

Interview with Hirschfield.

Q: When and where were you born?

A: I was born on April 30, 1921 in Berlin, Germany.

Q: And did you grow up in Berlin?

A: No. I was later, the end of 1921 my father died and my mother moved to Breslau which is near the Polish border. I would say the end of 1921, together with my twin brother. I have a twin brother. And from then on we used to live in Breslau.

Q: Did she move to Breslau because she had family there?

A: Yes. My mother's family lived in Breslau and therefore my mother moved together with my grandparents.

Q: So you grew up in Breslau?

A: I grew up in Breslau.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your education?

A: Yes, well I had more or less a limited education based on the later developments in Germany. I went to the public schools like everybody else, but we were not very comfortable in the later years due to the fact that there was a great deal of anti-Semitism. Already by about 1930 it started, even before Hitler came to power, and we were transferred to a Jewish school. I believe the name was Jude ?, in Breslau, which I believe was kind of a high school. And later after finishing the high school you were able to go to the gymnasium it was called. I attended that school until I believe 1934 without getting any degrees in that sense. It was too early, so I don't really know when the public school ended and the junior high or high school period started. I don't know. Anyhow I went to that school until I would say, 1934. In 1934 through very good connections, through my grandfather who was in the textile business I was recommended to start learning the business part of my life. My family had always been in the textile business for generations, and as you probably know it was the wish of every family to have one member continue in that particular area.. I was fortunate to be accepted as a *lehrling*?, an apprenticeship in one of the biggest firms in Breslau (no name furnished). And I was with that firm approximately four years. I finished my apprenticeship and that was approximately the time, that was until the so-called Crystal Night, 1938. Then as you probably know, most of these Jewish owned firms had to be (untranslatable) and this firm was taken over by a gentile (toy-vender) or whatever it was called at the time and naturally all Jewish employees were dismissed. And that was the end of my business career.

Q: Let me interrupt for just a moment. I'd like to go back. You mentioned that you noticed anti-Semitism growing as early as 1930, how did you notice that as a kid?

A: Especially in school you were more or less separated. Separated by many of the other pupils who knew you were Jewish. You were not invited to many of their out of school social activities. In fact in many, many instances we were attacked. Physically attacked already before Hitler came to power. However to a much lesser degree than I would say after 1933. But there was definitely at that time I remember, an anti-Semitic trend. You could see it, you could hear it in remarks in school and out of school. You noticed it in magazines and newspapers, not to a very large extent, but absolutely noticeable in our area of Germany.

Q: At this point, you were still in the volksschule?

A: At this point, that was 1930, I would say that was the regular school, the volksschule

Q: When you were in the volksschule did the teachers ever make it difficult?

A: No. The teachers really never made it difficult. I must say I never noticed an anti-Semitic remark towards Jewish pupils. I must say there were very few Jewish students in my class or school even.

Q: Do you remember ever going home and complaining to your mother or your grandparents about some of the incidents that took place?

A: No. I must say we never did that, perhaps for a psychological reason, maybe unconscious psychological reasons. We were fortunate to have as household help a gentile person who was in the employ of my grandmother already, meaning 1921, and due to the fact that my mother needed help badly by having twins so unexpectedly, my grandmother gave this household help to my mother really. She was raising us together with my mother, and due to the fact that she was gentile and we were Jewish, naturally we tried not to get into too much conflicts based on religion.

Q: When you were a kid, all kids like to belong and like to participate, how were you prepared or how did your mother explain to you why you weren't been invited?

A: Now especially looking back, we had been raised extremely orthodox not in the religious sense, but the alternate meaning. Whenever we saw a sign verboten meaning not allowed we would never do anything which was not within the law, the way we were raised. We never could imagine there was bribery, that public officials were bribed. We never could imagine that if someone said something to you which in reality was entirely different of what we were told it seems that would be accepted in that society. In other words we were completely ignorant of

facts, therefore we were more or less going blindly into a terrible tragedy without realizing that all of our education was contrary to facts of life.

Q: When you went to the Jewish school and left the volksschule did you realize why you were being transferred?

A: Oh sure. We realized that and every Jewish child realized it through daily occasions that Jews were attacked all over the city. You noticed through daily radio announcements. You noticed it through the newspapers and magazines that Jews were mentioned as a second, third or fourth class citizens. You became aware of the terrible lies being circulated, beginning of lies about the manufacture of matzoh where gentile blood was being used. Daily lies and misinformation. You were constantly exposed to these things also. You felt totally helpless as a child and you couldn't understand why is society attacking just these few Jews who are doing the same thing, paying taxes, are law abiding citizens, where their parents and grandparents have served in German armies and have excelled in many fields in Germany. You could not comprehend as a child these situations and you were floating in an artificial air. You were floating because you could not comprehend these situations, we found ourselves in.

Q: As a child, did you feel yourself isolated from the other kids?

A: Definitely. If you as a young child are being told you cannot go to this (illegible), you can only go where the Jewish children are allowed to play and when you are told you cannot be expected to be invited to these functions because only gentile people, so you at that stage I could not truthfully comprehend the situation. We felt naturally on many occasions uneasy, very uneasy, and only the fact that my mother and also our housekeeper tried to minimize this affect have we been able to overcome this situation I would call more or less normally. So developed in a more or less normal environment.

Q: How did things change for you after Hitler came to power in 1933?

A: For myself things changed drastically. You noticed first of all that there was a change within the Jewish community. We heard of people emigrating. We heard if we lost friends whose family moved after '34. And you noticed that Jewish people could not continue their occupation in many many areas. You noticed more attacks on Jewish people.

Q: Physical attacks?

A: Physical attacks. You noticed that it had become more and more difficult for Jewish people to retain a normal way of life. Normal Jewish people at that time already were restricted in finding apartments in certain locations. Jewish people could not even though legally they still could not move freely in '33 to my knowledge in Germany and could even make foreign travels I believe they were

issued passports. Talking about the period of 1934, I think they still could do it, but you still felt very much hemmed in. Now I'm talking from my point of view which at that stage still being a child I was not an expert and I didn't consider myself as having the answers to all of these questions, however you felt it every day.

Q: When in 1934 you did not intend to finish school in 1934. How did you feel?

A: The decision was made by my mother. I personally was very glad to get into business. I always had the feeling I would call, for it. It was always my dream to continue in that particular area so I was very happy. In addition to learning that particular trade I went to a *hundashuler*?, it's a textile, I went on certain days of the week. I took up additional studies in that business area so I was more channeled into the business field. I was really happy too, because I found it very interesting.

Q: Did you belong to a congregation in Breslau at the time?

A: We belonged to a congregation, yes. I really don't remember at this stage whether my mother and my grandfather were members, but we attended. We did attend services in what they called a liberal, not a reform synagogue. It was the most beautiful synagogues, I remember the N (name missing), in Breslau which was world known and unfortunately seen while I was passing by the November 10th morning while I was passing to work on my bicycle. I had to pass that building and I saw it going up in smoke. It was one of the most beautiful synagogues I have ever known even in later years, and it was a terrible shock and my whole world, my small world really, collapsed because we had never been raised to believe that violence of that nature could happen in that highly developed Germany of Mozart and Beethoven and so on and so on so it was a traumatic experience.

Q: The reason I asked if you attended services...

A: We did attend services, however not on a weekly basis.

Q: Do you ever remember hearing from the pulpit sermons about what was going on in Germany or conversations between your mother and your grandparents?

A: Now in order to explain the difficulties of a child being raised in a typical German-Jewish family I must say that matters of great importance were hardly ever discussed in front of the children. Whenever there were matters of financial importance, matters of any kind which were not suited for children's ears we were always asked to leave the room, and this was the acceptable practice in Germany in most cases as far as I know. We had never been exposed either my brother or myself to these critical discussions and therefore I must say, that is the only negative thought I have in connection with education and raising children that I

could never understand that these things were kept from us even though we were children, but I feel that was one of the negative aspects of a typical German education or upbringing to keep these vital happenings away from children.

Q: Especially since children were affected.

A: So I was really including my brother, totally unprepared and totally shocked by developments which certainly my family knew about and probably discussed, but they were never discussed or any aspect of it was ever discussed in front of us.

Q: You mentioned that your grandfather was in the textile business. Was this a retail or a wholesale?

A: He was a general sales agent for the whole eastern area of Germany for a textile organization in Breslau. He was picked up, I don't have the date here, but he was picked up by Gestapo agents in I believe 1942 and we were told to be sent east to working camps and that was the only information we got. That was the last we heard from him.

Q: You said he was a sales manager or a sales representative?

A: No a sales representative for that organization.

Q: Did his business start to fall off as time went on to your knowledge?

A: I really don't know. As I told you before, we as children really had no knowledge of financial aspects or any of that.

Q: While you were lehrling? Did you go out to sell at all?

A: This was primarily a wholesale distributor business, this was a business which my part of learning the business was not spent in the retail level. It was spent in the wholesale area entirely, because the intentions of the owners at the time was to eventually become one of their sales representatives in the Scandinavian area. And I was learning that type of business primarily for the wholesale part of it not the retail aspect.

Q: You mentioned it was a Jewish firm, but did they employ non-Jews as well?

A: Definitely. I would say they employed 75% non-Jews and only 25% Jews. Don't forget that Breslau was a town of approximately 650,000 inhabitants. I believe if I'm correct that the Jewish population was close to 24 or 25,000. So the normal set up I would say as to the Jewish people employed, this was a pretty normal setup.

- Q: What was your relationship or the Jews relationship in the country with the non-Jews?
- A: Well again you have to realize I was not competent to answer that since I was very young 13 or 14 years when I started. I would say the relationship was pretty normal within the framework of the eight or nine hours. I must say there were very few occasions when Jewish employees have a close social contact with the gentile population. We as lehrling had contact with Jewish lehrlings, but I very rarely remember having contact with our gentile employees at the time, but maybe somebody who was older at the time can give you a better idea.
- Q: As time went on, you were there between 1934-38, as time went on did some of these employees join either the Hitler youth or the party?
- A: Well I remember, this is a very interesting question and I remember certain employees, and I remember some joining the S.A. I must say that most of the employees in that firm were female, not male. Some of them joined the B.D.M., even though they joined these political organizations they never changed their attitude towards me. I couldn't say close, but they were extremely friendly from the very beginning. Naturally everyone had some favorites. I had some favorite people there too. Some very nice girls who worked there and were extremely nice, even after they joined the B.D.M. so I must say I did not notice any anti-Semitism from these employees. I never noticed it.
- Q: When was the first time you realized you could not continue in this firm?
- A: Well it was really a very quick development if I remember correctly. I noticed that it was made known that the general manager, he had a different rank at the time, was at a certain time given the full powers. The original owners did not come to business any more and you noticed that this particular procuress or general manager was immediately put in charge. That was the first visible change. I don't believe there was any bulletin hung in our working areas indicating the official change. I don't believe that was the case. It was so obvious that these developments were taking place all over that there was really no surprise even to us as young people that drastic changes are going on. This I noticed that management was really for a short period of time in gentile hands.
- Q: Was that before Crystal Night?
- A: That was exactly after Crystal Night.
- Q: Before we come to Crystal Night, did you ever see in any stores or in your own firm Juden verboten or Juden unerwünscht? Before Crystal Night?
- A: I am really not sure if I have seen these signs before or after. I have seen as you know these signs all over, Juden (word missing). I really can't say whether it was

before or after. I believe it was after, but I'm not 100% sure. It could have been way before Crystal Night.

Q: Up to Crystal Night was there ever any discussion about emigration within your own family?

A: There was never any discussion about emigration and I believe based on the particular attitude of my mother and grandfather who were typical Prussian poysech? That they themselves ever realized Hitler really had in mind to wipe out the Jewish people. It is the only subject that bothers me today that so many of the Jewish population, I'm talking about the elders, had been so ignorant or so unprepared or so unbelieving that they ever prepared for the future in that sense. Only a very small percentage really, and primarily people from smaller towns, like my wife comes from. Not so much the general population of big cities.

Q: Did they believe that Er Wird sich nicht lang anhalten?

A: They believed that this is a political development which will come and which will go based on the prior history of European political developments. It was never thought that an end solution was really achieved, could be achieved by Hitler.

Q: Even though they believed it, you mentioned that they saw other people going, that they saw people emigrating. How did they view that?

A: Correct. Well it was viewed in the following context. Most of the people I believe who left Germany first were people who lost their businesses, not so much people who were employed. A family who lived in a smaller town in Germany and had a small store was forced out of that town. Now these people had to make a drastic change in their life. As they had to make their drastic change it was almost the same undertaking to establish themselves in a German larger city or perhaps in a town in any other foreign country. These people had it maybe a little easier to make that big move out of Germany, while the great majority living in big metropolitan areas were not owners of businesses but had normal occupations. That is the prime reason I believe for people getting out of Germany.

Q: Did you, by this time you must have been 17, by 1938, did you see parades, Nazi parades? Did you ever witness any physical violence to Jews?

A: My best recollection is of a parade, not by Nazis but by communists which occurred somehow shortly before Hitler came to power. And I remember distinctly this particular parade because we were, my brother and myself, really lived a very sheltered life, unfortunately I would say. Whenever there were parades going on, my family and many other Jewish families, kept their children away from the active demonstrations. This was thought perhaps just for people of the lower class to run around and hollering. This was certainly not the right exposure for people in our particular category so therefore I did not observe too

many parades. The only parade I observed, I would not call it violent. I hadn't seen any attacks at that time, I noticed very critical expressions on the communists marching with black flags and the bystanders and I had this feeling that the next following year or something drastic might have based on the intense display of emotions during that parade. Now later on after '33 I certainly had to observe parades of Nazis. The only thing that impressed me was the tremendous organizational ability of the Germans to make parades and to enlist the aid of so many Germans who were willingly following the orders less on the Nazi doctrine but they wanted to participate because these parades were very orderly. They looked nice and they wore uniforms. The Germans were lovers of uniform, so without knowing what Hitler really had in mind many of the Germans were blindly I would say, following that trend, and less on the theories of Hitler's policies. I don't want to excuse the behavior of the broad majority, but my own observations and my own discussions with many people I noticed that a great majority were totally ignorant at that early stage. I'm talking about the early stage 1934, '35 of the real intent of Hitler. And any person judging, to get a good judgment of this particular period of the development of Hitler has to take in to consideration that Hitler did many things to Germany that were applauded by everybody including foreign governments. At the time that Hitler took over, the percentage of German unemployed people was sky high. The reason Hitler came to power was the economic state of affairs was so bad that people joined him because he promised jobs and means of being able to live. How he did it. He created jobs by creating projects where they forced to join the, they got 100,000 people off the streets. They gave them a uniform and they gave them (word unintelligible) projects like Roosevelt at the time here in America. They took 100,000 children from the cities and created worthwhile projects. The same. So slowly and surely he was able to employ everybody. And that perhaps was the reason why people in the early stages gave him credit for pulling Germany out of a very big down turn in the economic field. Now after he had achieved that solid foundation then he perhaps enlisted the help of his geniuses like Goebbels, primarily to make the German people more aware of the actual policies of Hitler.

Q: Speaking of Goebbels, did you ever read the Der Stuermer?

A: Definitely. We couldn't help reading these Hess letters and I vividly remember the bloodthirsty pictures which you could see, including the particular occasion I mentioned where around Pesach time they always showed a gentile being, gentile blood being used for the preparation of matzohs. You know the terrible things which they mentioned and listed in order to stir up the mood of the German population.

Q: At any time up to Crystal Night did you feel restricted in your movements in Breslau?

A: Oh definitely. Restricted in movements, I would say that every young child was restricted in movements, no question about it. These restrictions may not have

been immediately analyzed by that particular child at the moment because we lacked the knowledge to analyze the actual developments, but now I feel very strongly that almost all young people at that time had been exposed to these pressures and restrictions and have certainly received a life long psychological effect of that particular period.

Q: If I understand you right what you are saying is that mostly you felt restricted more by the rules of your family, saying that you couldn't go here or there even if it was protective.

A: Right. Well the restrictions came from within our family, came also from the outside, meaning that the parents did not necessarily have to tell us you cannot attend this. You sensed it automatically because you realized that whatever happened or whatever occasion occurred, these things were attended mostly by non-Jews, so you automatically had no desire to attend or participate.

Q: Did you ever as a seventeen year old, you may have wanted to go to the movies or cultural events like that. Did it prove difficult?

A: I must say that it never proved a very serious problem for the same reason as I said before. My upbringing was extremely conservative, which can really be compared to the upbringing of an orthodox child in an orthodox family. If an orthodox child, allow me to make a comparison, was to attend a game in Yankee stadium and has a wonderful time watching the ball game, where there are hundreds of vendors going around offering non-kosher food, that particular orthodox child will never feel deprived even though the parents would not allow him to eat that non-kosher food. He would not even feel it because that is the upbringing. That is same in my case. We never felt terribly deprived because we were raised under that particular cloud, or whatever you call it, we did not really feel it. We did not feel terribly hurt not being able to attend it because we didn't have that strong desire. We sensed the reason even though we couldn't explain it completely to ourselves.

Q: Good analogy. What happened to you in Crystal Night?

A: I must say that based on my experiences during the concentration period my memory is not as clear about many aspects as I wish it could be. I remember as I mentioned before, vividly, because it shook me up, passing by the Noysynagoga seeing it going up in flames, and I remember very vaguely, I think I was sent home, and my mother took my brother and myself. She went with us to visit an elderly aunt who lived in an old age home or a senior citizen's home on the outskirts of Breslau, and my mother I believe left us there with that elderly aunt or relative I believe, and we stood there for a little while, the intention was I believe to let things blow over. My mother must have heard that they went after Jews, shortly after, and picked them up and placed them in concentration camps.

Q: Did anything happen to your grandfather?

A: My grandfather. Nothing happened to my grandfather. They did not come to us, as far as into our apartment, though as you probably know, everybody, not only Jews, had to be registered in Germany. That meant that the authorities always knew where everybody including Jews were living. Nothing happened to us at this time, but we heard of people being taken away.

Q: After Crystal Night did things change for you?

A: In what respect?

Q: Did things become more dangerous for you? Let's put it this way, you mentioned that the business was (unintelligible) how did that affect your life?

A: Well I can only talk about our particular family life. It certainly changed. My mother realized more and my grandfather also did the drastic changes and they tried at that time to really think either about emigration or trying to get us, meaning my brother or myself, out of Germany. My brother was always a technical wizard. He was always interested in technical things and for this reason it was decided to let him get into the technical field so he was also through connection put into lehr with one of the biggest electrical contractors and in Breslau actually they carried electrical fixtures and machinery and so on, and he was learning that type of business and based on his experience he was accepted by Jewish authorities, I believe it was called the Reich in Deutschland. He was chosen as one of the very few young Jewish people to emigrate to England. To a so-called Kitchener camp, maybe you have heard of the name, which was a receiving camp for young Jewish children for resettlement purposes. The purpose was to receive them there and then send them either to Canada or Australia. And he was able after undergoing some tests I believe in Berlin, he was able to get out of Germany, sometime before, when did the war start? 1939. So he was able two or three months before that time to get through the Reich (unintelligible) out of Germany into England, and the only note we ever got, we had no idea where he really was sent to after that period. We knew he was in England, but then we got one Red Cross card, I remember that vividly where my brother just wrote I'm well, something like that, He mentioned something about ice hockey as we both had been great sports enthusiasts and active in sports, so the mention of ice hockey clearly showed me that he went to Canada. Canada was the dominant power in the ice hockey field in the world for generations, so we knew somehow they must have gotten him to Canada. That must have been the beginning of '40, during the war. So we got the Red Cross card. So that's why my life was changed. My brother got away. Myself, my mother probably figured out we had to get me out of Breslau and therefore I was sent to, it was called Gross Brazen, which was a very large agricultural undertaking, which formerly belonged to a wealthy Jew with a castle and a tremendous amount of ground which was evidently

given to the Jewish (word missing) and they in turn made up a Jewish agricultural school.

Q: The purpose being?

A: To train these young Jewish children for eventual emigration, but not for Israel, but to south American countries, and I believe if I'm not mistaken the Dominican Republic or something like that. Anyway some of these South American countries agreed to accept German Jewish people, but only if they were familiar with agricultural. Therefore the Reichsbauern? Set up this particular camp to train young Jewish children in the agricultural field to be able to get them out. That was the purpose, and I was there from January 1941 until about February 1943 and I must say that this particular period in my life, even though it was in very tragic times was one of the happiest years I ever spent because we were together with about 100 young Jewish boys and girls in my age, and based on the particular isolation of my (illegible) or agricultural camp and the manner in which it was run was to me a really wonderful experience. In addition to working on the fields and learning agriculture we were also given lectures and we studied theoretical, and this was under the auspices of a professional teacher, so therefore that particular period was very beneficial. In addition to it by being there and more or less isolated from the populated areas we were more or less away from the terrible daily happenings in the big city like Breslau, even though we kept in touch and my mother was still living in Breslau and was forced like so many others to give up her apartment and was forced to live in a ghetto like area. My mother was later employed by the Jewish gemeinde, Jewish congregation, and she worked, I believe in the steuer, tax department and so on. I think they gave her one room. She was allowed to live there and through this wonderful gentile person who was in our employ, my mother's employ over twenty years, my mother was able to survive this particular period because she brought her food and she helped her in any way with things where Jewish people could not move freely. This particular person was making it possible really for my mother to overcome a difficult period, until that time when she was sent to Auschwitz also.

Q: Up to 1941, up to the time that you went away to the agricultural settlement, how did things get worse in Breslau, between Crystal Night and 1941? Could you still work?

A: I don't remember really now when Jews were ordered to wear the Judenstern. I unfortunately don't remember the time. (It was early 1939). Based on that wearing of that Judenstern the life of Jews changed tremendously. If I remember correctly as a Jew you were not allowed to by using public transportation, sit inside these cars. I remember finding me standing on that platform before you get into the car, we were not allowed to sit. Jews were not allowed to attend movies and I'm not 100% sure. I did attend some I must admit. By covering, just in order to get in I made it so they did not get a view of my left side and I was able to get into certain movies or so, based on that particular thing, wearing of the

Judenstern, Jews could not freely go wherever they wanted to. There were certain restrictions, I don't know if there were complete laws from restricting Jews from attending any function, I don't know because as I said before I was living in Gros Brazen? From 1941 really, so the period you are talking about would be 1938 to 1941. That period., I don't have too much recollection of the official policy. If Jews were not allowed to attend, I really don't remember that.

Q: Do you remember getting the star?

A: I remember getting the star, yes. I remember getting the star, I remember the star on my clothes. I definitely remember that.

Q: Do you remember how you felt about it?

A: I certainly remember. It was a traumatic experience. I mentioned to you before that we couldn't really psychologically comprehend. At the moment probably everybody felt the same. Even though later many, many Jews even though the intent of Hitler was to degrade the Jews, but I think later we developed a sense of being proud to wear that star, after perhaps realizing the terrible intention of Hitler. So it had a great effect on everybody, no question about it, but we developed a certain proudness of wearing that star. Maybe that awareness that we are Jews and we are being subjected to these terrible, terrible things. Maybe that feeling of being a Jew and proudly wearing a star, maybe that made us able to overcome many of the traumatic experiences.

Q: Once you were the star you were much more visible, were there any physical abuses?

A: Yes there were many physical abuses. I personally was lucky in that sense. I personally never was really attacked based on the fact that somebody saw me with that Jewish star. But I know many, many people who had been attacked by young children when they saw a Jew or whenever they saw elderly people, particularly whenever they saw Jews or orthodox Jews who wore beards and were dressed in the more orthodox manner. These people were certainly attacked for being Jews. No question about it. Many occasions.

Q: Were you afraid to go out?

A: I must say I was not so much afraid. Naturally we were very cautious. When you live in an environment of that nature, automatically you are made aware of the dangers, you are very cautious. Afraid would not perhaps be the correct word because younger people don't tend to be as afraid as elderly people, maybe out of ignorance or not knowing what could happen, but really afraid I was not because I was very young and the sporty type and we had been involved in quite a few fights and I was able to take care of myself so I wouldn't call it at that time, but we were certainly very much alert and aware of things that could happen.

- Q:except for certain hours. Do you remember your mother going out shopping?
- A: I don't remember that period too well. As you mentioned about certain hours it comes back. I think that was true that the Jews were only allowed to shop at certain hours, but I don't have too much of a knowledge of that period. I really don't remember. It might be as I mentioned before that on account of the tremendous help we got from that gentile person, I think that many purchases were done by her and therefore I don't remember the particular shopping schedules too well.
- Q: She brings to mind something. In 1935 when they came out with the Rassenschande, was she ever 45 at the time, as you were allowed to keep her.
- A: Correct. She was the same age as my mother. She was born in 1900 and therefore we could keep her like you said, however the Nazis after that period based on the fact that they found out that she was working for a Jewish family for more than twenty years took her away and put her in a work camp to punish her for the fact that she was living and working for a Jewish family for twenty years.
- Q: When did they take her away?
- A: I don't know exactly. I would say we were taken to Auschwitz which must have been '43, my guess would be end of '42 or beginning of '43. She was punished for the fact that she was working for a Jewish family.
- Q: At this point, 1939, '40, '41 your mother and your grandparents made plans for your brother and hopefully for yourself.
- A: My mother and grandfather, my grandmother had died already also around 1925. It was just my grandfather who took the place of a father really in my sense, and my mother. These were the people who made the decisions.
- Q: And they were in contact with first the (illegible) which became the (illegible).
- A: Yes. My mother based on the fact that she worked for the Jewish gemeinde had perhaps pretty good what you would call contacts for getting facts and information and I believe even though it was never too much discussed that my mother tried to get us out of Germany, but at that time only people who had relatives in America who could give an affidavit, were able to get out of Germany, and we had no relatives living anywhere outside of Germany so therefore that avenue was totally closed.
- Q: Do you remember any discussion considering Shanghai or any place.

- A: I don't remember any discussions considering Shanghai. Although I have heard of some people went to Shanghai, yes, however I didn't remember any discussions of that nature. As I mentioned to you before, these very basic discussions were really never discussed in front of us.
- Q: When you went in 1941 to this agricultural community, you mentioned that it was isolated and therefore you didn't feel the daily....
- A: We didn't feel daily, correct, we were everywhere isolated and working on that farm, settlement, whatever you call it from morning till night and studying, we were so absorbed in our daily doings that we really did not feel that pressure other Jewish people must have felt living in that, these populated areas of Germany.
- Q: I neglected to ask you one question, before you went away in 1941 did your family have to move out of their apartment?
- A: That move out of our apartment must have taken place while I was in Gros Brazen. Then she was forced to move out. They assigned her one room which I've never seen, in that Volstrassen? area, which was the Jewish area, where the Yiddishgaminde? and some synagogues were in that Volstrassen, and if I'm not mistaken could have been a former ghetto area where Jews were living already many centuries before, but I may be wrong about that, but I only remember that this particular area, the Volstrassen, the main administrative buildings of the Yiddishgaminde including the orthodox synagogue, Storch was the name, in that particular area, and that area was designated later as the so called ghetto area, and my mother was assigned a room there, I've never seen it. I wasn't there, but I know that she was assigned there
- Q: Up to the time you went away, what kept up your morale from day to day?
- A: A very good question. I would say that my exposure of being able to be together with Jewish people, that probably was the reason that kept us up, in other words we had been able, I'm sorry were you talking about until I came to Gros Brazen? I'm sorry because after it was much easier because we were all together that was a great factor in being able to develop normally. Before that time I really don't know. I can't answer what kept, perhaps you might call it self-preservation, instinct, whatever. I don't think any planned activities by my mother, my family, or myself contributed to our being able to keep our spirits up. I don't think it was. Perhaps it is the great ability of human beings to adapt through any situation, and perhaps the major reason why I survived Auschwitz, not eliminating the major reason why I had been able to survive which had nothing to do with that, but was probably....
- Q: In these terrible days before you went away in 1941, if you had to look at your grandfather, did you notice a difference in him in the early thirties and later on by 1941?

- A: I have thought about that many, many times. I think I mentioned it before, the Prussian way of upbringing, unfortunately, has in my experience been a matter of showing very few emotions. The proper German-Prussian upbringing was, under all circumstances your own emotions should be so much curtailed it will not show. My upbringing was extremely similar. I had very few occasions to notice any changes in the composure of either my mother or my grandfather visible to us. That's why we were never really consulted or included in major discussions. That's why I never noticed any major changes in their expressions, because that was part of that typical German upbringing to hold back, not to show, to blindly accept orders, and accept the way of life that hardly ever questions orders and accepting whatever was a standard practice. That probably was a camouflage and made it perhaps possible for us to overcome the situation without really realizing the tremendous danger everyone was in. By keeping up that false front my mother and grandfather with good intentions, I'm 100% sure, because who wanted to expose to a young person or a child, these terrible developments and therefore we were kept away, and at this time I must say I am perhaps sorry that it happened. I realize the good intentions, but I feel that under these circumstances that children, young people of my age should have been taken in and briefed more closely on the developments. Good intentions, no question about it. With some young people it might have had very deep psychological after effects. It might affect, yes. But in this case again my impression was that in such an environment where even emotions had to be kept under very great control that this creates a very great danger.
- Q: And the question is psychologically, a boy of 17 or 18 is seeing what is going on anyway.
- A: Correct. A boy of that age has that conflict of seeing with his own eyes and all of a sudden made aware that you should not see it really, so that is where a young person has to go through a period of a conflict, a very great conflict, and believe me we had seen that. We had seen tragedies on the outside. My mother tried to shield us from the realities really, with good intentions, but these are the conflicts we had to go through.
- Q: I'm sure that is very important in what happened. When you went in '41 to the agricultural settlement it must have been, on the day that you left for there, how did you feel about going?
- A: I felt extremely happy. I felt happy in that sense to be together with young people. And naturally I felt extremely apprehensive of leaving my mother even though it was a short distance, I believe only about thirty kilometers, which is only about twenty some miles, but at that time it was a big trip, I felt apprehensive, no question about it. My brother was in England. I left my mother and my grandfather and Minna. We were very close, so naturally I felt apprehensive. On the other hand it was a new experience. I knew it was a new

experience, and we always had the hope that situations would get back to normal. I felt at that time during my studies and work at that agricultural school, this will be an interim period and later hopefully everything will be normal and we can all get together. The hope that almost everybody in our school kept up, that eventually we will all go back home and it will be normal. In the meantime in that particular camp we were all Jewish children and as I said before we were kept apart from the daily happenings, even though that particular school was taken over by the Gestapo later, but the management of the school was left in the same hands of a gentile former army officer who was an agricultural expert. You can call it here the manager of a big farm or these big plantations. He was an expert and he happened to be a party member and former army officer who was then put in charge of that camp. Now he happens to be a very correct person. He was not interfering with the inside management of our school. He was primarily responsible for the work involved, attending to planting and so on, but the educational part of our life, that was left in the hands of a Jewish educator.

Q: You mentioned, who was responsible for the inside management of this?

A: That was a Jewish educator employed by the Judisha? (word missing). He was a studien? assessor which I believe is a higher-grade instructor. I'm not too sure of the ranks. It's almost like a lower part of a professor. It's a higher grade in the educational management field I believe. Studien assessor was his title. He was in charge of the Jewish children, Jewish young people in that camp.

Q: During the time you were there did the Nazis bother you at all?

A: Not at all. We were not bothered at all, because that particular school was in a very, very small little dorf. That was a little settlement or little town. And most of the people living in that town, gentile people, worked on that farm with us together, and there were no other social centers, there was no organization in that little town. Therefore they must have forgotten for a long time to do something drastic. I would say they must have forgotten for a while, however once I remember a delegation of Gestapo people coming in, I forgot the year, and that was when the Gestapo took over the basics, the basic management, and we were not allowed at that time to get out of that camp or school, we were not allowed while before on certain occasions we were given permission to visit. Like in my case, home. I went to visit my mother on certain occasions. Then we were not allowed to do that.

Q: Two questions. Did you have enough to eat? And in this agricultural...

A: We were issued, in this agricultural school we were issued certain rations. We were issued, I'm talking about the management, certainly. I remember distinctly our very favorite diets which was rice (illegible) which was cottage cheese with a slice of bread. Certainly, especially at the later part of my being there, the food was, I can't call it bad, but as you realize, young people of that age don't care too

much about food. We were more interested in our daily activity, so we didn't care too much. It was certainly sufficient to keep us alive, no question, and especially when you live on a farm, even if your food ration consisted of cottage cheese and something, you always have a supplemental amount of potatoes, which were raised there. You always had something, extra vegetables which we were raising there, so there always was enough food to feed everybody.

Q: And was the work reasonable in the sense that it wasn't forced labor?

A: Let me put it this way. We had to put in a full days work. We never felt in that sense that it was forced labor because we considered it part of our schooling. It was forced labor because we worked like laborers from very early in the morning until at night. We never got a penny for it, but in reality it was forced labor, but as I said before as this was part of our course or schooling we never as young people felt like that.

Q: You mentioned before it was one of the nicest times, what was it a year and a half, two years.

A: Actually it was from January '41 to February '43.

Q: During those two years what was the major factor in making it a nice time?

A: The major factor I would say was the fact that we had been together with young people like myself. We had been, our activities consisted of normal work assignments. A very important factor was, we were very fortunate to have a very big social calendar. We had a fantastic library which the studies assessor brought or was sent by the Jewish authorities. We had a fantastic library, we had a very great classical library record library where we were exposed to classical music to a great extent. We had discussions, we had seminars, we had theater performances where we performed. We had our own stage. We had in addition to it we were fortunate enough to have a certain Jewish way of life by making our own Friday night services. We had people who were able to daven, we had created in one of our rooms a little synagogue where we attended services regularly. We continued that Jewish life which we were used to, and therefore, it was some kind of an unreal continuation of a normal life of a young Jewish person, and that perhaps was the reason why everyone was very content and happy there.

Q: An oasis like in the desert. What happened in February 1943?

A: We noticed already even in camp, certain changes. We noticed that young people, some of our students were called back to come home. I remember that these were people mostly living in very small towns in the western parts of Germany. These were the people who were attacked or were forced to leave Germany quicker, so I remember that before, I'm trying to think if this correct, I

noticed that some of these boys and girls were called back, and we realized that they were called back because evidently the families were forced to move out of these little towns, and they called their children and maybe they were able to emigrate, maybe they just wanted their children with them when they were forced by the Nazis to go, to be shipped somewhere else. Then we noticed in Gros Brazen that our group became a little smaller.

Q: Was that a disturbing factor?

A: Certainly that was a disturbing factor because we sensed somehow the deterioration of our own little world, of our own artificial little world. Then we noticed later people, children from mixed marriages were called and somehow had to specially register and we had a few people who were Jewish, who were raised Jewish, they were from mixed marriages, had to specially register, and so on and so on. I guess the reason for this was that under certain circumstances Nazis accepted these Jewish children back into their society or good graces, whatever you call it, when the parents could prove, if they could somehow convince the Nazis that the children are from a mixed marriage, but they really are not raised Jewish, they were then given official permission to remain (they went back to Germany and became gentiles), maybe that is perhaps the reason they were called. So I remember that we did have some cases where some of the girls in our group became pregnant, without being married. I remember these few cases where these young fellows who were responsible for that particular condition they married the girls. These were the first ones to be called away from camp and sent out. We never heard from them. That was a slow development. We were reduced, we were constantly reduced and out of, I forget the total enrollment at that time, less than 100, so all of a sudden during the course of the last year or so our whole group came down to 25 or something, and I was one of the, between twenty five people.

Q: As this group was being reduced, did you have any idea as to where these people were going.

A: We had no ideas and we did not get any information. My guess is, I can only guess, that these people were reunited with their families and sent to concentration camps, the same fate that happened to us later, but to these people it happened earlier.

Q: What did the word concentration camp mean to you at that time?

A: We never heard the word concentration camp at that time. All we were hearing was that Jewish people were sent to work camps and our perhaps naïve interpretation of the work camps was well they took fathers, mothers and children, they sent them to work camps. There was a lot of work, the families lived together and you were assigned jobs. That was our naïve thinking when we were confronted with the thought that Jewish families were sent to work camps. That

was our naïve feeling and understanding. And here to we came to the end of our Gros Brazen work period where we were given the order to report to Breslau on a certain date, and the man responsible at that time, it was not the regular educator who was I believe called away before, anyway we were given a date to report to that Breslau zum Lager?. It was in a big, huge, social hall, I don't remember if it was a former theater, I don't remember, we were given the date to report, and that particular date to this zum Lager.

Q: When you went back to Breslau to this zum Lager were you able to see your mother and grandfather?

A: We were a whole group of about twenty people I believe. We went to Breslau and while I was in that zum lager I met my mother there. My grandfather as I mentioned already was taken away in 1942 and in that camp I met my mother and I....

Q: Did you know your grandfather had been taken away already?

A: Yes. I knew my grandfather had been taken away and that the only note we got was that he had been sent east to ? and I met my mother and I introduced my mother to the wife of the meister, master, a Jewish woodworking master in charge of all the woodworking projects in Gros Brazen. The only, I believe, elderly person left, and he, with his wife was with us, and I remember I introduced my mother to Mr. whatever his name was, I forget his name, and we were together and waiting further developments. Sleeping a few days on cots and there were hundreds and hundreds other Jewish people. It was an empty school or (word missing) something like that. Then on a certain day, I forget the name of the day we were all told to get up and go to the train station. So we all, I believe we walked there. I'm not 100% sure, so I find myself in a (illegible) and then we were somewhere, I remember vividly we went to certain streets. I remember from Breslau people were looking, and then we were put on freight trains and I was with my mother and the fellows, the people from Gros Brazen on that particular train and we were going to, we didn't know where we were going to, but we were going, I don't even remember how long that trip took. It could be a day or even a second day, I don't really remember.

Q: While you were in this (word missing) wherever you slept for a couple of days what was the mood like, you said there were hundreds of people?

A: It was, you got a terrible feeling. You sensed something completely beyond your comprehension. You sensed something because when you see elderly people and young people and children and people of all categories for the very first time laying on cots on strobettan, which was totally contrary to a normal way of life, especially for people like these German Jews who had been brought up in that German manner where you wouldn't even waste your thought about thinking of the normal legal things. You sensed something terrible is going to happen. I

think the impression by most of the people that something terrible is going to happen, and that is the overall sense, particularly elderly people I remember. Younger people like us we still had that hope that well developments will overcome it. We still had that hope because younger people generally rather cling to positive things than negative. The elderly people in most cases I found terribly disturbed.

Q: When you say you found them terribly disturbed can you explain that a little?

A: Terribly disturbed by being extremely quiet. You could see fear on their faces. You could see a terrible fear really on the faces of the elderly people. You could hear every word that was spoken was interrupted in many instances by breakdowns and the expression of emotions and terrible feeling and even an untrained person got just from observing elderly people. Not so much younger people who through their ignorance or inexperience, would not show any of these emotions at that time.

Q: When you had to board the train did this sense of hopelessness increase or...?

A: Myself I must admit. I never had that sense of hopelessness. I never experienced it perhaps through the reason that I was always together with these same young people I had been together with for so many years in Gros Brazen. Perhaps this feeling of being together with these people and I had my mother there, that gave me an artificial type of outlook even though I sensed something terrible is going to happen based on the fact that we were forced to use for the very first time a freight car which is normally used to transport animals to the slaughterhouse or freight of any kind but never in my short experience even found it possible that people were transported in freight cars, so I might have had an underlying fear of what was, but my overall feeling was not that this will lead to a great tragedy. Certainly not my own impression. I still had a certain hope that eventually something will turn out for the better.

Q: How long were you on this train?

A: I don't remember. I only can venture to guess maybe from one day to the other. I'm not really sure. It wasn't too not very long.

Q: What did you do for food?

A: We were told to bring small pieces of luggage or rucksack which we took with us and we were also told to take food for a day or two. So there was no problem. We ate something. That part was all right.

Q: What about bathroom facilities?

- A: There was as you can imagine. I don't remember. I have no idea. I don't recall. I think, I don't recall. I guess certain corners they used. I really don't remember that. Not at that stage. There are other experiences which I remember more clearly.
- Q: The train took you directly to Auschwitz?
- A: The train took us somewhere. We did not know where. The train stopped and the door opened. As soon as the doors opened, that is the most horrible sight which I will always remember. Which I will never forget in my whole life. That I was seeing the same sight as a picture which you probably have seen in Israel where they were showing a barbed wire fence and you were seeing, have you been there? I think they have that particular picture. Have you seen that? It was identical the way it was. We were told to get out of the train and we noticed SS officers and some dogs and we were motioned over and we were told to take our valises and rucksacks in one car. There were thousands of people. I was worrying, how can we get it back, without realizing that we will never need it. That was the stage, the first step for people to be told to either step left or right.
- Q: Was that immediately when you got off the train?
- A: That was immediately after the train. We were told to walk and there was standing that particular officer with the dog and some other officers who were looking at each person and making the decision of left or right which means right away being sent to the gas chambers which we didn't know at this time or right or whatever it was. These were people to be used for their concentration camps. And my recollection at this time is that my mother with that other woman was told to go on that side. Almost all our people, we were young and strong were told to go this side, and I remember my mother and the other woman being helped and so on a truck, and that was the end, I remember that was the end of my recollection. We were told to go this way. We were put on trucks and moved out of that particular area where the barbed wire fence with glaring lights going because that went on for hours and hours. Thousands of people were coming, and then we were driven to that particular part of that Auschwitz camp which was called Monowitz, your name is Manowitz which is a coincidence, but it was called Monowitz, which is a side camp of Auschwitz. And that was called also Buna? Because the E.J. Farben of Germany was the firm who built their big industrial complex. And we as inmates of that camp were forced to work in that Monowitz or Buna camp. You heard about this? That's when we got there they must have just set up that camp because our first assignment was building barracks and we were later then assigned.
- Q: When you got to this Buna what happened to your clothes?
- A: We were told to strip completely naked at the time. This was the eastern part of Germany and still very, very cold, and I remember we had to strip completely

naked and run completely naked from one block, meaning barrack to another barrack and there we were waiting for some instruction or whatnot. I remember waiting. It was very, very cold. We were shivering all there and then one person came in and he was in a striped suit. He was called a kapo. Now a kapo was a person in charge of a certain block or section or working detail who was set up by the Nazis as, now a kapo is I don't know if you know about it, but a kapo was of questionable nature. Some of them were forced to accept kapos and they treated the people they were in charge of in a normal manner, but some were intentionally pushing for that position, and took tremendous advantage of their position by, because they were backed up by the guards and they had almost unlimited power so they took food away, that little bit that was given and they had the power to assign you to certain better types of jobs that might contribute to your survival, while people they didn't particularly care for or did not cater to their own needs they let them go to hell. So one of these people came in, I remember and they gave us some orders. I remember that particular incident that the meister who was still with me in that particular camp, some of the other boys somehow were channeled somewhere else, I only remember finding myself with only a few of my original group, and this particular kapo said something that was really ridiculous to us and this meister who was also a typical German in his sense said how can you say something like that. I remember that this particular fellow immediately attacked him and in such a manner that I don't really care to discuss the details of this. It was a total shock because we didn't really know what, we had no idea that this was a concentration, we still were perhaps under that notion, we didn't accept the fact that this is something else than a working camp, but then it dawned on us that this was pure murder. What we had seen now slowly dawned on us, we are seeing murder in front of our eyes and so that was the very first beginning, and then we were sent to having our numbers tattooed. We were not called by names anymore we were only called by numbers. Our hair was shaved off completely and we were assigned one thin striped suit and we were assigned to certain blocks, meaning that's where we belong and that was the early beginning, and then naturally when you were stripped of all your dignity by realizing you are non more name, there is only a number, by having your hair shaved off and by being forced to run naked around by not having the most natural rights in any manner, you noticed right away that this is something out of the extraordinary. Naturally you were confronted with a situation which I suppose created a period in our lives which at that time which at that time of complete despair or complete inability to cope with your own survival, and that's why during the very early period, I remember distinctly, many people in my blocks walking into a loaded wire because they psychologically could not cope with that first period that you are not a human being, that you are worse than an animal. They just couldn't cope with it and they were running every day I remember noticing people hanging on these laded wires, who just couldn't take it, and that was the very early part, the first few days of our being there.

Q: When you first started seeing this, as you say, the murder, the stripping of ones dignity, how were you able little by little to cope?

A: Good question. I've asked myself this many, many times. I personally had never before been exposed to murder, to killing, not even exposed to seeing blocks in that sense. I always considered myself rather sensitive in that sense when it came to these things. I don't know, but I must say something which I don't really like to say, but sometime during my confinement in the concentration camp I have felt a certain shield being placed around my heart that I could see, and we were called on many occasions to witness hangings where people were caught, I had no emotions. Later on I analyzed myself and asked how can I watch a person being hung and even look at that picture for five minutes. It didn't give me anything. I did not feel, I had no feeling whatsoever, and on many occasions I was mad at myself that I would not feel anything by observing murder and having no feeling. That invisible shield around my emotions, around my feelings probably was part of the reason that I could witness murder and five minutes later eating that water soup and a piece of stale bread which you were given and even able to swallow it. There are many things which I couldn't explain, but by being exposed to continuous murders and things of that nature it came to a step where I didn't feel anything.

Q: In the beginning when you first saw this, as you said, it was almost impossible to cope.

A: Well we still, I still had some hope. I still had some hope based on total unrealistic feelings. I had some hope. This hope was nourished by very small developments, but surprisingly some hope which had nothing to do with daily developments. I vividly remember in one of our blocks once to see a group of elderly men. They must have come from eastern European parts, kneeling in a corner of that barracks after a terribly hard day, kneeling and praying. They must have smuggled in a tiny little prayer book and you could see that these people even though if they would have been caught they would have been immediately shot or whatever, there were some occasions when you could see very devoted Jewish people, rather not eating or what, but they wanted to pray. That gave me some kind of a hope. It gave me a hope that there is something stronger than a gun or a gallows. Something that when people continue with such a belief that they are praying under such a condition where if they would be caught they would be surely hung or killed in some manner. Somehow that gave me some kind of strength, whatever you call it, that somehow I might be saved. And then some other things, when this camp the Auschwitz area was attacked by English bombers, bombing raids, I don't know when they started. Industrial installations were attacked continuously and we were hoping and praying and I could see myself standing outside bunkers they erected for us, they needed us as workers, and I was looking up and I saw them coming, and what a beautiful sight. I was hoping, I hope they kill everything including myself, I was hoping, and they really destroyed and we had to build all over again and that went on for a long long time, so we always, and then somehow since we had to work in these installations with Polish civilian workers which were not concentration camp,

they were civilian workers probably forced by the Polish or at that time occupied part of Germany and they were living in camps outside somewhere and they were more or less free. Through them we got some information that the war does not go as well and these little things and these little bits of information which we got, that all is not well, over a period of time gave us perhaps, a little bit of hope.

Q: What was your work assignment when you came to Buna?

A: My work assignment, I believe my very first assignment was probably the very worst one that anyone could get. It was carrying sacks of cement from one place to another, which was a type of commando they called it. They were trying to reduce the amount of workers in that manner. These sacks were I believe, I'm not 100% sure, about 100 pounds and they had to be carried on your shoulder all day long and in many instances in order to make the time pass quicker for the guards who were watching and also to give a little entertainment to the kapos, we were told to do this in a jogging manner. And also in many instances we were told to bend down while doing it just to give entertainment the guards. Each commando had one or two guards watching. So it was a terrible thing where older people dropped out, they dropped like flies and they couldn't do it. I don't know how I survived. Probably I was in superb physical condition due to my training at the camp so I survived even though the food ration was as you probably know, very little. Somehow I survived and I was reassigned to another commando which was garispow?, meaning to erect certain ladders or so, there were no cranes at the time, so in order to build a building they had to erect certain stands out of wooden planks, very high, so that the brick layers and so on could go from one platform to the other, and that was the commando I had to work for and fortunately in that particular commando the kapo was a very nice Berlin Jew who was forced into that position. I was also born in Berlin and he happens to be a very nice fellow, we both became good friends. He assigned me for a certain period of time to take care of a certain type of work that was done in a shack with certain kind of equipment inside and therefore I did not have to constantly climb up and do this work. That happened in the wintertime, and particularly in that area winters were very severe and the clothing we were assigned was totally inadequate. Very, very thin clothing, and as I was able for quite a while to work in that shack, just cutting certain sections of the small trees needed to erect a kind of gate or whatever, anyhow I was inside that area for a while with some other nice fellows, and we placed one person on the window so we would always be able to see the guards coming or somebody else, and whenever we noticed the guards were coming we made believe we were working like mad when in reality we didn't do much at all. Well that was the benefit of a certain period of my time. Only a short period of my time. At least in that period we could conserve our strength because as you realize we were all totally underweight and we were just being able to survive or walk but we couldn't really perform strenuous labor. Anyone who was assigned to strenuous labor probably, no not probably, I know they couldn't do it and they were not able to report to their work assignments in the morning and therefore they were sent to what is called a continbau? meaning it was an extra barrack for

so called sick people. Now most of the people admitted or accepted in the morning unless they had small little cuts on which they could place a bandage around, this was the very first step to being sent out of the camp into...

Q: But they realized that?

A: At that time I would say that most people realized that if you are kept there that this is the first step in to being transported to the gas chambers.

Q: When did you find out that there were gas chambers at Auschwitz, that that's what was going on?

A: Actually I don't recall any particular basic information given to us by any, but my personal impression of a gas chamber was the first time I smelled a terrible smell in the air. It smelled like smoke coming out of a glue factory. We were really too far away to see the smokestacks, but we smelled a terrible smell on certain occasions. And such a smell which is a highly unusual smell. A smell which gave me the realization that this is the smell of burned bodies or bones or something. That was perhaps my first inclination of the gas chambers where the people were...

Q: Did you get any information from older, I don't mean older in age, but older in length of time they had been in Auschwitz?

A: Well we did get information from the outside because there were constantly new people coming in from different areas of Europe. We got quite a few people in from Hungary. We got people in also from Romania and people from the eastern part of Europe. So and these people came in and naturally with information and the more people you talked to you were exposed to in the camp you could more or less put the pieces together. I believe based on these additional newcomers you could get an idea of where you really were and what is taking place.

Q: So it was the newcomers who were more informative you think. What I meant that the older ones who were there, did they understand?

A: I believe it was a combination of many factors. Many of these so-called kapos I mentioned to you before were old time prisoners. Not necessarily Jews. Many of these people who had a tremendous power were so called political prisoners taken in by the Nazis already a long time before. Many of these prisoners were already in other camps like Dachau and Sachsenhausen and these people had much more experience in the setup and in the plans of the Nazis than we as newcomers, and through them we also heard that you don't know what is going on and you should have been there and there and there and these people were there and they were always referring to other camps and Auschwitz, the gas chamber, so we got the information from either these people who were in camps many years before, or

through the newcomers who went through stages and had contact with some other people. So we got some information and then we realized...

Q: At what point did you realize that that had happened to your mother?

A: It wasn't really difficult for anyone to assume what happens to elderly people. The work we were exposed to could only be done by young people. When I say elderly people, people over forty at that time in my opinion were in most cases unable to do this type of work. And the weeding out process at that gate as I mentioned to you done by these SS officers who were the ones to determine will that body be able to perform that function of work. They knew what was going on. So they were weeding out already. I would say that most of the people like women and children and elderly people, middle age people who were slim or haggard or didn't look like people who could perform this type of work were already taken to the left or right it doesn't matter. So we could assume that any of our own family members, mothers or fathers who were forty, forty five, fifty, couldn't possibly survive that type of work, so it was an assumption based on what we saw, what was demanded.

Q: What were the actual living conditions? You mentioned that you had to build the barracks.

A: They were building pre-built type, meaning they were getting pre-built types of barracks where certain sections was made somewhere else and shipped in section form to these concentration camps and we were assigned then to putting sections to section, so that by putting one wall, then a door, then another wall and then a window, so we were building these. That was the building process. So we were helping and making I think foundations, cement foundations I believe, and then on that foundation we were building. Now we were doing this with some civilians, some German civilian workers. I remember one who was very nice who was assigned who was sent there to the east to build something, and I remember very vividly he was such a nice fellow, he took pity on me and I asked him to do me a favor, send a letter back home to somebody. He did send one of my, which was strictly forbidden, and I got that letter back. I sent this to Minna I believe or Elsburn's sister who was a Mischling from a mixed marriage and she was allowed to, and I mailed that to her, and this letter reached, he did this for me. Just to tell them where we were and so on. I think I have that letter somewhere. We were doing that under the supervision of some civilian workers and maybe the exposure to these civilian workers either in camp or building it outside when we were working with these foreign workers on these projects, maybe that was the reason why we kept in contact or got information about developments.

Q: When you say these barracks were put up, prefabricated type, did you have beds?

A: Yes, so called beds. This was wood. The bed consisted of, it looks very much like the beds sold here in the U.S. especially for people who have many children.

Bunks. Instead of mattresses there were just wooden planks and we had no so called mattresses meaning bags which were stuffed with straw, meaning a jute bag, how do you call these things? Meaning a sack. They were stuffed with straw, real straw and then placed over the boards and then that was your quarter. There were how many people, I think three, one on top of the other. And they had to be made after we got up in the morning and that was one of the greater, we got some blankets, yes, we got a blanket and the greatest tragedy every morning after you got up you sewed, it had to be perfectly vertical, if you made it a little cockeyed you were punished. It was one of their disciplines to even punish you more by letting you do these terrible things which were totally useless, but in order to keep every minute, every hour of your time under strict command. And I remember these inspections which took place then when you were found and your cot was you were punished by I don't know what, terrible things. And that's the way they kept these things in order.

Q: Did you have bathrooms in the barracks?

A: Not in the barracks. These were special barracks where you had not bathrooms. You had a latrine which was an open place and with a board where you were allowed to do your business and you had extra water fountains which was I remember a structure maybe perhaps ten feet in diameter with faucets, one next to the other, and a basin where many, many people could wash themselves, on the outside I believe it was. Cold water, there was no hot water.

Q: Did you have to contend with lice and...?

A: Tremendous. That was one of the daily accompaniments, whatever you call it. You were exposed and by the thousands, you were holding your hand under your arm and we had, constantly. Then periodically we had to go to a delousing type of booth and we had to go through that type of thing. That was good for a while and then the whole thing started again. It was a continuous thing and that was a contributing factor for people getting infections. When you had a little scratch it developed immediately into something and that's why the amount of people not surviving in addition to the tremendous hardship of work was based on these sanitary conditions and naturally the other conditions which I explained to you before.

Q: Was there ever any chance, I know the word organize was used to steal, was there ever any chance to get extra food or anything?

A: No. There were never any occasions or opportunities to steal food unless you were one of the few workers assigned into the kitchen for kitchen work, or you were one of the fortunate people to have as a friend one of these kapos. Then they were letting you wait at the end of the line so that when they brought these big soup barrels, the soup came in a barrel and soup was the sustaining type of food and for argument sake they had potato soup or sometimes some kind of vegetable,

so what did the guys do who were in charge of dispensing that food. Nobody wanted to be first on line because when these big barrels were unloaded in front of each barrack and you were told to form a line the first person got just the upper portion, meaning just the water. Everybody wanted to be the last because intentionally the block oldest? meaning the man in charge or the kapo made sure that he himself would get only the heavy type of food which was at the bottom, or his friends or designated people, so the weak ones, the very weak ones, the people who had no connections, were always forced or pushed to take the first portions, while the ones who were able to, pushed themselves into a position more in the back of the line, were the ones who got better food and things like that. And naturally there was trading of food going on for just basic necessities, like knives were fashioned out of spoons. We were not allowed to have knives so some people who were handy were hammering with stones the end of a spoon, by hitting that portion. It became thinner and thinner and created a knife. That was needed to cut your bread portion into equal pieces which you saved, a bite in the morning, the next bite later, so these commodities exchanged, so you had to give a few pieces of your bread to buy something else. You were assigned shoes you couldn't walk into and there was no way to get better shoes. If you didn't get a better pair of shoes your feet would rub, your skin would be open. It would mean pure death because in a day or two you would get infection and you would be sent to the konin? House so you were forced to maybe try to change a pair of shoes with someone else, so you were giving your little portion and trading. So these trades constantly helped.

Q: Speaking of shoes, what kind of shoes did they give you?

A: Well I never forget, and that is one of the most tragic situations. It bothers me even today. I remember when we came and were walking into that camp in Auschwitz when it was just opened. I remember vividly some very well nourished called studens or kapos standing at the doors with a smirk on their faces with a look at newcomers, they don't know what's going, something like that, and these were Jewish people. And unfortunately I would say they are still alive and two of them are living right here in Washington Heights, very orthodox people, and they were calling over some guys, and I had stieffel? from Gros Brazen. In the country you were using leather boots and they were calling some, not me over. Take off these shoes, and they gave them shoes which normally have wooden shoes with a linen upper, with a wooden sole like they wear here, these kids. This type, these were the work shoes, and only the privileged, studen aldeste or kapos, block aldeste they were allowed because they were the privileged type of people. They were allowed, they got special permission from the SS to wear good shoes. They had a better type of a suit striped yes, but high class, they had them made by tailors from our own people who had been tailors, they got custom made while everyone else had to take what was given to them while walking through these sections where they were assigned, These privileged people including these I mentioned took off these shoes and gave these people the normal type of shoes assigned.

- Q: Was there ever a chance, how did one become a block aldeste or a kapo or.....?
- A: Well I must say as I mentioned to you before most of these people were in various camps a long time. Some of these people as I mentioned before were already in these camps, Saschenhausen or Buchenwald, and then were sent by the Germans as the nucleus of these new camps which they had to establish to absorb these hundreds of thousands of Jews. Now in order to have qualified, underline qualified people, they took these and sent them all over Germany or wherever they established new camps. They had the nucleus of these people who went through all this already years ago and these were the people who were then put in charge to continue their basic establishment policy, meaning they were very well experienced in mistreating people, punishing people, and had the greatest experience in taking advantage of the situation. And I don't want to go so far as to say our own Jewish people who have certainly experienced very bad times before, before they were assigned to Auschwitz to establish the new setup, but I must say that I was stunned when I saw that our own people just for the sake of being put into a privileged position were instrumental, I would not say that I have seen these people kill somebody else, but I have noticed that have been instrumental in taking everything to their own advantage, for their own benefit, taking away from a fellow Jew. That has bothered me a hell of a lot.
- Q: There's good and bad in all people I suppose, but.
- A: I've tried to analyze my own behavior during that period of time and I don't want to say that I always behave myself 100 per cent cultivated manner, meaning that I always observed the normal courtesies which I normally would apply here or anywhere. Certainly not, but probably most of my behavior cannot be compared because you were forced to live more or less like an animal, where you were only concerned with the basic survival, just basic survival problems. That you, meaning that you were always patient until you were called, certainly you always did by instinct many things, but I have never gone that far in the sense of taking away from anybody in that sense, like some of our own people have done.
- Q: What in all that time, you mentioned that it was a day by day existence, survival was the most important thing, what do you think kept you going on some of the worst days...?
- A: What has kept me going? I really can't answer. I remember something, maybe that's part of the answer. What keeps you going. I remember in the very beginning when I was assigned to that particular work detail of building these scaffolds. I remember myself very, very high up, it was extremely high. I think at the time they wanted to build an electricity powerhouse or whatnot, and all of a sudden I'm together on a very small area with a beebler forsher? A gentile beebler forsher who was put into a concentration camp for his belief, a beebler forsher is like a Jehovah's Witness. And while I was there, he knew I was Jewish and so

forth, at time he was trying to convince me of the benefits and merits of his belief, and in a good-natured manner. You know when you are working together, and somehow I was wondering and I was really admiring this person, not for his belief, that is his private, but I was admiring him that under these circumstances where he is barely alive, he was in very bad shape, but he had the courage and he used every minute he could to convince fellow human beings of the merits of his belief, and maybe in that particular vein, the example I gave you when I saw some orthodox Jews praying in that corner, or maybe in my case when I noticed in front of the Commandant's barrack which I had to observe I believe every morning walking out to working details, where I noticed a beautiful bed of flowers with the most gorgeous little flowers, I walked through, I could not really understand how is it possible that life is being taken away, hundreds and thousands of people are being murdered every day and I was watching from one day to the other how flowers could grow, how nature continues. You know things of that nature have perhaps given me a thought that whatever will happen or whatever we could hope happen is stronger than whatever we see every minute. And maybe that belief is something supernatural or that something better will happen, or that there is a God, maybe that kept me going. And I never was and I'm not an orthodox person. I was always raised to believe in God and I do believe. There were times surely when I saw in front of my eyes terrible things happen which I didn't mention here, during every day in the camp. Very often I must admit I ask myself, can there be a God? Is it possible, can a God allow these terrible things to happen. Not only in relationship to the things I saw happen to my own family which I've seen walking left, but to be exposed to such terrible agonies and such terrible things, hundreds of times I have asked myself, is it possible, is there a God. I must truthfully say even though I was raised in the liberal sense I have never once said no there can't be a God, I've never come that far. I've always kept somehow in my mind the belief that there is a God and there are many things which I cannot explain, and there will be a time which might make it possible for me to survive and others too, and I've always kept up the hope and maybe that was one of the reasons, surely not anything else, because the conditions as you must know everybody had to work in or were exposed so that hardly any human being could survive.

Q: Towards the end, towards liberation, were you aware of the fact that the war was going poorly for the Germans?

A: Well I as you know was in Auschwitz, and the later stages really developed more or less like this. We were told, we got some information through the grapevine, yes, that the German armies were doing very poorly on the eastern front, and we got this information through these foreign workers we worked with in that particular complex.

Q: But not prisoners, foreign workers?

A: Not prisoners, foreign workers we worked with them and through foreign workers who listened to BBC broadcasts I believe on shortwave which they were not allowed to listen to but they listened and they told us that it doesn't look good on the eastern front and that the Germans are being driven back and we had an inclination that the political situation is somehow changing so we were hoping. We were hoping that the Russians would push the Germans toward the western part of Germany. By doing this we figured naturally that we are on the eastern part of Germany we would be benefiting and so on and so on. And sure enough we were told one morning to get ready and we were told that anybody who is not in a condition to walk and most of the people as you know already after so many years were in a terrible physical condition, but you functioned by that time not by your normal functioning of the brain but by your instinct. You were told to get up, you got up. Walk, if you could walk you walked. Some people couldn't so they decided we're not going to walk, we're going to the continbauen, some did. But everybody realized that if they go there the SS is going to shoot anybody remaining. By the way they did not get shot. I heard later they survived some of these, but we were taken on that infamous Totes March. From Auschwitz they made us walk, there were thousands of inmates walking in groups with SS guards on each side and behind and everybody who couldn't keep up with that normal walking tempo was shot by the SS which was behind., you probably heard about it. We were walking, I think the first step was in Gleivitz, which was an industrial town in eastern Germany. I believe it was the town and from there but I'm not 100 per cent sure. Naturally we lost a tremendous amount of people who couldn't make it, who couldn't walk with us, and we were put somewhere on the train again, on a freight train. We were driven for a very, very long time through various parts of Germany and also Austria. For some reason we were able to look out even though we had guards inside our cars. We somehow noticed Austria, so somehow I don't know if the purpose was to get us out of Germany, but anyhow we were finally unloaded in the Hartz Mountain area. In an area I never heard of. It was also a concentration camp by the name of Elrich in Hartz, which was the most horrible thing even Auschwitz was a paradise in comparison to what we have seen there. That was a small concentration camp where we were staying and such a horrible thing I don't even know if I should mention it now. Certain blocks, certain buildings were only for people who had reached almost that and where just by looking in you saw nothing else but half dead people only skeletons, and where they also had furnaces and burned, not like in Auschwitz where people were gassed and burned over there most people died natural causes, totally, in other words based on the conditions, most people were so far that they were dying, they were brought in by other workers and burned inside these, so this was the most horrible sight even for us who were seasoned inmates of concentration camps who had seen a lot, but this is about the worst I have ever seen because it was just a killing type of an operation just to, without doing anything to these inmates it was just a normal process of just dying and then disposing by burning, and the few people who survived that particular area later on we were put on a train again and we got out on a little station and we were walking and walking, we didn't know where we were and some people came

towards us and we were asking them and also we could see Jewish inmates, even women were walking in the other direction. And they mentioned something like Bergen-Belsen and so even though we had never heard of Bergen-Belsen before, when we came there we were fascinated because we didn't see a concentration camp we were seeing a German Kozarem? A kozarem is a brick building which housed soldiers. We were told in a relative nice manner, even the tone of the guards changed by using, well you fellows you go in here. All of a sudden we felt we were spoken to, not like numbers, but like people. And we somehow sensed that something is going on and a few days later we saw these SS officers without weapons and telling us look, you'd better wash up now the British will be coming soon. And we saw these SS in their uniforms, but no more carbines, no more weapons. Just you'd better clean up, you should make a good impression when the English comes. But unfortunately we were in such a three quarter dead condition that we couldn't even realize or cope mentally or physically. I think I was walking around on all fours. I didn't even have the strength to walk. I think I was down to about 85 German pounds. My normal weight was 165 German pounds. At that time just to give you an impression. What ever was left most of these people were half dead really, but my recollection is that I was just barely able to walk and we were crawling into these beds somehow and then one morning it was I remember hearing through a loudspeaker something in German that this is the Second so and so British army. We came here to liberate you or something. We heard but we were still, that was exactly then we knew we were liberated. But something that I didn't tell you. It is very gruesome but I think that I should mention it to you that happened on that train trip that we had to make from Elrich that terrible camp to Bergen-Belsen. We had two German guards on that train and I remember vividly going through the night. They wanted to entertain themselves so they picked during the day hours when it was light one of the particular persons in that freight car which will be killed on that night with a knife in order to entertain themselves and I remember the last victim, a little, he must have been a ten or eleven year old gypsy boy. A gypsy not a Jewish, I remember that. They picked and they wanted to kill him on that night and they flipped on their lighters or whatever they had. As entertainment they picked every night some of the survivors in that car and killed just to be entertained and threw then the corpse out of the car. That was on the way to Bergen-Belsen. I remember then that I passed out on that train and like a miracle, I remember that I passed out. I had some kind of a dream that I was floating away somehow and all of a sudden I felt a certain pinching and that was just the time they told the people inside that car, the fellow inmates, to get out of that car to walk from that train station to Bergen-Belsen. Some of the other fellows must have pushed me, get up, try to get up, otherwise everybody in there would have been killed, so I woke up in time and I made it out of that car. That was just the night after they killed that little boy of twelve or thirteen. I think he was twelve years old. That and I made it and walked with them to Bergen-Belsen. And then a few days later or whatever, then came the liberation.

Q: When you heard that the British army was there did it matter to you?

- A: The only thing that mattered to everybody was food. You were in such a condition that really nothing mattered, only the basic things that mean survival. I mentioned to you before that based on these inhuman treatment that they take away not only your means of survival like food, shelter and clothing, they took away the human dignity and decency and you are exposed to murders and killing. It came to a point where you were really made something else than a human being. You were made into an animal where only survival, your whole thought was how can I survive that day by doing as little as possible because if you do much you wouldn't survive. How to get a half way decent little bit of food and how to stay away to be able to not to be outside where there was below degree temperature because you would freeze to death. Only the very basic thoughts of survival were in your mind nothing else. And to survive, that was such a great undertaking that you didn't have time for anything else.
- Q: That's why I asked. When the British did come did they provide?
- A: When the British did come unfortunately maybe with good intentions. They were dishing out on that day, captured German rations which consisted of the heaviest food digestible. Fat such a fat like sewinerfleis, lots of fat inside. They meant well, they dished this out. Some of my best friends died because they had diarrhea and could not, and naturally like everybody else, who was holding back. Whatever little bit, we didn't get food for I don't know how long, everybody ate whatever they could and based on that. I must say that even though they meant well, they wanted to feed us, but they gave many of these people the wrong food and I lost a very good friend of mine who survived the camp and couldn't make it based on that. Even myself I went through the stages, I don't have to tell you, but I was able to survive and regain some of my strength very, very slowly.
- Q: How did you begin to, this is a very hard question, how did you begin to be a human being again?
- A: Good question. Maybe this is also a very fortunate development. I was finally getting my strength back and walking around on my own two feet without crawling. I went around the camp and then I saw a few other people and naturally you spoke to them. You spoke to the people who survived and you tried to, first of all you tried to become a human being again. It was time to clean myself and wash myself. You had the strength, before you didn't have the strength. And then I think we got some other clothing and all of a sudden you felt more like a human being. We were looking around, is there anybody in that camp you know and you spoke to some people. I met one fellow who was also in camp with me even though I didn't know him too well and I couldn't know him too well because while I was marching out to our work details, he was playing every morning in that band which was standing at the gate playing. He was a member of that band in Auschwitz playing the most beautiful music while we were walking out and in order for the guards to be able to count each person they had to play march music,

so that while you were in step they were counting the rows of people. He was a member of that privileged group of musicians. Now the musicians were privileged because the SS had to keep them in physical condition where they were able to swing a bow or able to blow into a trumpet, so they were privileged. And he was one of the very old, he was in Dachau. He was not to be compared to the other privileged who were put in that position just normally. I don't want to give the wrong impression. He was just a musician by nature he was like everybody was asked what's your occupation. So he was assigned to do this. I met him at that time and we became friendly and I asked him where are you from and what are you going to do? Where are you going? I'm a musician I play the violin and he was really very nice and I must say I really think we should stick together. Where are we, in the middle of Germany. We have nobody and we could stick together. Fine, we'll stick together. Let's walk. We were given already some release papers. There were some representatives from some Jewish organizations there. I think the British army set up some kind of a civilian authority. We got some release papers that we were released from Bergen-Belsen. I still have that here, and we were walking. Now neither did we know much about geography or where we found our, now we know Bergen-Belsen is somewhere in that particular area. All we had in mind was let's get ourselves the heck out of Germany. Let's try to emigrate, and I always had that letter my brother sent me and I had that Canada, maybe, my notion was let's can we go to Canada and so on and so on. And I spoke to my friend Max Hotner who was that musician and he said yes I feel the same thing and while we were talking somehow we met another fellow who was with me in Gros Brazen and he said look we want to go west, why don't you come home with me I live in Krefeld which is on the western border near the Dutch border. That's very nice near the Dutch border means that we are getting more west. Let's go. He said my family had a business there. We had a house there. Let's all get there, so we were hitchhiking and you know walking and walking. So we finally...I'm sorry I have to mention one thing. That was a little later. I was walking with the musician and we came to a place near Hanover. And my friend as a born musician his first wish and hope was he wants to get a violin in his hand. And I'll never forget in a little, somewhere on the way he saw somewhere, we spoke to somebody, somehow he could trade or something his first violin. This violin was even a students violin, it was not a full violin. I don't know much about it but it was not a full violin, it was a students. And I will never forget on that first evening he took that violin and even though he only played notes he wanted to test his finger, his capability I think I broke down completely because I couldn't recognize, reconcile the fact of music with survival and beautiful tones coming out of...See this was a period of, an adjustment period. Again we were taken in by, we were walking through like strangers and then all of a sudden a woman, we were touring a little town and a woman, she waved us in and this was a German woman with six or eight children and it turned out that her husband was on the eastern front somewhere, and she saw us, she had compassion and she took us in and said you stay here, you sleep, I'll give you food, and she gave us food. I'll never forget, both of us who had never seen food, she came with a soup tureen you call it. It was one of these things, it must have held four,

five, six gallons of soup. So she was, it was a beautiful day, she was sitting outside because she probably couldn't take it inside, we were full of lice. So she was serving us in the garden outside and we both finished, I think the soup tureen was I think bigger than we were. We both finished that in a short while and she placed a big type of tube inside and she filled it with water and we were taking our first bath. So she was a German woman and she had compassion and she felt...and so by being there a few days so we gradually and gradually gained some strength and then we went to Hanover which was a bigger town and had a registration of Jewish survivors. And we were looking if we could find names like my mother's. I was looking into the register if we could find anybody else and then we met that fellow from Krefeld who said look you have nobody, come with me and then we hitchhiked and traveled.

Q: When you left Bergen-Belsen did you have clothes and money?

A: We were given some clothes. Yes we were given some clothing.

Q: So you weren't in the striped uniform?

A: No, not in the striped uniform. We were given some, how was that really, just a second. I really don't remember that too well. I only remember, I even think that we had the same clothing. I'm not too sure about that. No money we did not get. No money, but I must say that wandering through these little towns we went to the burgomeister, to the mayor's home and we demanded food stamps. So we were given some stamps and we were naturally then after we had regained some of our senses we were in such a state that we were vicious. So we were really on the way and we were going and no matter where we wanted to get some clothing and something and so we got some. There were some houses and nobody was in there so we went in there and went through the rooms and got them and I remember my prize possession was an army hat. A German army hat where you could lower the upper portion and protect your ears, one of these things, and so this I got and a jacket or so. It wasn't I remember an organized effort at that time to supply you with a change of clothes, no it was something you were on your own. I remember some people they were sitting at the desk and they gave us a passport or a paper that we were released from Bergen-Belsen. There was no real organized effort, or maybe we didn't stay long enough. I was told that people who remained longer in Bergen-Belsen it became an official displaced person and that happened later, but we didn't wait that long, we just went.

Q: On your way through Hanover and all these places, the reason I asked is because you know you have to eat and you have to get things, on your way through you must have met lots of Germans...

A: Correct. They were all afraid and they were telling us we were not and we never belonged and we never liked it and they were all saying the same thing. And we were so disgusted and we were so disgusted naturally. We were so hostile that we

did not care to have any contact. We did not care to have any contact with anybody, we did not care ask for please give us, we felt it was the responsibility of the society or the country itself to do something for the survivors so, so whatever we did really, whatever we were looking for was really to get out of Germany.

Q: Did any of them say, but we didn't know what was going on?

A: Sure. We encountered this many, many times. Almost all Germans we came in contact with said we didn't, we had Jewish friends. There weren't any people at this time who freely admitted yes we were members. Not one. There wasn't one person. As we knew that most people were lying probably for reasons of self-preservation. We were living more or less with Jewish people, some survivors, in these towns like Krefeld. The English authorities they gave us a villa which belonged to the Gauleiter at that time was a beautiful two or three story house with garden and they said look fellows this is your home now. Do whatever, so the British at that time, it was British occupied they gave us this home, they said you can live there and we got us some food stamps and then we became more and more accustomed to normal ways of living and we were going out and trying to find ways and means of stabilizing our lives, even though we never had the intention of staying in Germany forever. My thought was just to get out. I couldn't bear to stay. I couldn't stay with those people who did that to our people, to my family. My friend who was a musician was offered a very good position as a violinist with the Krefeld symphony orchestra which he accepted. And he accepted it and I didn't blame him for it because his life was really music and an artist of this nature and he was a great musician. He was a very well known musician. He belonged to one of the greatest pre-war quartets, the Rostov Quartet in Berlin, so I really thought that his direction might be a little different than my own even though his feeling towards the Germans was like mine. But an artist is more influenced by artistic demands than anything else. In my case it was just a matter of getting out and then I was...

Q: As you were going you sought out British and American authorities along the way?

A: Very little. I wasn't looking for any authorities. All we were looking for wherever we went to get the means of getting food so we went to these burgomeisters like everybody else, looking for help in that sense. We weren't looking for any of these things because what help could they really give us. What help could people really give us at this time. If it's a question of clothing, yes. I think the Germans in certain towns they had a setup. You applied for, I think that's the situation. I don't remember too closely. We got food stamps and we had something to wear, yes. We were not too much concerned with these things. We did not at that time really regain our balance. At that time we could not comprehend, and I had a very great psychological problem in accepting that there is still something like a family life for somebody else. I had not been with a

family, or within a family for such a long time that I really could not accept anybody else having an orderly family setup like people coming home after work and finding a father or mother and brother and sisters. That was something which maybe unconsciously I didn't want to accept and when I came to America after meeting my wife in Germany who was in a concentration camp also, but not in Auschwitz, but in Theresienstadt, who had her family here, part, her sister and brother. When I came over here it was my first exposure to continuation of family life that I was living in heaven because I found out that there is a resemblance to what I was missing all these years and that made my new beginning.

Q: Where did you meet, or how did you meet?

A: On my way to the west, I was moving towards the border area Bad Nauheim, which is a beautiful little town about thirty kilometers west of Frankfurt. And why that town? We were told that this had the headquarters of the second or third British army. I forget which one, I'm sorry, American army, and they had displaced person camps over there and people said why don't you go and take a look and maybe you'll find some, we were always looking for survivors. And I came with my friend to this town and I was shocked by seeing an almost undisturbed beautiful town with people walking and I saw all of a sudden something which I hadn't seen for years. A continuation of life. And somebody said go there, there's a building that belongs to the former judashagamin? Next to the synagogue is the displaced person center so if you see some people you ask them if they're Jewish and they said yes where are you coming from why don't you come here and so on. I met some people and they said why don't you register here you can perhaps stay here until you find something, so I registered and somebody said look there are many nice people here would you like to meet some nice people and I said yes. So I know some nice girls..... who also were in camps and at this time I was that 1945 that means I was 24 years old so truthfully I and probably everybody else based on the deterioration of our physical condition I guess our behavior even after the release or reaction of feelings in a normal manner were certainly affected, so I believe our desire for a normalization of our personal life was not as great or non-existent in the early stages based on the fact that at the end we were hardly in a position to stay alive, but after a certain amount of time and after eating the normal amounts of food we became more interested in life in every sense and therefore we were interested in meeting new people and really starting to engage in normal activities that young people are normally engaged in and therefore I said yes why don't we meet some people and also we were in a physical condition where we wanted to meet some people. We still in the early stages we did not want to meet, we could not regain our balance, but then slowly, everything slowly came back and we were looking for young people to associate with and share our experiences and learn, perhaps find our way back to normalization, so I was told there are some nice girls, why don't we get to meet them, and sure enough they opened the door and my wife happened to

be in that room with another girl and we were introduced and that was the beginning of our....

Q: Just a question along that line, you had spent the time between 17 and 24 without the contact of, I shouldn't say without the contact of young people, but without the normal type of social activity, was that difficult to adjust to?

A: Do you mean later on during the adjustment period?

Q: When you met your wife, when you were beginning to meet other young people, young girls and so on.

A: Yes in my particular instance certainly this is one of the most critical findings which the medical profession has made rather late, in determining if the people who survived this particular period have been permanently, how would you call it, had been permanently affected in their desire to normalize them later, certainly I have had to go through a very trying period of making my future, of channeling my thoughts into the right direction because I could not in the beginning, more or less, I could not get that picture off my eyes of seeing young children and mothers being led into that particular area. I could not get that picture from my eyes of the destruction of so many women and children and this was and perhaps still is a part of the unconscious after effect that you wonder perhaps if a continuation of life in general makes sense and that was in the beginning a very, very difficult part to overcome, where you have seen the taking of life of children, the mistreatment, the cruelties and particular in that sense to women. You had to find a way to readjust yourself into the normal. That has been a very great problem in the early stages and I have discussed this with many other people and they have told me the same thing, however probably the reason that many of these survivors have been taken into a normal family life or have been given the help of people who were fortunate enough to survive that period, especially here in America and somewhere else. So that you slowly have become accustomed again to a normal way of life. But in the very early stages it has been a very, very difficult period.

Q: When you did meet other young people, your wife and other, how did you go about reestablishing a bond of thinking about a family life?

A: Of really noticing the differences between a female and a male in that sense. Well the situation is like this. There is perhaps a medical, I can explain this to you more clearly. If you are living in an environment like a concentration camp and you are given such a small amount of food that you're barely alive, your normal instinct or desires are totally killed, disappear. I won't say totally, but more than 95%. So these desires which a normal person would feel, are practically non-existent. The over riding thought of a person in our situation as I mentioned a few times was basic survival. That particular sexual problem did not play any part in our lives during that period to any great extent. Later on after you become, then certainly that plays a great part. That plays a greater part because then you are in

a more physical and psychological situation to continue the normal life. I must say however, you are probably aware of it if you studied the period at that time that the Nazis have done experiments with males and I believe with females also whereby inmates have been chosen at random and I remember some occasions when we had to line up and every number two steps in front and these boys, I was not luckily one of them, have been taken where medical experiments have been made with these people and I have been aware of these things where people have been exposed to drastic surgery in connection with these particular sexual activities, whereby the Nazis wanted to test the difference between the capability of a person after undergoing these partial or full operations in that area were better workers than the persons who are still have the basic capacity to function as a normal person. And many of these survivors have unfortunately been placed in a category where they are not able to function properly. Fortunately this was not the case here. I had more of a psychological problem to cope with than physical.

Q: That's what I was really asking, in terms of psychologically...

A: Psychologically I had a very great problem to overcome and no question about it I must say that perhaps with many survivors there is still a psychological problem involved, not only in that particular area. I must say that perhaps everybody who survived that period of time has certain psychological problems. The only question is how much or how little and many, many people could not unfortunately establish a normal way of life and are still suffering from that and many people have found a way, like myself and my wife, to adapt to our new way of life I would say normally in a sense. A 100% normal adjustment in my opinion is absolutely impossible. We accepted and we are tremendously grateful for the opportunity to get out of Germany, and we love this country more than anything else. There is not anything I would not do for the United States, because the possibility of starting a new life here to me was the greatest thing which I will never forget. In addition the fact that my wife had family here and for me to be taken in with open arms and really noticing for the first time after so many years it seemed the continuation of family life. That was the best possible medicine for me that anybody could hope for and that was the reason and naturally for my wife who went through a similar situation, who has a tremendous understanding and feeling for problems which occasionally crop up, so being together and understanding our problems, we have been able to establish ourselves in the U.S. very well and I'm very grateful.

Q: Did you come over here together after you met in Bad Nauheim?

A: We were practically engaged in Germany, practically, you know officially. We had no money as you can, we lost everything. I came here with six dollars which was the balance of ten dollars which HIAS or Joint, which did great things. They helped us, so I stepped off the boat with six dollars, and my wife was fortunate to get out about half a year earlier due to an affidavit which her sister gave her, and

when I came here I was greeted by my wife and family, so I really stepped into a wonderful setup.

Q: You mentioned before that your brother was in Canada. Did you decide on the U.S. because of each other, because of your family?

A: Correct. Through that particular friend who said look I live in Krefeld, why don't you come with me, I also have a brother he mentioned who was able to get out of Germany and somehow he was in touch with an American soldier he befriended and myself in Germany, he was able to get in touch with his brother, and just by coincidence his brother was together with my brother in the Kitchener camp in England. He knew that some of the people in the camp were sent to Australia and some of these Jewish people were sent to Canada and he happened to know my brother and through him I got in touch with my long lost brother. It was quite a reunion. In a way it was quite a happy reunion and in another way a very disappointing reunion. We are twins. We are twins and even though you will see him now he looks identical. You would not be able to distinguish one and the other I'm sure, but we are totally different and the difference is perhaps and it became clear and I must say this in order to be true to myself, there is really very little we have in common, based on the fact that I was stunned by the fact that he, like almost all American Jews I have met, have had the pleasure of meeting after getting here, that they haven't had the slightest conception or understanding of problems which have survived the camps and one of the most shocking experiences here, and you might laugh, were questions which have been asked, whether we were introduced to people. Her sister who came here a long time before and always wanted to introduce us to people, to get us to know as many people as possible. We are stunned by the most stupid, excuse the expression, questions of how many eggs did you get every day or questions of such a nature that we couldn't believe that our own Jewish people who had access to newspapers to radios to all kinds of literature, who should know better, should ask us people questions of that nature. Who told us you had a hard time but we were walking 25 blocks to be able to get some nylon stockings, these questions were choking me up. That was the biggest stumbling block of finding my balance in the U.S. Not anything else but the total ignorance of the survivors, of our own Jewish people in the U.S., Ignorance and perhaps looking the other way. Perhaps not being told because we, of perhaps not wanting to know about it, because they might have been afraid or felt a certain sense of guilt. Why didn't we do a little more? Why didn't we give him an affidavit? How many people could we save? and in our own circle I must say we had family who didn't really do enough and were in a position to take out a few more people save them. And maybe those unconscious feelings of guilt of our own people including American Jews who did a lot I must say and I'm grateful, but these are things I must say were a great disappointment and that's why I agreed, that is the underlying reason, because I haven't talked to anyone in detail like I talked to you, in all these years, because you can imagine it's a tremendous pain to go through all of this. I have only done it for the benefit of the young generation that never ever should people remain

ignorant and remain so passive during a time of that nature. That was my only, not to publicize because I am totally against it, I feel there are many other people who have a bigger capacity for telling history what really happened, but I'm just doing it for future generations should learn. Should learn that there is no looking away. There is no solution with being concerned with your own problems, especially Jewish people have the joint responsibility to try to prevent a situation which happened during that time.

Q: Agreed. As a matter of fact there's only work being done now, I only know of one instance of the American Jewish response and how pathetic it was.. It's going on downtown on 86th Street in American Jewish Congregations, a Rabbi Lookstein, but anyway the same type of thing because it was an outrage.

A: An outrage. That is something that burns me up and so many of our friends who have gone through it. After we came here we have been made aware that there was a large segment of the American Jewish people who really did not do enough, even including our own German people. I am not minimizing the very beautiful things which many American people did, but it was not enough for these people just to donate a few dollars in order to help some people. What was lacking most of the time was a personal involvement. It was the personal feeling, not so much the money, but it was the feeling of looking away. it was just something and I wish everybody would just see the picture which we have seen not too long ago, that boat with the refugees was turned away. The St. Louis. That was part of it where there wasn't enough public pressure, there wasn't enough done to prevent something like that.

Q: One question in line with that. When you came...I hope you don't mind the question, were you made to feel either by American Jews or by German Jews as, if I use the word extraordinary that's not quite the word I mean, as different.`

A: Yes, I understand. Let me tell you something. (I had a sister here, my own sister did not understand. I had constantly fights. They were ignorant. They were so involved with their own things they didn't think how I would feel). See in other words it is more a matter of feelings. Let me give you an idea. In the very beginning and you touched a very good subject on quite a few occasions when we were invited, and people meant well, American Jews they didn't take five minutes as we were presented as the wonders of the seven worlds.. When we were presented to the people in attendance and I would almost die when it was noted that you have here a member of the very rare crop of inmates who survived the horrors of the concentration camps and why don't you tell us. And this lack, this total lack of feeling that being put on a plateau, like they want to present the president of the United States, but I hardly ever had the occasion where I must say look we were introduced to American born people who have used the right approach. Who have said look we don't feel bad about it, we don't even ask you to talk about it, but don't think we want to ignore your past. We are very interested. Tell us can we help you in any way, so don't feel that intentionally we

are leaving. We don't want to touch on that subject. Just the opposite, wherever we went it didn't take a long time before they brought out, look these people they went through, look he was in Auschwitz and we were terribly upset by it. See this is the one I'm not saying all people did this intentionally. They did not intentionally to hurt us, no, they didn't do it, I'm not saying, but I must say a better educated, more educated American Jewish public should have been made more aware of these serious problems and they should have perhaps been able to cope with this particular situation a little better.

Q: When you did come, did you speak English?

A: Well I was in the fortunate position that I spoke some English. I had some English in school. I was also extremely fortunate that I did not have to depend on outside help in establishing myself. I found a job.

Q: How did you find a job?

A: Well I know the Aufbau. The Aufbau is the German newspaper. I was told they have an employment agency and I went one morning to the employment agency and there was a very nice lady there and I said look I just got here and I'm looking for any kind of job. I don't care what it is. I realize I cannot continue in my learned profession. I am very interested in the technical field or so and I think I might have a technical inclination that might be easier for me to start with and sure enough and first of all she said you are very lucky, there is a firm being founded or has been founded recently. A manufacturer and importer of clocks. Would you be interested in applying for this. Sure. The owner I think is also German so you can converse, I'll give you the address and so on. And to make the story short I went there and that is the same place I'm still working. I'm now the general manager of this organization. It started at that time from very humble beginnings and is now one of the leading organizations of that kind in the United States.

Q: What kind of job did you get there when you first came?

A: I got there and I think I was the first employee and I was doing everything. We were making movements for clocks. I was handling the assembly, I was going to the post office with packages, I was doing the packing, I was doing almost anything at that time.

Q: Was it easy, you mentioned that he was German, were the other employees German?

A: He was German Jewish and he got some more people, German Jewish people also who went through almost the same experience. He got a few more and it made my beginning rather pleasant because there were a few people to talk to, no question about it. On the other hand I was really looking forward to meet and

work with Americans, first in order to further my language knowledge and also to really get in touch with the American people. Now automatically this happens even though my language is far from perfect, I nevertheless learned to communicate and I learned to know the people, and during the years and years when the firm became bigger, naturally I came to know this country better, we traveled quite extensively in the United States and we also made many trips to Europe, so we have been really quite fortunate in being able to make a new and successful life.

Q: When you came here, you got married soon after you came?

A: When I came here I came in March of that year and we were guided by the following situation that it is cheaper for two people to live together and we were able to afford a furnished room in the neighborhood, and we decided on the fourth of July because that is a legal holiday, as I wouldn't be able to take off and lose my few dollars in wages. So we spent our honeymoon in Central park, had a wonderful time. My brother came to my wedding. That was the first time I met my brother and we had a glorious time really.

Q: When you say Central Park, you literally mean Central Park?

A: Well we were taking that day. We couldn't go on a honeymoon somewhere else so we decided look. My brother had a car here, he drove us around, so we went downtown on that particular day as that day was my honeymoon, the next day we went back to work. My wife had a job. It was Friday, so we had that weekend. So we had that weekend and on Monday we went back to work, and that was our beginning. It was very happy. Our whole wedding expenses was I think forty five dollars for the rabbi who was graciously lending us his apartment. Rabbi Koppel. So we had the ceremony in his apartment. We had a nice little affair. Cookies and wine, that was all we could afford. Everything was (friends of ours, they came a week before from the boat) Oh yes, some other people, and we invited them also to our wedding and then they went to Buffalo. So it was nice. It was really nice.

Q: You mentioned that you had a furnished room that you rented. One other question occurs to me, do you consider yourself more a part of the American mainstream or more a part of the German Jewish community in New York?

A: Let me put it this way. I consider myself primarily an American Jew. There is no sense in denying my heritage. I was born in Germany and I was raised in Germany. No question about it. And I speak German at home and with our friends, no question. I can't say I consider myself part of the American scene in the sense that wouldn't be true because I mentioned to you before, our life outside business circles primarily with people who have a similar experience like we had. Now I cannot blame the American people for it, for that particular area. It is probably that we ourselves are, for reasons which we mentioned, have been

looking for that type of setup. It is not that we would not have been welcome. Sure we met very nice American people. Maybe by our own choice we have decided to build our life more in circles like we just mentioned.

Q: Have you ever been back to Germany?

A: Yes. We went to visit that wonderful person (We saw Minna) and we have not heard anything on our visits that would have made our short stay there unpleasant.

Q: Aside from hearing anything I just wondered how you yourself felt whether it was difficult to go back.

A: Another thing is the areas we visited are really different from the areas that I, we visited Nauheim, but Nauheim that was already the happy stage. I did not go back to Breslau, I did not go back to Gros Brazen, I did not go back to any place I had been before. Maybe it is an unconscious decision not to go back, maybe not to rip open. Very possibly, because if I wanted to go back to Breslau, even though it is now Polish, I think I could get a visa to go there. But maybe I don't have a desire, maybe I don't want to go back, a decision you can realize. The other parts of Germany we visited was more like parts of Switzerland, which we visited, so it really didn't come back. And one more thing, which is perhaps very important to you. Many people will say and you perhaps expect it in the beginning after we were released when perhaps you thought, weren't you so bitter, so hateful that you could kill, weren't you, yes I was very bitter, I was very hateful, but I still say this now and many people will not understand, I do not have that hate in my heart, I did not feel that I did not have that hate even though I knew when we went back to Germany for a short time that somewhere along there might be a killer, so sure, could be, but I do not have that hate. I don't have that hate today. Why? I don't know. There's one thing I know. I don't think that any normal person could continue living if you run around with that terrible hate in your heart. I know that there were many people who were in camp with me who were let loose after camp really were let loose. I personally did not participate in any of these let loose processes because this was not part of myself. That does not mean that I don't have the same feelings. I have the same feelings, but that element of blind hate which would be perhaps justified, I do not have.

Q: What happened at Bergen-Belsen to the SS guards who were there?

A: I believe a very short time before the British army moved in, the German guards completely disappeared. Where they went and what happens, I don't know. I heard later on that they caught some of them close by. They were taken on top of these buildings or the roofs of these buildings and were thrown down by some inmates who recognized them, and I heard that some bodies were mutilated.