

National Council of Jewish Women Sarasota-Manatee Section
Holocaust Oral History Project
Oscar Baron, Survivor
March 28, 1986
Bradenton, Florida

- Q: Today is Friday, March 28th, 1986 and this is Fern Niven from the National Council of Women on Longboat Key, Florida. I am here to interview Mr. Oscar Baron who is a Holocaust survivor from Czechoslovakia and he is going to tell us his story and his experiences of his life and in particular of his experiences with the Holocaust. Mr. Baron, so that the people who hear this tape can better understand and get to know you as a person, will you tell us about your early life, you know, how many brothers and sisters you had? What kind of work your parents did? What kind of economic situation you experienced as a youngster?
- A: Of course you know, that is, I mean, uh our life, our life in Czechoslovakia was dependent on what the Germans will do because when we had been occupied we didn't know because according to the Nuremberg Laws, you know, the Nuremberger Gozetsa, you know what they called the Jewish Nuremberg...
- Q: This was true even when you were a child?
- A: No, no.
- Q: Please tell us about how your life was as a child?
- A: It is very difficult to say when I was a child, you know.
- Q: Well, that's all right, did you have brothers and sisters?
- A: No, I'm alone.
- Q: An only child?
- A: I'm alone and I went to school and uh, another boy and uh....
- Q: Did you go to public school?
- A: A public school, yah. We went to the public school as long as uhh. We have been allowed. You know as long as we had been allowed. Of course afterwards it was difficult for the Jewish children to go to the public school so....
- Q: Yeah, did you....
- A: So what was done you know so there was special Jewish schools in Czechoslovakia, you know.

Q: When did it start being difficult for Jewish children to go to school?

A: 39, after 39.

Q: But you were already an adult at that time?

A: Yeah, but....

Q: I want to know more about your childhood? Did you go....

A: My childhood was nothing was quite normal, because....

Q: Did your parents have a business?

A: My, no, we had no business, you know my father was an engineer.

Q: He was an engineer, okay.

A: And so we had no commercial, uh, connections.

Q: And your mother was a housewife?

A: My mother was a housewife, you know.

Q: And you completed how many years of formal education?

A: That is, of course, the formal education was five classes which they called public school, you know, and after that you know, we went to the so-called middle school, you know, that was higher after the fifth class, the higher schools, you know, and then you see I didn't know, you see what, what I would decide, because....

Q: As a career?

A: Yeah, then I went to Hamburg. You know I was in Hamburg because of a friend, a cousin of mine invented fermentation of molasses.

Q: What made you, how old were you when you left Prague, Czechoslovakia to go to Hamburg?

A: I was 20, 20 years old.

Q: Did you, had you gone to University at that time?

- A: Yeah, but I didn't go directly to the University, I only went to the classes for fermentation.
- Q: I see.
- A: You know because Hamburg had a special department for fermentation.
- Q: What made fermentation so special? Can you tell me?
- A: Fermentation was made so special because up to that point, uhh, every alcohol, every alcohol was done so fermentation but we had better luck you know that we can fermentate molasses, you know. It was a special bacteria which when heated, you know, started to produce citric acid, you know, and that citric acid of course is well-known because it replaced the lemons, you know up to then there was no synthetic, uhh, lemons. Of course people dealt with citric acid the synthetic. It was a natural product from sugar, you know. The bacteria transferred the sugar in citric acid, you know, that is what was done. And therefore, you know the citric acid was so important because up to now we didn't have such a think which was developed in Prague.
- Q: So the chemical fermentation process interested you and you moved to Hamburg in what year, do you remember?
- A: In 1920. I went to Hamburg because I knew that in Hamburg I was informed that Hamburg had a special department for fermentation in the university of Hamburg. So I attended, you know, I went to the evening courses of the university to attend the fermentation of the different products especially molasses, you know, which was at that time something quite new.
- Q: Now we are talking about several years after the end of the first World War?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: When, was the Wehrmacht Republic already in existence?
- A: It was already in existence, because Czechoslovakia was built in 1918.
- Q: It was declared a state? An independent country?
- A: Yah, you know in 1918 it became an independent state. Czechoslovakia because we had been Austrian-Hungarian Empire.
- Q: Empire? All right.
- A: And that you see,

- Q: We in this country need to have some of these things explained to us because this country has always been the way it is now and it's hard for us to realize countries were changed, boundaries were changed.
- A: But for the children, you know who are listening, it would be very interesting that Wilson, President Wilson came up with the 14, so-called "14 Points."
- Q: Yes?
- A: You know where they said that certain region can be independent. So President Masarek was a very great philosopher, also political minded like Dr. Benesch, you know they came together and started, you know, to take Czechoslovakia, Moldavia, Bohemia, you know and they built the Czechoslovakia state and Slovakia which partly belongs to Hungary at that time because (words missing in original transcript). So then we became the Czechoslovakian state, you know from the Hungarian part, Slovakian part, Bohemian and Moravian state with the capitol in Prague, you know; that was in 1918 and from then of course we became the Czechoslovakian Republic.
- Q: When you were growing up and at this time in your life that you're describing, did you ever experience any anti-Semitic acts directed towards you or any anti-Semitism going on at all?
- A: No, we didn't because the principle I would say the Czechoslovakian people were not anti-Semitic you know. They liked Jews and they liked to inform you, you see, that every Czech had a special friend which was a Jew. Because it's my Jew, that is of course the Czechoslovakian people were not anti-Semitic. Of course you must understand then we had also, when Czechoslovakia was built, there were also many Germans. You know we had the Sudetenland which had about 7 million Germans: Of course you know The Germans were always a bit of anti-Semitic, we didn't know. But that belongs to the Czechoslovakian state. You know the German separate, you know, which was the Sudetenland which became incorporated into the Czechoslovakia state. So there was political situation which you know with the Czechs and Slovaks and the Poles and the Hungarians, You know there was a mish-mash from different nations.
- Q: It's helpful to have you explain this.
- A: Yah, so anyway you see for that time it is very important to know that it was based on the whole. The whole situation was based on the "14 Points" of President Wilson so that every region could be independent, you know. That happens, that happens, especially with the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy because they split it. The Austrian-Hungarian monarch was very, very old, one of the oldest, oldest monarchy in Europe. But of course the Hungarians split it, Slovaks split it and Czechoslovakia was a conglomary of the different kind of the smaller nations under President Masarek.

- Q: And it was at this point of your life that you went to Hamburg?
- A: Yah, we went to Hamburg, you know and lived in Hamburg. As a matter of fact I lived about 10 years in Hamburg.
- Q: Did your parents go too, or just you?
- A: Uh, unfortunately my mother died when I was very young.
- Q: Oh.
- A: So you see I have no parents anymore because my mother died when I was 10 years old.
- Q: And your father?
- A: My father was in the war.
- Q: And was killed in the war?
- A: What?
- Q: And was killed in the war?
- A: He was killed in the war. So I didn't, so I grew up without parents.
- Q: That was very hard.
- A: Yah. But it was a time you know it was a time, a more crucial time in my life. But it was nothing to do with my later studies. You know it was my later undergoing what I did. And, as a matter of fact, you know it happens because I was forced I was forced not to be employed, you know, because as a Jew you know you couldn't find a normal job. Only afterwards I became the director of a big chemical works, you know in Czechoslovakia when I returned.
- Q: Was it because you were Jewish that it was hard to find a job or were jobs just difficult to find?
- A: No it was, no, it was that you know because Jews couldn't be a bribe. So we couldn't find a job.
- Q: So there was some discrimination at that point?
- A: Yah, but not by the Czechs, only after the Germans occupied us and I'm speaking about after '39. After '39.

Q: Go back now work towards that from the 1920 period?

A: From 1920?

Q: You said you were in Hamburg about ten years?

A: Yah. Yah, then I came back to Prague of course when I came back to Prague of course then I found immediately a job, you know, special in the fermentation factory producing from molasses citric acid. It was very easy because I knew already what was going on. So it was not afterwards. It was not very difficult anymore but before, of course.

Q: Did you have a university degree?

A: No. I didn't because I didn't have any degree in university because I only attended the classes you know not as a...

Q: Not a formal degree?

A: Not a formal degree. Yah.

Q: So you went, about what year was it when you went back to Prague?

A: In 1932.

Q: And Hitler came to power in 1933?

A: '35 I remember he come to power '33, '35, '34. He became fuehrer I think in '35 after Hindenburg made him....

Q: Chancellor.

A: Made him fuehrer of the Nazi party.

Q: Did you have uncomfortable feelings when you heard about Hitler that he could be a very dangerous person or did you not pay very much attention, can you describe that time?

A: Yah, I can only describe the time I listened to his speeches. You know, he was absolute against Jews and he, of course was not alone, he had other people like Himmler and I don't know what names all of them were. But there were absolute, you know Jews were out of any field, you know.''

Q: They were forbidden to be in any of the professions?

- A: We couldn't have any profession as long as Hitler and the Germans occupied therefore, what was...
- Q: But it was still a few years before they came to Austria? Were you married at this time when you returned back to Prague?
- A: No, no, I was not married. I married later. Yah. And so
- Q: When was the first inkling that you had that there was going to be a real problem?
- A: A real problem for what?
- Q: For the Jewish people, can you remember a specific incident when it became clear to you that there were problems coming up?
- A: Yah, the peculiar time was when the Germans declared the Nuremberg Gazette which was the Nuremberg anti-Jewish laws in Nuremberg.
- Q: And when was that? Can you give the date?
- A: '35 I think.
- Q: 1935?
- A: '35. In 1935 the official information, you know, was that the Jews are out.
- Q: But in Prague you were not subjected to this yet?
- A: No, No.
- A: In Prague, we were only subjected after Hitler occupied Prague. Before there was nothing against the Jews except maybe in Sudetenland where they were anti-Semitic because they got it from the Germans. But there was nothing against the Jews. Every Jew could work, you know, in every kind of job he wanted I believe, a factory or a bank or what else. There was no difficulty, no. It was quite normal.
- Q: When the Germans marched into Czechoslovakia were you expecting it or were you shocked?
- A: No, we were, we were, of course we heard it on the radio, you know, that the Germans are coming to occupy Czechoslovakia, they are marching in. You know, it was done, we had the information that the Germans are coming. But, of course when the Germans came we got the insignia to wear. From that moment you know, if you were a Jew you couldn't go out. After 5 o'clock you have to be at home, you know. We couldn't go into a coffee house, a cafeteria because we

- weren't allowed because Jews were not allowed you know to go in public, public center.
- Q: Were you frightened or angry or just what kind of reaction did you have to all of this?
- A: It's difficulty to describe you know we were always afraid that something worse could happen, we didn't know what else could happen. It was enough that we could work, we couldn't go for our living at days at a time and I decided, you know, to become a teacher because we didn't have any teachers.
- Q: Because the children the Jewish children were at that point not allowed to attend school?
- A: Only Jewish school.
- Q: Could you have uh, at the point which Hitler marched into your country, could you still have left if you wanted to? Could you have fled from Czechoslovakia and gone somewhere else?
- A: Afterwards you mean"
- Q: Well at that point, at the time they occupied the country?
- A: After they occupied the country we had no choice; we have to wait until the German decide and, therefore, you know, they sent the Jews out from Czechoslovakia. So in 1941, you know they deported the Jews to Poland to Lodz.
- Q: All of them?
- A: All of them including the children, 4,000 children.
- Q: Can you describe that?
- A: Yah, I can describe that. Of course you know when we came to Lodz, to the ghetto.
- Q: Describe how it was to leave your home.
- A: There was no, you know, one day you got and you got a letter that you had to be there to a certain place and from there they assembled all the Jews. Always, you know, they sent always 1,000 Jews in one lot. There were 5,000 Jews going to Lodz. You know to Poland to send them out.
- Q: Did you have to just leave all of your possessions?

- A: Everything you have to leave, you know you couldn't take anything with you, because we had to leave everything there and bank accounts and everything and we were deported to Lodz.
- Q: And you could not even take your money with you? Or your clothing? Nothing?
- A: Of course only what you would just need for the way.
- Q: Like a small suitcase?
- A: A small suitcase; that's all what you could do.
- A: You know of course everything was to be leave there. Because it was not allowed to take with you because it was controlled because you were assembled in a big, big, big hole you know where they all, of course, find out what you have and what you don't have and you have been sent out by train.
- Q: By passenger train?
- A: What?
- Q: Passenger Train?
- A: No passenger train, it was a train you know where they load the animals.
- Q: Cattle car?
- A: Cattle car, yah, and then you went I don't know how many nights and day we went before we came to Lodz.
- Q: What did you do for food, what did you do for water and what did you do about keeping clean or going to the bathroom?
- A: That was very difficult. First of all to go to the bathroom was the most difficult situation, because many people died on the way too, you know, and did their thing on the train. Because you know there was no opening. Water sometimes you know at one of the other stations people came and gave you a little water, as you needed.
- Q: Did you have food with you? Or were they supposed to...
- A: We had a little food which we took with us but we didn't get any food before we went when we came to Lodz...Then you got some soup or so I don't know.
- Q: But that was many days from the time you left?

- A: It was three days, three or four days.
- Q: That's a long time without food.
- A: Yah, so that's what we could take with us in the small suitcase.
- Q: Did they tell you that you were going to Lodz?
- A: No, no, nobody was told where we were going because we thought we were going for work. You know, they told us we were going for work and of course we didn't know you see it was a Ghetto. We worked in the Ghetto too but we didn't know before.
- Q: when you left Prague did you have any family there? You said your parents had died. Did you have grandparents, aunts or uncles? Did you just go with people from the community who were not related to you?
- A: No, as a matter of fact because, you see, you had to be, because I was in Maccabee you know so I had to...
- Q: Maccabee is like a group, a sports group?
- A: Yah, it's a sports group, a Jewish sports group you know. I was one of the leaders and of course, you know, we organized the people. Sure we have to organize them so that they would follow to the train and go, because to load, to be loaded. It was a peculiar situation. But then we arrived in Lodz. Then of course...
- Q: You arrived in Lodz?
- A: When we arrived in Lodz, we had been taken care of by the Jews over there. Because there were only Jews. It was a Ghetto, you know. They were Jews and you know they sent, give us shelter and we got some food: We got soup that's all.
- Q: About how many people, you said they sent them in groups of a thousand. About how many people from the first 1,000 that you were with died before they got there?
- A: I would say that, in the train?
- Q: Hm, Hm.
- A: Maybe three or four, not more. I mean there were, they died because they couldn't, they were too weak.
- Q: This was all kinds of people, young people, old people or did they make a selection process before they put you on the train?

- A: It was mostly young people. I would say the age group was about, I would say about 15, you know to 60 or 70.
- Q: A very wide range of ages?
- A: The people who came to Lodz.
- Q: All right. And men and women?
- A: Men and women and no children. Children came separate. They were sent out later on to Auschwitz, the children.
- Q: Without their parents?
- A: Without their parents.
- Q: All right. Go ahead.
- A: So when we arrived there, of course, you know, so we have been organized for work because you know in Lodz they were already working. The Ghetto Jews worked for the Germans. There were different kinds of factories already established.
- Q: Um, hum.
- A: And so we had been organized to different kind of work.
- Q: How old were you at this time?
- A: At that time you know I'm born in 1903 so that was 1939, 41 when we deported so 3 to 41.
- Q: You were 38 years old?
- A: Yes. 38 years old.
- Q: Okay.
- A: Yah, of course you know we worked four years: We stayed four in the ghetto: We worked there, you know.
- Q: And you were not married yet?
- A: At that time I was already married.

- Q: Tell us a little about it. It helps to get a picture of how your life would be.
- A: Before I went, before how was it? No, I married before we were organized for the deportation. I married just a few days before. You know, so I was already very young married.
- Q: And a very strange honeymoon?
- A: A strange honeymoon? It was no honeymoon. But anyway that was it. I married a few days ago before, you know. But of course in Lodz we led a normal life, we worked, we got our food ration, you know, for our work so....
- Q: What kind of work did you do there?
- A: I, I myself worked in the laundry, you know, but there were also furniture work, furniture factories, there were different kinds of several factories which were established. I was sent to the laundry.
- Q: So they didn't utilize your skills as a chemist?
- A: Yah, they utilized my skill because I had to produce soap.
- Q: All, all right.
- A: Ha, Ha, you know that was my luck because I was asked you know what I can do and I can do soap. I said sure I can do soap providing I have the materials for the soap but they had also a wonderful, wonderful--beside the fatty acid they had a wonderful sund, sund.
- Q: Sand?
- A: Sand, you know they had this fine plastic mesh, white sand and of course you know when you have fatty acid you can mix the sand with it and you get soap. You can produce soap.
- Q: I didn't know that, but now I've learned something.
- A: Yah, yah.
- Q: All right.
- A: I produced soap, you know so therefore I was a big shot and I could produce soap. But then you see we stayed there about four, over four years and then Lodz was liquidated because the Russians who should come to liberate us stayed in Poland on the (words missing in original transcript) and did not come to Lodz. Didn't come over, you see.

- Q: How did you feel about the Russians coming?
- A: We were very pleased but they didn't come. They stopped at the Polish border and didn't go further so we had been liquidated and we have been sent to Auschwitz.
- Q: And what year was this? 1945?
- A: That was, we were sent to Auschwitz in 194.., wait a minute '44, 44.
- Q: What month do you recall?
- A: Ohhh, '44, I think it was March.
- Q: Okay, the winter time.
- A: The winter time, so we came to Auschwitz.
- Q: Well did they just one day tell everybody to get on a train, were you prepared for this?
- A: No, we came by train. We came by train to Auschwitz.
- Q: Okay. Everybody in Lodz or just some of the people?
- A: No, no, no. Most of the Jews, you know, the whole Ghetto was liquidated so all the Jews, you know, didn't stay in the Ghetto; a few stayed probably there we don't know. We came to Auschwitz.
- Q: Again, it was on cattle cars?
- A: That was again on cattle cars, you know.
- Q: About how far was it in miles or kilometers from Lodz to Auschwitz?
- A: It would be- it would be- because we went by night, kilometers, a few hundred kilometers but I don't know exactly.
- Q: How long did it take to make the trip?
- A: I think we were on the train to Auschwitz about three days, also in the cattle car about three days.
- Q: Did they give you food and water?

- A: We got bread in Lodz you know for the train, for the train, yeah.
- Q: Did you, while you were in Lodz did you have enough food to eat? Did they give you sufficient food?
- A: No. It was rationed, you know, for the work you did in Lodz you got the ration. Every week you got a ration, you know, which was of course different kind of bread. You got two kilos of bread per week. Two kilos of bread per week you know. Then you got the soup, this potatoes, that is what you got during the work; nothing else because you didn't have anything. That was all the food we got.
- Q: Did you have any meat to eat during that time?
- A: Meat?
- Q: Or any kind of protein or cheese?
- A: We got time to time sausages.
- Q: Sausages?
- A: Yah, and I think once in two or three weeks we got a piece of meat too. That was the ration, in the ration.
- Q: How about fruit or vegetables?
- A: Fruit and vegetables we had raw vegetables, but otherwise there was no fruit, but vegetables we had.
- Q: So basically your food was bread and soup?
- A: Bread and soup and potatoes.
- Q: Potatoes.
- A: Yah, and horse. Horse sausage from time to time and that's all, yah.
- Q: Did you feel hungry most of the time?
- A: You see this is a question which is very difficult to answer. It depends how disciplined you were. If you were able, you know, to put your two kilos of bread in pieces of one week then you always had 20 decas of bread which I did. I was very disciplined but many people didn't and they starved.
- Q: They would eat all of their bread the first day or two?

- A: No, no, no, they ate the bread immediately and in two days they had no bread. You know and they starved.
- Q: The discipline helped you save your life?
- A: Only the discipline, you know the discipline you know you have to wait, you know you have to have 20 decas so you have to cut it in pieces, you know, before you get your soup.
- Q: In Lodz, did you live in houses? Or in barracks?
- A: No, no, no. We lived in houses. So not very nice but anyway in houses. We lived in barracks in Auschwitz, but not in Lodz. In Lodz we lived, they were really houses. You know of course....
- Q: Were there a lot of soldiers there keeping people under control?
- A: There were German police I would say soldiers were outside you know because that was the Ghetto.
- Q: There was a wall behind it?
- A: A wooden, a wood wood....
- Q: A wooden wall?
- A: A so-called wooden wall that was around it so nobody could go in, nobody could go out.
- Q: How high was the wall? Do you recall?
- A: It was high it was about 2 1/2 meters high.
- Q: And about how large was the Ghetto?
- A: The life?
- Q: How large was the Ghetto?
- A: Oh, how large, the Ghetto was quite large you know they have in the beginning about 180,000 Jews.
- Q: 180,000? That would be very large, that's a lot of people?
- A: 180,000 Jews before, later on you know they were less and less because they were sent out. About 180,000 Jews were in the Ghetto and of course from the 180,000

of course mostly work, everybody has to work because otherwise you did not get any soup. You didn't get any rations, so you went to work.

Q: Did they have any medical care there? When people became ill?

A: Yah, yah, I may, not know much but anyway, if the people got very sick you know there were doctors, the immigrant doctors you know taking care of the Jews, but it was not, there was not enough medical, how do you call it?

Q: Medicine?

A: Medicine.

Q: Were there people in Lodz, besides people from Prague, were they there from other countries and other cities?

A: Yah, there were people from every country, from Germany, about 5,000 Germans, Austria you know, from Prague, yah, yah, from about five countries so you know they sent to Lodz, always together, 5,000 people so therefore you know we had 180,000.

Q: Yes, that's a great many people. I was trying to imagine the wall and how large an area it would have to surround.

A: I think I don't remember, you know how large the whole Ghetto was, you know, it was described but I don't remember.

Q: Well you've helped in filling out the picture for us. You said you went from there to uhh, the concentration camp.

A: That, that, you know the Lodz was already a concentration camp in so far you have to go there and you have to be kept there.

Q: Yes, that's right.

A: It was a concentration camp, Lodz was a concentration camp only it was a Ghetto. There were only Jews there.

Q: Compared to Auschwitz, how did it compare?

A: It can't compare because compared to Auschwitz you know you lived in barracks, you got your ration, so you could live. In Auschwitz you lived in barracks you know and you had no possibility to move around because you slept in the barracks, you couldn't go out from the barracks, you know.

Q: Were they much more cruel to you in Auschwitz?

- A: Oh, yah, they were cruel, in the Ghetto they were not cruel but in Auschwitz of course they were very cruel because you couldn't move, you couldn't say anything, you know. Very seldom you were able to get a little, get a little air, you know, before they sent you out. Because from Auschwitz you were sent to different camps.
- Q: Who provided you with things like clothing?
- A: Clothing came from Dachau you know the stripped, the stripped suit. Came from Dachau to Auschwitz.
- Q: Stripped, striped suits like prison suits?
- A: Yah. They came from you know and then you got it of course, you know, one shirt which was full of lice, you know, there was always the lice but you know you got a stripped suit. You were always to wear a stripped suit.
- Q: So if you ran away you would easily be identified by the striped suit?
- A: No, you couldn't run away. People run away you know they were hanged. They were caught in the forest and they hanged them, you know.
- Q: Was Auschwitz a town? Besides – was there a town there?
- A: Auschwitz, you know, Auschwitz no Auschwitz was not a town as such, They called it Birkenau. It was like I would say here the difference like Sarasota and Bradenton, you know.
- Q: Nearby?
- A: Nearby.
- Q: Because you mentioned a forest.
- A: Yah, you know that's so.
- Q: Was this in the mountains or was it flat land?
- A: No, it was flat because it was an industrial town, you know. Lodz was a very big industrial town before, you know, before the Germans made the Ghetto.
- Q: I mean was Birkenau was in the mountains?
- A: Birkenau, of course, was also. . . ., no it was not a mountain, it was flat. It was. . .

- Q: What kind of work did they have you doing in uhhh
- A: In Auschwitz?
- Q: In Auschwitz.
- A: In Auschwitz we had different kind of work, you know, you have to work in the meadow to turn back. The air around you know.
- Q: I don't understand.
- A: You know, meadow, the air you have to turn from the other side, you know, how you take a glass and you put it on the other side. What else did we did, you know in no we didn't know only when we had been sent out; it was not special work, there was not special work. Only to put you know the shovel and put the meadow
- Q: Oh, the meadow, to turn over to grow things.
- A: Yah.
- Q: To plant a garden.
- A: That's right.
- Q: Was there a selection process? In the concentration camp did they select people to live and other people were killed?
- A: No, no, the question only in Auschwitz you know many people had been gassed. You know there was the gas chamber and they sent the people, you know, to be liquidated.
- Q: Did they know and did you know what was happening to them?
- A: I will tell you what happened. When I came to Auschwitz, it's a very interesting story. There behind, behind a wall you know was one boy who recognized me. "Mr. Teacher, Mr. Teacher," you know so I went there and he said "Mr. Teacher you have to try to get away from here because they will gas you. All the children had been gassed." There were thousands and thousands of children sent to Auschwitz and had been gassed and here was one survivor.
- Q: Did you know about this before?
- A: No, we didn't know. They didn't tell us that we went to Auschwitz in a gas chamber. There were gas chambers in Auschwitz no, no.
- Q: Did you believe this youngster when he told you this?

- A: Sure. He told me the whole story, you know, because he came out from Prague you know and there were little children and the children, of course were gassed and he survived, he survived because a kapo kept him.
- Q: A kapo?
- A: A kapo is a man in charge of the, of the barracks.
- Q: Of the barracks?
- A: That was a kapo. He kept him, you know by chance. I met him after the war.
- Q: What, did you really believe that this terrible thing was happening?
- A: Yah and then after that.
- Q: Well when the boy told you this?
- A: Well sure I believed it because, you know, I believed it because shouldn't we believe you know we spoke to other people, of course. There were gas chambers nearby.
- Q: Did any of the people like yourself, other people that came to the camp have to work in the gas chambers?
- A: Now, now you must understand how it was when you arrived in Auschwitz, you know, there was a man what we called afterwards Mengele. He was decided whether you go to work or to gas, you know, but I had a courage. You know when I saw I didn't know it's Mengele until afterwards. So I saw. . .
- Q" This is the infamous Dr. Mengele?
- A: Huh?
- Q: The infamous Dr. Mengele who tortured and killed so many youngsters?
- A: Yah, afterwards I was told he was Mengele. When I saw, he was saying left, right, left, right, so I approached him because I spoke perfect German, you know and the attention, you know, I knew the mentality of the Germans very well. So I stepped in attention. . . you understand German?
- Q: No.
- A: I said I would very much like for work, to go for work. So he pinched me.

Q: Felt your muscle?

A: Felt my muscles right, you know. Left was the gas so that, you know, that the people knew who was going left was gassed who was going right was for work, so all my colleagues which survived---three, four---because they did the same like I did. You know to Mengele and he sent them to work you know. I would like to work, so all right.

Q: He decided you were strong enough to work after he felt your muscle?

A: Yah.

Q: What was the reaction of the people who were selected to die? Did they understand what was happening to them?

A: No, how could they know. We came from Lodz and this. . .

Q: You knew.

A: Yah, yah. But you see the question was only, you know, he said left, right, left, right. Of course I thought there must be something wrong so I wanted to go right for work. And left I was going on and going on and going on. It was the gas chambers so I had the feeling that I had to have the courage to tell him.

Q: Okay.

A: So then of course, when we went right for work, you know, we came to a big hall.

Q: A big hall?

A: A big hall and uh, what happened then. They were, you know, sending people out.

Q: Out to work?

A: To work, you know so of course we came and asked if we could go for work.

Q: Was your wife with you at this point?

A: No, no. Only men.

Q: Where was your wife?

A: The wife was on the other side, women were separated and men were separated.

Q: But she was not sent to the gas chambers, she was allowed to live?

A: She lived in Auschwitz. As a matter of fact she died, my wife lies in Bergen Belsen. You know she went to Germany, to Bergen Belsen. You know because they separated the women immediately. You know, in Auschwitz, separate the women and separate the men. And then come, you know, and then came every second night then came Mengele and decided who is going left and who is going right and so you didn't know if you were going to be lucky to be sent out to work; otherwise you have been gassed, you didn't know.

Q: How long were you there?

A: So we have been, I have been in Auschwitz about six weeks and then you know I was sent to a camp that is called Lidalow. From Auschwitz we went to Naap. From Auschwitz we were sent to Dachau and in Dachau we were organized for the different camps; you know, the different camps for work, also, for work, you know. So we went there from (words missing in original transcript) Dachau, we went in different. . . I worked for instance, as a foreman for Messerschmitt. Messerschmitt was the jet people you know.

Q: Yes.

A: So I established an example with jets as a foreman, you know, of my lot. The only peculiarity was against the women, because the women you know were separated; there were men and women separated. Women came to work but they were under the guidance of a woman Nazi. Women Nazi, you know and I remember, you know, one night you know came because I had about 200 women at Messerschmitt and one of the Nazi girl came to me it was at night, because at night the SS came to control and she came to me and we were not allowed to talk to a Nazi. She came and I was afraid and she talked to me and she said, "Can you tell me how many people you've killed?" I said, "Why do you think I killed people?" "Because they told us all the Jews are murderers."

Q: Oh, my goodness. And she believed that?

A: And she believed.

Q: And she believed that all the Jews were murderers.

A: Were murderers and I said, "Do you think that the women, you know, you are very nasty to them, are murderers?" She said, "I don't know; I was told that you are murderers." I told her that the difference between you and me because she was German and I spoke German, I said I was born in the 2nd floor and you are born on the 1st floor. That's the only difference between us. We are not murderers and the women are not murderers. Please be nice to them. She started to cry and of course you know I was afraid and the SS came and she cried. They could send me to Dachau.

- Q: They could think you did something to her to make her cry.
- A: Yah, she could have, yah she could have told them I told her something. So that was their cruelty of the women, they were very cruel. Because they were all told that we are all murderers.
- Q: And they were gullible enough to believe that?
- A: They believed.
- Q: Okay. So how long were you in Dachau?
- A: In Dachau, Dachau I was before I went to Auchsberg to (words missing in original transcription) five weeks.
- Q: They moved you around a lot?
- A: Five weeks you know and then we came to a nasty, nasty camp. I was already asked from the Germans about this camp, Riderlo, you know.
- Q: Can you spell that. It's not a familiar name to me?
- A: R-i-d-e-r-l-o.
- Q: And where was that, in what country?
- A: It was in Germany.
- Q: In Germany?
- A: In Germany. It was of course I would say it was partly in Germany, partly in Poland, you know. It was partly in Germany, Riderlo. It was nasty, the people, there was typhus.
- Q: That was always the danger in camps wasn't it? Typhus?
- A: Danger of typhus, many people died. You know from the 600, about 400 died.
- Q: Oh!
- A: I had black typhus, you know it's a different typhus, from the lice. You know, I had the very sick black typhus. This came from water. I never drank water. I always waited until it is cooked up in the evening. And I worked, you know, without water.

- QW: And then you drank boiled water.
- A: Boiled. Only boiled. And I got the black typhus which the Americans saved me. You know when...
- Q: Talk a little louder.
- A: Oh yeah. When I got this black typhus, the Americans were already on the way, you know, to one of this camp. It was in Ehlach. And my friend drove me to the Americans and the Americans came and brought me, you know, to the American lazeret. You know they built up a fake lazeret.
- Q: I'm not sure what a "lazeret" is.
- A: A lazeret is in the hospital. They call it lazeret. And then I got high fever and they took me and washed me and put some DDT on me and now I was lying on the bed and then came an American doctor. He looked at me helpless. He said...
- Q: He couldn't do anything for you?
- A: But I understood English that he didn't know. And I started to shout, to cry, and I said "Doctor, why, why?" He came back, he sat down. "My boy, tell me your story." So I told him what's going on and that we came from Lodz and da, da, da, da. And now you see that I came." And he said, "Wait a minute—I don't let you die. I don't let you die. Don't worry, I don't let you die." So he asked two men nurses. . .
- Q: Male nurses.
- A: Male nurses to give me a prescription. Every two hours I had an injection. I had 80 injections against this typhus which I had, you know. I had black spots, it's called the black typhus. And they saved me; the Americans saved me.
- Q: How long were you in that hospital?
- A: In the hospital, you know, that was already s funny thing. In the hospital, I was about three weeks. Then they sent me to another hospital, you know where I stayed four weeks. But when I had typhus, your balance us disturbed. So I always fell on the left side and I couldn't get up. So I was in the other hospital I was about six weeks and I lost my muscles. You know I couldn't walk. . .
- Q: From weakness. Your muscles became weak. Was the war over at that time?
- A: Not yet. Not yet. But the Germans were already starting to run, you know. When we came to Ehlach, they starting to run. So I was in Munich, you know, in a building which belonged to the American supply. And they took care of me.

And then I was sent to the hospital there. In Munich I came to German hospital. There was a German doctor. My luck was that I spoke perfect German.

Q: You spoke how many languages?

A: What?

Q: How many languages do you speak?

A: I speak English, French, German, Czech, Polish. So my luck was that I helped many of my colleagues because I was able, you know, to communicate German. I came to the doctor. "My boy, you are really sick. But I will tell you, I am able to give you 20 marks a week, as supplement in Munich."

Q: Why would he give you 20 marks a week?

A: Because I was sick. He could give the sick people 20 marks a week. So he gave me the 20 marks. And I could come every week for the 20 marks. And when I got the 20 marks I said, "No I will go to buy something." For the first thing, I went to a butcher. You know, in Munich everything was available. Food, sausages, everything was available. In Munich they had everything.

Q: Almost as though there were no war?

A: They didn't know. They said they didn't know. So I asked the doctor, "Doctor, I would like to have a bath." He told me where the bath was. There was a big line and because this sickness, they said, "Don't stay here. We didn't know what happened to you. But I will refer you the bath and you can come every week for a bath." So I...

Q: This was like a public bath house?

A: Yes. A public bath house, yes. Then I went to buy some sausages, some ham, you know, I cost 20 marks.

Q: Twenty marks was a lot of money?

A: A lot of money. It was about five dollars at that time. So I said, "Give me 10 decas this, 10 decas that. Here I pay." "No, no, no, you don't pay." You see, you went through so much. We didn't know everything. You can always come and you have nothing to pay. You are a poor boy; you have nothing to pay. Come again."

Q: Why do you think they were so nice to you, all of a sudden?

- A: Because, you know, they thought that by telling me that they didn't know anything, and you know, and they had fooled everything, and so they were very nice.
- Q: They were hoping you would remember and speak up for them when the war was over.
- A: Maybe. Then I had, you know, I wanted to have sauerkraut. I had the feeling I want to have sauerkraut. So I went to another shop. They had a barrel of sauerkraut. "Can I have a kilo?" "No, you have not to pay." In Munich I didn't pay. Before they brought me to Prague, I didn't pay. I had always still the 20 marks. You know, I could go buying everything, but....
- Q: And every week you got another 20 marks.
- A: If I went to the doctor. That was my nicest time, because I could get. .
- Q: How did anyone keep clean in places like Dachau and Auschwitz?
- A: You see, that was a difficult situation. I was the spokesman used, you know, to take a cold bath in the morning. There was water, cold water. But that was all that we had and the shirts with lice. I would take the shirt off and wash myself.
- Q: Was there soap?
- A: No, no, just water. There was no soap, no paper, you go to the toilet, no paper. There was nothing. Only a whistle. You had to go to the toilet when he whistles; you sit down when he whistles, you get up..
- Q: And no toilet paper?
- A: Nothing, nothing.
- Q: The conditions and the smells must have been indescribable.
- A: Therefore, you see, most of the women they had no water, they had no baths; they came to work, you know, it was terrible. They didn't have a bath maybe for two months. They couldn't wash.
- Q: Your wife described to me how she very carefully washed every day, because she knew it was important. And the water was cold, but it was important to keep as clean as she could.
- A: But these women, you know, come to Messerschmitt. They come from outside, I didn't know if they washed or not. But anyways, they didn't wash there, because they had no warm water. But the most disquieting for the women, which Hitler

did, because you see, they had nothing to put on, you know. Their breasts were hanging out. The women, you know . . . for me, I said okay, I have to work because they send me out again, so I go to work. So it was not so difficult for men, but for the women, it was terrible. Besides, you know, they were under the guidance of these girls, which . . .

Q: Of the matrons?

.

A: Yeah.

Q: Who were very cruel to them?

A: Very cruel.

Q: What was it like when you learned that the war in Europe was over? Was there any special . . .

A: That was a very interesting case. You know we marched. We had to march, because we were walking. We slept in a forest on snow, because there was nothing. But we had to march from one town to the other town. You know, we took . . . before we came to Ehlach.

Q: Ehlach?

A: Ehlach. It is near Munich.

Q: All right. Who made you march? The soldiers, the German soldiers?

A: The Germans, the Germans, you know, they called them police, but it was the German soldiers. So, sometimes, you know, I stayed back. So they sent the soldier, with the gun, to fetch me. So, because I spoke German, I said, "Listen, I am hungry, what about you?" "He said, "I'm hungry too." "Okay, let's go to the farmers." "Okay, let's go." So we went to the farmers and the farmer's wife asked the soldier, "Can I give him something? A piece of cake or a piece of . . . ?" Sure, because he wanted also. So these days we went together, begging from the farmers.

Q: You just left the group?

A: Yes. So, before we came to Munich. We had the feeling that the war is over. Why? Because the Germans came and stopped us, you know. Will you come with us and when the Russians come, you tell them that we are nice to you. so my colleague would say, "Let's go, Ossie." I say, "Oh, no, when they come the war is over. We go to the end. You know, we don't want because I don't know,

maybe they shoot us, I don't know. So we didn't go. But then we knew the war was over, because the English, the French and the Russians and the Americans. . .

Q: How did people behave when they heard the war was over?

A: In every town we have celebrate very nicely.

Q: Did they cry or did they laugh?

A: No, no, they say they didn't know what's going on, you know. They never knew what's going on. They behaved against us later on very well.

Q: Was there any kind of celebration? Did the people you were with celebrate in any way?

A: No, I was not...see, I was only with the people from the camps, so we didn't celebrate, of course, you know. The main point for us was to get a piece of bread and to get something, you know, where we can beg for a piece of sausage. I don't think that the Germans celebrated, I don't think so.

Q: I didn't think the Germans would celebrate, but maybe the other people would celebrate. When the Germans actually left, did they just walk away?

A: They walked away. From the (words missing in original transcript) barracks, they walked away. And they left us alone. They walked away.

Q: Did you understand the war was over when they walked away?

A: Sure. We knew.

Q: So here you are, in a camp and now you don't have to stay.

A: But, you see, I was in a very good position because at Messerschmitt I worked with French engineers and they had a radio. So every evening I knew what was going on because as a foreman, I was taken care. When the SS came, I shouted, so they put up a radio. I shouted, you know, till they heard me. But then, you see, the French did a fantastic thing. They screwed the (words missing in original transcript); we had no laces.

Q: On your shoes?

A: They screwed the cables in such a way and the jets start to vibrate...

Q: The Messerschmitt started to vibrate?

- A: So the screw went loose and the jet didn't fly.
- Q: Like sabotage.
- A: Sabotage. So one day, you know, the SS came and they saw the yellow cable in my shoes because we had wooden shoes with textile uppers. But they had no laces. So we took what is left...
- Q: The cable wire...
- A: The cable wire. Ah, sabotage, sabotage! In the meantime, you know, I get friendly with the German foreman and he told the SS that is waste. That is not the cable; we didn't pick it. Because they said we made the cable--we cut the cable...
- Q: You cut the cable too short, so you could tie your shoelaces.
- A: Tie your shoelaces. So I saved us, you know.
- Q: So there were a few decent people? There were a few decent Germans who helped.
- A: They had to be, because otherwise we couldn't survive.
- Q: Can you think of any other outstanding things, like somebody of the Germans who was helpful? Were there other Germans who were helpful to you?
- A: Oh, yeah. One thing you must understand--a piece of bread when he brought you, because when he marched with us--I spoke German. For instance, one soldier, they called him False SS. They were taking care of us, the workers. "Can you give me a piece of bread?" "Don't worry, I bring you." Oh, yah, they were helpful.
- Q: Were there people throughout your experiences, Jewish people, that you stayed with and that you all kind of looked out for each other?
- A: During when?
- Q: While you were in the camp.
- A: In the camp. There was no possibility to look after one another. There was no possibility.
- Q: And you said your wife was at Bergen-Belsen.

A: Yah, afterwards. After she came to Bergen-Belsen. You know, that was a special woman's camp. Bergen-Belsen was...I met many...I met a few women who knew that my wife died in Bergen-Belsen.

Q: Oh, she died in the camp?

A: In Bergen-Belsen, yah.

Q: She died in Bergen-Belsen. So you were very much alone again?

A: Oh, yah. In Prague I was alone, sure. Because I met my Lilly muchy later. Sure I was alone. She didn't come back.

Q: Well when you were free to leave the camp, where did you go?

A: We didn't go free, because they brought us by trucks to Prague.

Q: The Russians brought you or the Americans brought you? Who brought you to Prague?

A: The Americans. The American trucks, you know, brought us from Munich to Prague and in Prague you see we have been at home. There was no difficulty any more. And we could go where we want, because nobody controlled us any more.

Q: How long did you remain in Prague after the war was over?

A: After the war was over, the whole time until 1948.

Q: Quite a long time.

A: Yah, because I worked in Prague. I told you that I was director of one of the chemical works in Prague. In '48 we emigrated to London.

Q: What made you decide to emigrate?

A: I don't know. The question is...we didn't feel very well and Lilli wanted to go out...

Q: You'd already met Lilli and you got married then.

A: Yah, yah. I was already married to Lilli in '48. we emigrated together. I met Lilli.

Q: You met her in Prague?

- A: In Prague. And I knew her husband. He died in the camp. I knew her husband, you know, and so we met through friends. You know, I don't know whether Lilli told you, you know, we went to a street which I shouldn't go and there was a friend from home. "Ossie, Ossie, come up, come up." And there was Lilli. Of course I didn't know her. So I married her later on.
- Q: And then you decided to move from Prague to London?
- A: Because I had a worker permit. You know, I did a big job for the English and I got, you know, the home office gave me a worker permit, which was very difficult to obtain in London.
- Q: Was it limited, like so many years?
- A: For one year, you know. So then we came to the immigration in London. "Mr. Baron, you are expired."
- Q: Your work permit expired?
- A: "You are expired." He looked at me and say, "What will you do after one year? You cannot go back to Prague." Because it is in the passport, you cannot go back. I said I will do the same what I did already several times. I will go ahead. "I give you one year. In one year you have time, you know, to settle with the home office, because the home office gave them the order to let me in, because I did a great favor to them, to the English. I worked for the English very big scale. But I did something for them, you know, and they never forgot it. I can always go back to England, you know, because I have a permanent stay I can always go to England because I helped the English and they know it.
- Q: Helped them with your knowledge of chemistry?
- A: Yah, but they were in great trouble. They needed material which they couldn't get and I supplied them the material from Prague.
- Q: Much earlier on?
- A: I worked with them, with the English many years before.
- Q: Yes, you told me about that before we started talking on the tape. If you could pick up one thing that happened to you during your experiences in Europe and in the camps, what would be the most outstanding thing that you would talk about?
- A: In which way?
- Q: Any way. Is there one thing about your experience that stands out in your mind?

- A: You see, when you have been in so many camps, like I have been, you know there were eight camps, it is very difficult to pick out one special item or special camp, because everything was bad. I would say I think Dachau was the worst. No, Liederlau was the worst. You know, that's very difficult to say what happened just in this camp.
- Q: Is there any one thing that you felt was most contributory to your surviving?
- A: Yah.
- Q: What was that?
- A: I was sick in one camp and I talk to myself, "Ossie, it's finished." You know, I had diarrhea, I couldn't keep it any more. And then you see there was a Polish doctor and he said, "what happened to you; you look so pale?" "It's finished."
- Q: Having diarrhea when you don't have any medicine is pretty bad.
- A: "I cannot keep it and I'm giving up," I told him. He said, "You cannot give it up; we need you, because we need your language. You know, you have to negotiate for us. You cannot die." I said, "what shall I do, Doctor?" He said, "I have two pills here--two pills in the whole camp."
- Q: Two pills that would help the diarrhea?
- A: Yah, that would stop--what is it called---two pills, yes, who could stop it? And he gave me the two pills.
- Q: That would seem to be a memorable experience.
- A: You know why? Because three days later he died.
- Q: The doctor died?
- A: The doctor died. And that was the most memorable thing.
- Q: I can understand it would be very memorable.
- A: He gave me the last two pills, which stopped my diarrhea.
- Q: How long were you in London before you went to Canada?
- A: Three years.
- Q: And you have been in Canada ever since?

A: Yah, in '51 we came to Canada.

Q: Well, I certainly thank you for sharing this with us.

A: I share it with you because that is all what I can tell you. The questions only that you see, if you are in different camps, and every camp has something different, you know. And you had to try to survive in one way or the other, you know. Either you stole potatoes somewhere, you had to do something, you know, to survive. Because one potato was life. One potato was very important, because you couldn't stop because you had nothing firm to put in your tummy, besides the ration of bread when you worked. So every camp was different and, so what else was outstanding?

Q: Do you think about these experiences very often?

A: Very often. Yes, sometimes I wake, sometimes I think so, you know, that sometimes it came to me. I thinking about, you know, what you said about special experience. I go from one camp to the other camp.

QL: It must be hard to remember the sequence, if you were, you said in eight camps altogether. It must be hard to remember the sequence of the camps.

A: It is very difficult to remember, you know, what was just in connection with this. For instance, when I worked at Messerschmitt, putting the jets together, before we went to Augsburg to work on the big Messerschmitt. When you put the jets together, we got everything back, so we put it together. And then, you see, we work day and night, one week night, one week day. So I came to the idea when I come in the morning, you know I could maybe go for the SS, you know, because the SS had--you know, what you had to carry on the...you had to go with the small..

Q: Small hand truck?

A: What?

Q: Like a hand truck?

A: Not a hand truck, but you know it was not a truck, it was like a wagon. So I came to the idea that I come from the work in the morning, I can go for the SS for the food for them.

Q: Good thinking.

A: So I ask, you know, they say, "Okay, you can go." So naturally because I expected, that I can always beg for something. Sausages or bread. Some people are very nice; some people were less nice. So we had to get bread for the whole

camp. So, so many bread loaves. So I came to a fantastic idea, that I tell you for joking. I said, "How can I manage to control how many bread we took from his bakery you put on the wagon." And he had to control it. So I put it round; I put every loaf round. So he always forget, you know...

Q: Where he started to count...Instead of putting it in rows, you put it in circles.

A: He always counted and he always made mistake, because he never came to the same. And that, you see...

A: You could get extra bread that way. I am going to turn the machine off now, but I did want to thank you so much for contributing to this.

A: You are most welcome.