarette, the way they had treated the other nations in Europe was now the situation in which they found themselves, they didn't have anything to eat and there was no way to make a living. There was a great deal of black marketing among the Jews. The Jews immediately started to do all kinds of business, to bring business, to start business, to work in business. Some even got rich.

08:29

It was natural. People had lost years off their lives, they wanted to build their lives, to achieve something. Some learned a trade. The Jews lived in camps. There were camps all over, in Munich, in Feldafing, Freimann, and in other places.

08:30

Finding an apartment outside of the camps was difficult, and there weren't many houses. We lived in a private house but Jews weren't really permitted to live in houses. Miriam married a guy and her best friend married his brother. They lived in Furstenfeldbruck, where the Americans built an enormous air force base. Jews were scattered amongst the little towns in Bavaria, but no one wanted to remain there. The majority wanted to leave to the US, many to Canada and also to Australia.

08:31

Not everyone wanted to go to Israel, though if you think about how many were in Cypress there were many who went to Israel. The Sochnut and the delegation from Israel did fantastic work, really very good work, exceptional work. And I am not even talking about the Brigada, which did wonderful things, they did everything to help the people and Israel. There were many people who wanted to take revenge on the Nazis.

08:32

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There was a group, actually they were not far removed from the delegation from Israel, that looked for Nazis and took revenge. That was known to me, it wasn't spoken about too much. I wasn't involved in that. I wanted to build, to build a future, the Germans could go to hell. . I didn't want to stay in Germany, I wanted to run away from Germany. Today, things are different, the connection is different.

08:33

Today, we have connections with Germany. In my work, we have a great deal of connection with Germany. A large part of our school is subsidized by Germany. It's not so simple. Today's Germany is not the same as it was during that time and you can't speak about the German people the same way, it's too simplistic to think that way, you can talk that way but it's not so simple. I remained in Germany until 1948. I started working with the delegation from Israel in October 1945. Gad left to Israel at the end of 1947 and I went in March 1948, before the declaration of independence of Israel. I went on **Aliyah Gimel**. I went by way of France.

08:34

Near Marseilles there was a camp called La Grande Helena. The people who were going to Israel on Aliyah Gimel were transferred to that camp. There, phony passports were being produced and it was with those phony passports that people were able to get to Israel. I went to Israel on a Dutch passport, as a tourist, and here I remained. That is also how Gad came, his parents had come earlier, on Aliyah Aleph.

08:35

When I came, I switched direction, I left public service and worked in a different area. I am not sure if I didn't make a mistake, but that is what I did, and I am OK with it. Gad stayed in public service, he worked for the Histadrut and then someplace else, today he is in Berlin working with the community in Berlin. He started an evening school in Berlin for adults where Judaism is taught, areas that are dear to him. He also loves the German language and is devoted to it. .

08:36

Gad did not find his place here in Israel though he looked, even at the Histadrut, he tried with Natan Schwalb, but Natan Schwalb dropped the ball when it came to Gad, however effective he had been during the war, here he messed up, he did not know how to find a way to keep Gad here.

08:37

Those days were good days, there were ideals, people did do things but there were also conflicts. When we were in Germany after the war and members of the Jewish Agency encountered Jewish refugees, there was sensitivity towards the refugees on the part of the Israelis, but that was not the case here in Israel, there wasn't sufficient sensitivity, they didn't look at them nicely, they didn't understand them, they didn't want to understand them.

08:38

I personally didn't care about that, I knew that I had fought in my own way, I did something, I

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didn't go to Auschwitz, I went against the current and I fought in my way so I didn't need the support of the Israelis or their recognition that I was a Holocaust survivor, so as an individual I did not suffer from that kind of treatment, it didn't touch me in the least, but there were many who did suffer, they expected more support from the people here but it's hard to expect that from people.

08:39

There is something to the general belief that Jews who grew up in the German culture felt a certain disconnect here in Israel, I don't know what to say, but for example Han Lewenstein also went back to Germany. I don't really know, but I had it good here, married a woman from Iraq, I built a family and set down roots. For many years I was the "Yeke" my wife would tell me that I was such a Diaspora person until she got to know me better.

08:40

But for many years I worked as a carpenter. Who were the carpenters in Israel? The Poles, the Romanians and the Germans. So the languages that we spoke were Yiddish, Hungarian or German, we didn't speak Hebrew. Even with the stores with which we worked, we spoke German, everyone spoke German or Polish. We didn't speak Hebrew with each other. Finally, when I got married things changed. I got influenced.

08:41

But there are many good things from the German culture that remained with me and I am glad about that, for example, order and cleanliness and accuracy. I teach carpentry. There are many technical aspects to it and I enjoy it, I also get the feeling from the people whom I teach that they enjoy it too.

08:42

Why did I change direction professionally? Because I absolutely did not want to be a clerk, there was no way that I would be a clerk. That is the reason why I left public service, but Gad is built for that, the main thing for him is to work for people. Today, when groups from Israel go to Germany, to the community, he talks to them about how things were during the war in general and how things are today, but he doesn't get into details with the youth.

08:43

Today, many people attack Gad and ask him why he lives in Germany, why doesn't he live in Israel, but he got out of it somehow, just like he got out of things during the war. The feeling of having been in the underground has remained with me, it's something that never leaves you, the experience is too entrenched, you've been through too much. .

08:44

It's like someone who was a soldier in a war, it remains with you during your whole life. How can I explain it to you? Do you think that I spoke about my war experiences with others? No.

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08:45

On the other hand there are others, like Miriam's husband, who has since passed away, he spoke about it all the time. But I for example, I didn't speak about it with my children, I didn't want to, I didn't want them to carry it around with them the whole time, now it's different, they are older. When for example Miriam's husband would talk in general terms about the past and we would be sitting around the table and the topic of for example his family would come up, even tangentially, he would cry. Miriam would say to him, stop talking already, but he couldn't, once he started talking he wouldn't stop.

08:46

I didn't talk a lot, I didn't tell a lot, here and there a little something, but a big picture, no. I wonder if my kids will have patience to listen to all of this. They have to be in a particular mood to hear it, it's hard to find the right time, maybe they have to be more mature.

08:47

I speak with Germans. They say to me why do we need the East Germans, just because we were once part of the Reich, what do we need the East Germans for, we don't want to be connected to them, they had a country for 40 years, let them continue to have a country, that's what a West German said to me.

08:48

West Germany is democratic, a young democracy maybe not a deep one like the US or Great Britain, but nonetheless a democracy. The East was a Communist country where a person couldn't open up his mouth, so what did they know, first they were under Hitler, then under the Communists, so what can we expect from them in terms of how they think. The young people don't even know what it is to be a democracy, they weren't taught in school. They were taught that the people living in the eastern part of Germany were not Nazis, the Nazis are all sitting in the west, and Israel is also a Nazi country, everyone except themselves are Nazis!

08:49

That is the poison that they were fed, it's the same kind of poison as Nazism. From the minute the child starts school they get indoctrinated.

08:50

What can you expect from them, all they heard and learned for the last 50 years is Communism. They had a kind of welfare socialism, where most people were in the same boat, if your neighbor had to wait 13 years to get a car, you did too, you got paid, he gets paid, what you can buy with that money is a different question. But all of a sudden the world changes and for the first time those in East Germany see that they have nothing whereas in the west people have money, so how would you not expect them to be radicals?

08:51

I believe that something is missing in the heads of the East Germans. Journalists in West Germany tell me that you can't even talk to the East Germans. You have to educate them but

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before you can educate them you have to feed them so that they can want to be educated.

08:52

They look around and they see the dilapidated housing that they still live in, that they can't buy what they want to buy, that they can't get jobs. All of this is unquestionably frightening. Kohl united the two Germanys because he was thinking only in the short term. Economists warned him not to do it but he was more concerned about winning over his party, he wanted one united state.

08:53

Today, everything is exploding there. There are foreign workers and they are resented because there is an unemployment problem, they forget that they invited the foreign workers to come, and there are lots of them. I am sure that they will come up with a solution and find their way, but the problem is that they waited too long to tackle the issues.

08:54

Now Germany realizes that there is a problem with foreign workers. They recognize that they allowed too many to come in, that perhaps they granted too many foreigners asylum. The conservatives wanted to limit the number of foreigners, but the Socialists thought the opposite. People want to work, and they can't and in Germany, compensation under unemployment insurance is very high. The government is paying out a great deal of money. 08:55

08:55

There is a problem in their education. Many of the youth go to technical schools. So what do they really know? What were they taught? They are taught technical skills, they don't learn the humanities. For 50 years their heads have been filled up with a bunch of nonsense and lies, all of their history has been distorted.

08:56

It's already two generations, for two generations they were taught the same garbage. They see on television that the west is full of goodies, and that they have nothing, and that they will be slaves of the west. No one wants to invest in the East.

08:57

It's not only the Jews who are being blamed, but it's easy to blame the Jews. And who is to blame? In truth, the Church.

08:58

What can I tell you to summarize all of hours together? I am satisfied that I had the opportunity to talk about what happened. I feel that a weight has been lifted from my heart. In telling my own story I have also told the story of others, those who were with me, some for a long time, others for a shorter time.

08:59

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What I find most satisfying is that from the organization that we set up, and we had a goal, a mission, to enable us to live, and we lived, and we came out of it very well. Yes, it's too bad about Poldi, and about the suffering that Evu endured, but at the end of the day, Evu lived and we met afterwards, and all of us somehow found our place, it's also too bad about the Wallach brothers, and the episode with Moise, but his brothers found their way, even Gad, and Uncle Martin.

09:00

They lived and have overcome their past. And I hope that one day my children will hear this story. I met up with Jizchak Schwersenz here in Israel, he lived in Switzerland for many years then he came here. There are others who I have forgotten to speak about, but I can't remember everything, my head isn't there. So that's it.

THE END

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